



**EAST ORANGE BOARD OF HEALTH**  
**REGULAR MEETING**  
*East Orange Department of Health & Human Services*  
*143 New Street*  
*East Orange, New Jersey 07017*  
*April 20, 2021*  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Meeting Call to Order – 5:38 PM**

Board President Christine Harris read the following **Sunshine Law**: This meeting, which conforms to the provisions of the Open Public Meeting Act, Chapter **231**, and Public Law of **1975** is a regular meeting of the City of East Orange Board of Health. Notices have been filed with our official newspaper, with the City Clerk, and posted on regular bulletin boards. The public is permitted to participate at this meeting.

Zoom Telecommunication ID: 912 3279 6242

Meeting Link: <https://zoom.us/j/91232796242?pwd=cUUzdm9lb3l0dXF1Z1R2QWtNUkZCZz09>

After the roll call, it was determined there was a quorum to convene the meeting.

**Board Members Present:**

Christine Harris, President  
Horace H. Henry, Vice President  
Tobbia M. Corbitt  
Deanna Phillips  
Angela Jones-Williams  
Dr. Tonya X. Cook

**Council Liaison:**

Leneus Bergson - absent

**Board of Health Counsel:**

Ryan Linder – Temporary Attorney assigned to the Board of Health

**Health Department Staff:**

Dr. Griffith, HHS Director – absent, at the vaccination site  
Victor Kuteyi, Health Officer

**Mayoral Staff:**

None

**Public in attendance:**

None

**Approval of March 16, 2021, Meeting Minutes:**

Approved Unanimously

**Announcements President Harris:**



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1. President Harris expressed appreciation of Vice President Henry for co-chairing March's BOH meeting while she recovered from vaccination aftereffects.
2. President Harris reminded all BOH members to complete their annual financial disclosures.

**Health Officer Kuteyi Updates:**

**East Orange Vaccinations Update**

President Harris asked for an update on the number of East Orange residents vaccinated. HO Kuteyi shared that approximately 10% of the residents are fully vaccinated, having received two doses of Pfizer, two doses of Moderna, or one dose of J&J. As determined by the State's report, 6,138 EO residents received one or both vaccines and 1,136 received the J&J vaccine which is 10% of our population of approximately 60,000 residents. BOH members remarked 10% is a small number with thoughts that we would have vaccinated a higher percentage of our population. HO Kuteyi shared he is not aware of when the data was collected so it may not be current.

President Harris asked how often the Health Department updates its data collection system? HO Kuteyi stated the system is updated daily by entering the data into the State's NJIIS which is then recorded and analyzed by the State. BOH members emphasized the importance of capturing data such as the number of residents vaccinated and how many undocumented residents have received the vaccine. HO Kuteyi reiterated the vaccines that have been distributed to our residents were provided by the County or the State, so the record-keeping is managed by their entities, but they share their data once analyzed to each municipality or entity they collaborate with. Dr. Cook explained the State's system is antiquated and contains information inclusive of all vaccines, not just COVID-19. This makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive analysis in real-time. There are also only a handful of individuals working in the data analytic field in the State. If the Health Department is not administering the vaccine exclusive of the State and County, they do not have a database to collect that information you are relying on the state to give you that breakdown.

BOH members expressed frustration with the State's data collection system and remarked a separate structure should have been developed and implemented during the early stages of the pandemic to ensure we are collecting comprehensive and concurrent data. President Harris asked if East Orange residents are still being vaccinated at both designated County sites? Health Officer Kuteyi stated they are. Trustee Corbitt announced she received a robocall from the County Executive's office stating they have opened up all vaccination sites to any resident of Essex County. HO Kuteyi stated that is a good development because they are trying to encourage municipalities with lower numbers to have greater access. This will prevent individuals from being turned away at vaccination sites because of the restrictions. Trustee Corbitt announced vaccinations are being administered at local pharmacies such as CVS and Walgreens.



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President Harris asked if identification is required at the vaccination's sites? HO Kuteyi shared it was required in the beginning, however, they have since become lax to avoid turning away individuals who would otherwise be deterred by enforcing the need for credentials, such as undocumented, and those who do not wish to provide detailed information.

Trustee Corbitt asked if Campus High is still a vaccination site and what is the protocol to obtain a vaccination. HO Kuteyi stated we have collaborated with NCHC to administer vaccines at Campus High on two occasions and are looking to reactivate the site as early as next week. Registration information can be found on the City of East Orange webpage or residents may call Senior Services or the Health Department's main office for assistance. We also have the mobile van which will be utilized more by offering vaccinations to homebound individuals, boarding homes, outreach, and other COVID-related programs.

President Harris asked if we are accepting walk-ins at the vaccination sites? HO Kuteyi stated registrations are preferred, however, we are accepting walk-ins. HO Kuteyi advised the registration process is required because the number of vaccines supplied is based on the number of registrations. This is done to prevent wastage. Walk-ins are accepted once we have vaccinated residents who had appointments and can only occur when there are extra doses provided in the vials.

#### Vulnerable Population Coordinator

President Harris asked HO Kuteyi to provide details on this position. HO Kuteyi shared the grant is ongoing and we asked for an extension of the grant to allow us adequate time to fix gaps contained within our grant submission. Once these issues have been resolved we will resubmit the grant. Two individuals were suggested to serve as population coordinators in our grant proposal, Karen LaRussa RN, and Sheila Judy. President Harris asked if the position is intended for one person or two? Health Officer Kuteyi stated there is no specification that the position has to be occupied by one person.

#### School Reopening

President Harris asked if there were any issues or discussions about the school reopening here in East Orange? HO Kuteyi shared we have not had any very recent meetings regarding reopening, but the schools opened yesterday. Some students will be participating in class while others will have a hybrid of in-class and homeschool learning. President Harris asked for clarity regarding whether the Health Department has ensured the School Board is following the Executive Orders to provide a safe and conducive environment for students and teachers? HO Kuteyi shared the EO School Board has always followed the Executive Orders and regulations during COVID and despite not having met with them recently, they provide the Health Department with a briefing of what is current and an overview of any future plans.



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President Harris stated that as a result of school reopening, air quality, cleanliness, and the ventilation systems throughout the schools, be reviewed by the Health Department. Trustee Corbitt concurred.

Trustee Phillips confirmed students are back as of April 19, 2021. The schedule is four days a week with most students coming in two days a week. Of the populations that opted to return, some will report Monday & Tuesday or Thursday & Friday as an example. Some teachers are live streaming for classes that are held in-person and online. Faculty who have concerns about their spaces have been relocated while the School Board works to address issues. Trustee Phillips expressed excitement about having children in the building again and hopes it will be successful. It was shared, air quality is one of the biggest issues within the schools. President Harris asked if an HVAC specialist was contacted to address the issues? Trustee Phillips shared an HVAC company inspected schools yesterday. Trustee Phillips shared transportation has been another issue for the school system, but they are working to address this as well.

Trustee Corbitt asked why a September date was not selected as the return date for students and staff, allowing the EOSB to fix issues prior to reopening? Trustee Phillips shared many parents are frustrated wanting their children to attend school a minimum of 4 days a week, instead of two. Trustee Phillips shared the belief that issues will be addressed faster when the buildings are occupied.

President Harris remarked the children have suffered so much by not being in the classroom, which has stunted their learning and socialization process. Trustee Phillips shared per her colleagues; many children seem happy to be back in the classroom setting as opposed to being stuck at home. President Harris asked has there been any thought to extend the school year? Trustee Phillips explained it would be difficult to extend the school year as many teachers have been working remotely during the pandemic and are contracted for a regular school year. Trustee Phillips advised extended programs are currently being offered for special needs and general education students.

#### Environmental Health Inspections Update

President Harris asked how are the REHS inspectors doing with their inspections? HO Kuteyi shared the inspectors have completed about 72 retail food establishment inspections. Those that require citations have been given with court appearances being held via Zoom. President Harris expressed satisfaction with their efforts and asked if establishments were remaining compliant with COVID precautions. HO Kuteyi shared most establishments have remained compliant. President Harris asked if the Health Department is citing people for COVID violations? HO Kuteyi stated we do not have an ordinance that supports citing individuals but the EOPD does.

#### Rodent Complaints

President Harris asked if we are getting any rodent complaints? HO Kuteyi revealed he



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received a rodent complaint today and has reached out to Code Enforcement and DPW to facilitate a quality-of-life inspection to assess the situation and strategize on how to mitigate the rodent issue.

**Attorney Linder Updates:**

Rejection of the Project Cost Associates Contract

President Harris asked if the LHCHH program has been affected by Project Cost Associates' (PCA) inability to meet the obligations of the contract? HO Kuteyi stated the program is still working the way it should be as of now, despite the contract breach. HO Kuteyi shared he believes the role of Project Cost Associates may involve the process of providing estimates for lead abatement services. The LHCHH Program is a grant that provides funding for residents of East Orange who meet a certain criterion to have lead abated in private homes or apartments.

President Harris asked if PCA acts as an intermediary to determine how much the lead abatement will cost? HO Kuteyi stated he is not aware if that is PCA's full function but noted the process once the Health Department receives a request for abatement. Trustee Corbitt asked for clarity regarding whether PCA is contacted when we need a cost analysis before providing East Orange with their findings. Trustee Corbitt also questioned how they were able to plagiarize their qualifications and how that will affect our ability to service the community? President Harris suggested Attorney Linder may be able to provide clarity on the matter. Attorney Linder shared he is not familiar with it as we sit here today but he can certainly review it and provide a response to the committee.

President Harris provided Attorney Linder context by explaining the BOH was not included in the original selection of contracts nor resolution and was asked in last month's meeting to review documents supporting rescinding the contract. This brought us to the subject of the BOH being autonomous or advisory. Attorney Linder advised the status of our BOH per the City Ordinance is advisory, however, advisory boards can pass legislation such as the resolution you just referenced. The legislation though is a recommendation that the health and education committee of the City Council is free to accept or reject so procedurally the board will pass a resolution that resolution will then be forwarded to the health and education committee for further action.

Attorney Linder explained historically all City contracts have a 30 day out clause that allows the City to cancel the contract on 30 days' notice which complies with our standard contract uniformity. President Harris asked for clarity regarding the BOH's role in creating ordinances? Attorney Linder stated whatever legislation created by the BOH is used as a recommendation which does not become law until it is submitted to the Health & Education Committee for approval and then adopted by a majority of the City's governing body. Attorney Linder shared an RFP was filed to get a new vendor and we already have responses.

Attorney Linder concurred the previous vendor was not necessarily honest when detailing his qualifications so the fact that he was awarded the contract based on misrepresentations





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provides the basis for the city to in fact cancel the contract and re-award it. Trustee Corbitt asked if the contract cancellation falls within the 30-day time frame or does his misrepresentation void the timeframe? Attorney Linder clarified the misrepresentation was cause for us to cancel the contract whether or not the timeframe permits. President Harris asked how many people bid on the contract from the outside. Attorney Linder stated he is not aware of that information.

**Open Discussion:**

**Messages on Mask Wearing**

President Harris asked HO Kuteyi to shed some light on the mixed messaging regarding face masks now that many people are fully vaccinated or have at least received a portion of the vaccine. HO Kuteyi shared the consensus is towards using the face mask. He believes when we achieve herd immunity the CDC & NIH will assess the situation across the country and make an official announcement when masks are no longer required.

President Harris asked Dr. Cook if she agreed with HO Officer Kuteyi? Dr. Cook expressed agreement stating we are ticking back up with our numbers and we just cannot let our guard down. She reported in South Jersey the number of positive COVID cases is increasing and expressed concern for individuals to remain diligent and continue to wear a mask. It was also noted that some do not wish to get vaccinated which affects our ability to obtain herd immunity. President Harris shared she heard in certain settings such as if everyone in a small group has been vaccinated or if you are outdoors and sufficiently distanced from others a mask may not be required. However, some are still advising to wear a mask regardless of the situation. Vice President Henry concurred stating we have not done enough research in monitoring the trends and data to make an informed decision on mask requirements. While this has been ongoing, we must continue to be patient and encourage others to continue wearing a mask and getting vaccinated.

Trustee Corbitt shared family members have received the vaccine and still caught COVID. She spoke to the severity of COVID-19 and getting vaccinated does not negate the need to continue practices such as social distancing, mask-wearing, and handwashing as herd immunity will take some time to obtain. Other BOH members concurred stating no single factor or strategy will mitigate the virus. Vice President Henry stated we are still in the pandemic stage with the next stage being endemic. It will take some time to determine what percentage of cases will determine once we have reached an endemic. President Harris expressed unfortunately COVID is going to be around for a long time but hopes that within the next few months more people will get vaccinated and believes a population of approximately 7,000,000 people which equates to half the country has already done so.

Trustee Corbitt asked the status of vaccinating homebound individuals who were initially supposed to receive the J&J vaccine but were delayed due to the pause? HO Kuteyi stated we had to shift and create a new plan for those individuals but anticipates scheduling to commence as early as Thursday of this week. Trustee Corbitt asked what the time frame is to



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consider yourself fully vaccinated. Dr. Cook and HO Kuteyi stated two weeks is the period to be considered fully vaccinated. BOH members shared their experiences with follow-ups regarding their vaccines and encouraged others to participate in programs such as V-safe to ensure adequate data is captured for analysis.

Trustee Jones-Williams asked how long individuals that have taken the Johnson and Johnson vaccine should have concerns about the blood clotting issues? HO Kuteyi suggested individuals should monitor sudden symptoms such as swollen feet, headaches, drooping eyelids, etc., within two to three weeks after being vaccinated. If any of these or other symptoms are observed individuals should contact their primary care physician.

At the conclusion of Board business, President Harris adjourned the meeting at 7:07 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jo-Ann Mills  
Board Clerk