

**Board of Health
Tuesday, October 1, 2024
Hybrid Meeting / Penn Room**

Members Attending: J. Moya – in person; J. Henning, K. Schorn, K. Wang, J. Dethoff, B. Hospidor, J. Schwartz - virtually

Others Attending: S. Smith – in person; S. Herbert, J. Melendez, BCTV - virtually

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Sharibel Urena, representing Clean Air Reading, read the following statement previously submitted via email:

Hello, I'm Sharibel Urena from Clean Air Reading. I have a bachelor's degree in Biochemistry from Albright College and am a Reading native. Like many people here, I contracted Sars-CoV-2, known as Covid-19. After the infection, I had some lingering symptoms and eventually recovered, but this is not the case for everyone. We have since learned that at least 1 in 10 infections lead to Long Covid -regardless of vaccination status- with chances increasing with each infection. Long covid is a devastating neurological cardiovascular illness that can take away people's ability to work, move, see and even think. It hits communities of color, disabled people, elderly people, trans people, women and anyone in a public-facing essential job the hardest and is driving the explosion of excess mortality in all age groups.

We know that COVID is airborne and spreads like smoke. We also know that proper ventilation (at least 5 air changes per hour), N95 respirators and adequate sick days are proven to stop infections. The Philadelphia Health department acknowledges that to prevent disease, we must take steps to clean the air, which includes wearing masks, using HEPA air filtration, staying home when sick and testing in addition to practicing good hygiene.

In the absence of adequate public health resources, my team at Clean Air Reading has stepped up to provide free rapid tests and N95 respirators to our community. To confront the Long Covid crisis I demand high-filtration mask availability, air filtration and far-UVC light in schools, government facilities, including all jails and detention centers and N95 mask mandates in medical facilities. We must expand the availability of free PCR tests and treatment and create resource hubs to provide free respirators and tests to the community. I also demand accurate, science-based communication to the public. The Pennsylvania Department of Health website falsely claims that washing your hands is the best way to prevent covid, when we know it is an airborne virus and requires airborne infection controls. I would love to work with you in implementing solutions to keep our community safe and healthy! Thank you so much.

Dr. Dethoff thanked Ms. Urena for her comments

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Mr. Moya, seconded by Mr. Hospidor, to approve the August 6, 2024 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

REPORTS

- Health Inspections

Ms. Herbert provided the following report:

- 51 health inspections were completed
- 22 rechecks were required
- 20 animal cases were investigated
- 15 restaurant / bodega complaints were investigated

Dr. Dethoff noted the increase in animal complaints and an increase in the number of pets that he has observed. Ms. Herbert stated that it is normal for animal complaints to increase during the warmer months. She stated that many people are breeding and mistreating their animals. She stated that there is also evidence of cock fighting. *(Note: the City requires residents who wish to keep exotic pets and those who wish to keep more than six dogs / cats to submit a permit application to Property Maintenance. This is monitored by the ARL and Reading Animal Control Board.)*

Dr. Dethoff questioned where cock fighting occurs. Ms. Herbert stated that many times it occurs in rear yards and does involve gambling.

Mr. Hospidor questioned who enforces the animal regulations. Ms. Herbert stated that she works closely with the Animal Rescue League (ARL).

Mr. Hospidor questioned if the ARL is located in Reading. Ms. Smith stated that it is not located in Reading.

Mr. Moya questioned how he can submit a complaint without paper forms. He stated that he would like to report issues anonymously. Ms. Herbert stated that Mr. Moya should call the Citizen Service Center and to report issues anonymously. Ms. Smith provided the phone number.

- Lead Abatement Program

Mr. Melendez provided the following report:

- Lead has been abated from a total of 25 homes under the Federal program and from 14 homes under the State program
- Several additional homes are in the abatement process

Dr. Dethoff questioned if the City is confident that it will receive additional funding in the future to continue this program. Mr. Melendez stated that he is confident.

Dr. Dethoff stated that RAWA recently received a federal "Get the Lead Out" grant and questioned if this was a different program. He also questioned how these grants could work together. Mr. Melendez stated that he is unfamiliar with the specifics of the "Get the Lead Out" program but that he does work closely with RAWA. He stated that old plumbing is replaced as needed and that water is also tested.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if the water needs to be the first tap of the day. Mr. Melendez stated that it does. He explained that the water needs to be standing in the pipes for at least six hours to get accurate results.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if the plumbing that needs to be replaced is inside the property or if it is the outside connections. Mr. Melendez stated that it could be both. He stated that Reading's problems are mostly related to lead paint.

Dr. Wang agreed with Mr. Melendez and expressed the belief that the “Get the Lead Out” program is EPA’s response to the Flint MI situation to prevent that from happening in the future. She agreed that lead paint is a bigger problem for Reading.

- EMS

Dr. Dethoff stated that the August statistics have been provided via email along with a brief report from Deputy Chief Sninsky. He stated that the report indicates that ambulances will be moved into fire stations. He questioned where they are currently located and why this will occur. Ms. Smith stated that currently the ambulances are housed on Walnut St near the former Community General Hospital building. She stated that the City hopes that housing the ambulances in the fire stations will result in quicker response times.

OLD BUSINESS

- Ambulance Ride Alongs

No report

- County Health Department

No update

- Home Healthcare Companies

No update

- Street Sweeper Program

Dr. Dethoff reviewed the response from Public Works about the sweeper concerns.

Mr. Henning stated that the sweepers do not use water in the cold months. He stated that he has spoken with Ms. Ayers-Fisher about this issue and stated that she recognizes the need for balance during these months. He stated that there is work being done to streamline the routes and stated that the purpose of the program is to keep vehicle contamination out of the Schuylkill River. He stated that the City is working to target areas with runoff to reduce the dust in the cold weather.

NEW BUSINESS

None

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Henning stated that he has put a link in the chat for Ms. Urena about the Advancing Health Literacy program and stated that some of the issues that she has raised are being addressed.

Dr. Wang stated that Berks Community Health Center offers free COVID testing on site and has free home test kits available.

Dr. Dethoff stated that the federal government will also provide free home COVID test kits. He noted the issues with some kits having expired.

Dr. Wang stated that some expiration dates have been extended. She stated that dates can be verified on the CDC website.

Ms. Urena noted the increased accuracy of PCR tests and stated that this type of test cannot be administered at home.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 3, 2024 at 4 pm hybridly via Zoom and in the Penn Room.

The meeting adjourned at 4:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk