

**Board of Health
Tuesday, June 1, 2021
Zoom Virtual Meeting**

Members Attending: J. Dethoff, B. Hospidor, Kathy Schorn, M. Kelleher

Others Attending: S. Smith, A. LaMano, C. Reed, A. Murray from Penn State Health

Dr. Dethoff called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm. He stated that a quorum is present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Ms. Schorn, seconded by Mr. Hospidor, to approve the April 6, 2021 meeting summary. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Rivera joined the meeting at this time.

GRANT PRESENTATION

The Finance Department Grants Division submitted an HHS Advancing Health Literacy to Enhance Community Responses to COVID-19 grant application on April 20th. The City served as the applicant while partnering with Reading Area Community College, Penn State College of Medicine, and Latino Connection on the proposal submitted. The intent is to improve health literacy by creating an effective community-centric system with a focused peer review program that can be integrated into health systems. The program will consist of three components; training community workers, reporting, and conducting rapid-cycle quality improvement initiatives to address COVID-19 vaccination efforts. The grant request is for \$3,999,382 for a two-year program. No funding match is required.

Mr. Rivera introduced himself and described how this grant will benefit Reading.

Mr. Denbowski arrived at this time.

Mr. Rivera stated that COVID brought many health disparities to light. He stated that the City is partnering with Penn State Health St. Joseph and RACC on the grant. He stated that the application has been submitted and noted his hope that the Board of Health will also assist. He noted the need to serve the community.

Dr. Dethoff stated that he recently made a presentation to City Council and a Councilor questioned if the Board was involved in the community health needs assessment. He questioned if this grant was related to the needs assessment. Ms. Murray stated that it is not.

Ms. Murray stated that she is the Project Manager for Racial and Ethnic Approaches at Penn State Health. She stated that the hospital is involved in many grants with many partners. She shared her screen so that the Board could see the project's mission and goals. She stated that this grant is awarded by the federal Department of Health and Human Services. She stated that the grant project will identify approaches to improve health outcomes.

Mr. Abodalo arrived at this time.

Ms. Murray stated that Reading is within the top 5% with residents in need in the nation and stated that minorities are more likely to test positive for COVID.

Ms. Murray reviewed the power point slides and described the project's goals and objectives. She also described the partners and their roles. She stated that in addition to partnering with Penn State St. Joseph and RACC, the project partners include Latino Connection. She stated that the City is the main grant applicant and will control the release of the funding. She stated that the project is under review and the City should learn if the grant has been awarded on July 1.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if the grant is directly COVID related or if health in general could be improved with the funding. Ms. Murray stated that the goal of the grant is to increase literacy regarding COVID. She expressed the belief that working through the project to address COVID may unveil similar items with general health literacy as well. She used examples of translating COVID information into Spanish, including wayfinding signs, general information and ensuring that telephone calls can be bilingual.

Dr. Dethoff questioned when the project would begin. Ms. Murray stated that if the grant is awarded on July 1, the project can begin in early August.

Dr. Dethoff stated that much COVID work is past. He questioned if the funding could be extended to other health issues that Reading residents may have. Ms. Murray agreed that there is a funding lag. She stated that the grant funding focuses on COVID but may also assist in the future with other health issues.

Dr. Kelleher introduced herself as the Chief Medical Officer of Berks Community Health Center. She stated that the Health Center was awarded a similar grant addressing many of the same issues. She stated that the Health Center will also be hiring Community Healthcare Workers. She noted the lack of effort to work together in Berks County and stated that the Health Center should also have been a partner in this grant project. She agreed that the grant focuses on COVID but that there are many other health needs in the community. She agreed that the overall health of Reading residents needs to be addressed.

Ms. Murray congratulated Dr. Kelleher for their grant award. She stated that this grant is looking for groups that are not related to healthcare. She stated that organizations will be assessed as part of this project. She stated that she will be happy to partner with the Health Center when appropriate and agreed that many organizations are working in silos.

Mr. Rivera stated that Mayor Moran met with every non-profit and hospital about this grant. He stated that the Mayor would be open to partnering with the Health Center. He noted the need for better lines of communication. He cited an example that Berks County officials did not consult with Reading officials on COVID. He stated that the Health Center does a great job and he has much respect for that organization. He noted the need for all to help and to get on the same page.

Dr. Kelleher agreed. She expressed the belief that more coherent work is done when all work together.

Mr. Rivera offered assistance to the Health Center as needed. He stated that the Mayor is open to working with all organizations to improve the community. He noted the need to ensure that this mission is accomplished.

Ms. Murray agreed that there is a saturation point for COVID. She again noted her hope that this grant would bring other issues to light that can be addressed to circumvent a repeat of the COVID situation including the need for other vaccines or health appointments but that COVID is the first focus.

Dr. Dethoff questioned the community needs assessment. Dr. Kelleher stated that all hospitals are required to prepare a community needs assessment every several years. She stated that the Health Center uses the hospitals' findings to guide their operations. She stated that the assessment is shared publicly and is referenced when applying for grants.

HEALTH OFFICE REPORT

Mr. Reed stated that Health Inspectors are currently working with 23 businesses that opened without proper licenses and permits. He stated that there are also approximately 20 animal complaints, mostly chickens. He stated that there are 30+ businesses that wish to open downtown including food trucks and outdoor vendors.

Ms. Murray left the meeting at this time.

Mr. Reed noted the return of special events in Reading.

Dr. Dethoff questioned restaurant inspections. Mr. Reed stated that they are inspected two times per year.

Dr. Dethoff questioned the keeping of chickens. Mr. Reed stated that the number of chicken calls has increased recently. He noted the need to apply with the Animal Control Board in order to keep chickens. Ms. Smith explained that the Animal Control Board reviews the applications and hears a report from the Animal Rescue League. She stated that generally the Board will approve the application if the ARL sees the animals are well cared for and there are not neighbor complaints. She stated that roosters are very disruptive to neighbors and are generally not approved.

COVID-19 UPDATE

No report.

HEALTH CODE AMENDMENT

No report.

Mr. Rivera left the meeting at this time.

BERKS TEENS MATTER

Ms. Smith reported that since the District has reopened its buildings to in person learning the Health Resource Center has also reopened. She stated that the group has not yet finalized their name change.

Dr. Dethoff questioned how the Resource Center would operate in the summer months. Ms. Smith speculated that it would be open virtually.

LEAD ABATEMENT COALITION

Dr. Dethoff noted his surprise at the recent article in the Reading Eagle. He questioned if this was new information or information that is being restated. He questioned if the Board needs to be paying closer attention to this situation.

Dr. Kelleher stated that this information is not new and was not surprising to her. She stated that this is recycled information and that lead has been a problem for many years.

Dr. Dethoff noted Dr. Kimball's involvement in reducing lead levels in children. He stated that Dr. Kimball is very excited that Dr. Kelleher is serving on the Board.

Mr. Abodalo stated that the article was a precursor to today's event. He stated that lead poisoning leads to health and behavioral problems in children. He stated that the Mayor's office will be participating. He agreed that this is an old problem and that Reading will continue to address it. He stated that the City will be applying for grants from the PA Department of State. He stated that reducing lead levels will be an Administrative priority. He noted that the City will partner with the Coalition for Finding Lead.

Dr. Dethoff noted the need to identify high lead levels early.

Mr. Abodalo stated that statistics show that there is a lag between testing in Reading (19%) and testing statewide (30%).

Dr. Dethoff questioned why there is a lag. Dr. Kelleher stated that high risk children should be tested at 9 months with all other children tested later as part of their well visit. She stated that many times the test is ordered but the parent doesn't complete it.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if the test is cost prohibitive. Dr. Kelleher stated that if the patient is insured there is no fee. She expressed the belief that it may be cost prohibitive to those without insurance. She stated that the Health Center is currently discussing how to address this issue in hopes that more parents will have the test done.

EVICTION MORATORIUM

Mr. Abodalo stated that the City and County programs are going well. He stated that most residents have been allowed to stay in their homes and that the program is running smoothly. He stated that the largest criticism of the program is the amount of time it takes to receive payment. He explained that the payment process takes 3 – 4 weeks.

COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

No report.

NEW MEMBERS

Ms. Smith stated that the application received for the alternate resident position is not supported by the Mayor and is not moving forward. She stated that the applicant for the environmental health

position has the support of the Mayor and is scheduled to be interviewed by the City Council Nominations & Appointments Committee on June 21.

NEXT MEETING

Dr. Dethoff stated that the next meeting of the Board is scheduled for Tuesday, August 3 at 4 pm.

The meeting adjourned at 4:41 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk