



EAST ORANGE BOARD OF HEALTH
REGULAR MEETING
East Orange Department of Health & Human Services
143 New Street
East Orange, New Jersey 07017
June 15, 2021
MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Call to Order – 5:36 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: 949 7980 8328

Meeting Link: <https://zoom.us/j/94979808328?pwd=TIJ5SGNzUEV3cGFqTGxyUk0yTjVvdz09>

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 - absent
Dr. Tonya X. Cook

Council Liaison:

Leneus Bergson - absent

Board of Health Counsel:

Attorney Farah Abuobead

Health Department Staff:

Dr. Griffith, HHS Director
Victor Kuteyi, Health Officer

Mayoral Staff:

None

Public in attendance:

None

Approval of May 18, 2021, Meeting Minutes:

Approved Unanimously



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Announcements President Harris:

1. President Harris announced Governor Murphy signed an Executive Order ending the COVID19 State of Emergency.
2. The Board to discuss the topic of recreational marijuana the deadline for municipalities to decide between either opting out or creating regulations to manage it must be presented sometime in August.
3. The State Association, NJLBHA, monthly meeting on Saturday, June 19th. The topic for discussion: vaccine side effects among some young teenagers and adolescents; and regulations regarding recreational marijuana. This would certainly help provide clarity on the marijuana issue.

Dr. Griffith Updates:

Recreational Marijuana

Dr. Griffith shared that a final decision has not been made whether or not the municipality is going to move forward in creating an ordinance. Attorney Abuobead shared that Attorney Ryan Linder is either in the process of drafting or has just completed working on an ordinance to regulate recreational marijuana. Dr. Griffith expressed that any ordinance that is being put forth should also be discussed with the Board of Health as well as the Health and Education Committee. Dr. Griffith shared per discussions, that the Health & Education Committee wanted to make sure that they are aware of what is taking place and felt as though there needed to be a larger discussion related to the decision being made and not just once a conclusion has been reached. Attorney Abuobead stated she is not aware of the legislation moving beyond being crafted. President Harris remarked it seems as though the City is going to allow the operation of marijuana to some degree.

Attorney Abuobead shared if we do not draft an ordinance then anybody would be allowed to sell and open for all, for the next five years. After five years we would have another opportunity to draft an ordinance. Attorney Abuobead stated she is almost certain there will be some form of regulation rather than prohibition. Dr. Griffith shared that at the Health & Education Committee meeting, hookah and hookah lounges became a topic as they are related. Any type of restrictions that we put into an ordinance, related to recreational marijuana, must consider regulating hookahs and hookah lounges. Any Board of Health input would be really helpful to receive and pass on to Attn. Abuobead, to ensure that legal, as well as our Health and Education Committee, are aware of the Board of Health's position, related to recreational marijuana use.

Attorney Abuobead stated that any previously existing municipal ordinances or legislation regarding the use of recreational marijuana is officially null and void. New action is required so the 180 days rule or the five-year rule, applies to everybody regardless of whether or not they have legislation.



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President Harris stated for the board to be effective, we need to have an idea of which way we are going to concentrate our efforts; regulatory or, opting out completely? Trustee Corbitt asked for clarity of the meaning of “opting out”. Attn. Abuobead answered there are three scenarios. First, would be not to draft which means all of the activities would be allowed; the second scenario would be to draft an ordinance which is what we are doing. If you draft an ordinance there are two possibilities, 1, to use, or 2, to prohibit use.

President Harris shared a sample ordinance regarding recreational marijuana from the League of Municipalities Conference, to act as a guide for the BOH, which outlines the functions of what recreational marijuana entails.

Dr. Griffith shared the League of Municipalities seems to be the general organization that individuals are pointing to when at least crafting their documentation, so if the board has that it would be a good resource. Dr. Griffith shared, that even without reviewing Attn. Ryan Linder’s ordinance, the BOH can express their position but also have a caveat, that should the municipality move forward, these are the things that you believe should be considered from a public health standpoint. If that document is not finalized until maybe the end of July or the middle of July, you already have started your discussion and you have a framework for the position. Trustee Corbitt suggested the BOH have a member’s only meeting to discuss their position on recreational marijuana usage. A date of June 22nd was selected to hold this special meeting. President Harris advised members to review all materials and create their list of concerns and recommendations for discussion.

Trustee Corbitt asked for clarity on whether the City would gain revenue if recreational marijuana was allowed. President Harris believes the City would gain revenue from licensing, taxes, and fines. VP Henry shared that similar to sales of cigarettes, one can draw a reasonable inference, that revenue would be generated either directly or indirectly. Attorney Abuobead also briefly commented on decriminalizing marijuana.

Health Officer Kuteyi Updates:

School Reopening’s

President Harris asked about testing for Legionella in the schools and reminded HO Kuteyi this should have been done as a part of the school reopening process. HO Kuteyi stated he reached out to his contact at the school and is waiting to hear their response before making an official comment. President Harris asked if schools have officially reopened. HO Kuteyi replied that schools have reopened. President Harris asked if the water systems have been flushed properly and maintained to meet safety standards. HO Kuteyi shared he witnessed the fountains being removed at Campus High, so he assumed this has taken place throughout the school system. President Harris asked if the assumption is that this has been done for all schools and not just a few. HO Kuteyi stated he believes it was done for all schools but will confirm once a concrete answer is received from the school district.



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Trustee Phillips relayed she has seen red coverings over the water fountains throughout the schools, which obstructs usage. President Harris asked if meals were being cooked in the cafeteria. Trustee Phillips stated the cafeteria is open but is not sure if they are cooking. Trustee Phillips shared there have been trucks delivering food to the schools so there is a possibility the food is being catered. President Harris suggested the red covers may be utilized as a precaution if the fountains have not all been checked; and asked HO Kuteyi to verify this information. President Harris remarked that summer programs are being run in some of the schools which makes it imperative the water systems should be checked. HO Kuteyi stated the students are being provided with bottles of water to ensure they are hydrated.

Regular Retail Inspections

President Harris inquired about the status of regular inspections. HO Kuteyi relayed the regular inspections are going well. The health inspectors have completed 111 inspections since January. In May they inspected 38 stores and have already begun inspections for June.

Mobile Clinic Vaccinations

President Harris asked about the mobile vaccinations. HO Kuteyi stated the vaccination clinics have been very successful and we had clinics in both Irvington and Orange this past Saturday. President Harris asked if our vaccination percentage has exceeded 40%? HO Kuteyi shared the vaccination percentage: Ages 18 and above 45% (35% completed both doses and 10% received 1 dose); and ages 12 years and above 42% (32% completed and 10% started) with Pfizer vaccine. We are working with the school district and Shop Rite to promote education and awareness to parents regarding vaccines as it relates to their children.

The school district has been providing support wherever needed. ShopRite will be providing the Pfizer vaccine for youth aged 12 and older, on Thursday, June 17th at our vaccination clinic in front of City Hall from 4:30 PM to 8:00 PM. The school district disseminated the flyer for the Pfizer clinic to parents. Dr. Griffith added we have implored many ways via flyers, outreach, our webpage, and other strategies in multiple languages, to ensure that we get the word out and make sure we educate our residents and I think that the job that we have done in our efforts thus far certainly contribute to the percentage increase.

President Harris remarked everything sounds great and it is obvious the department is working very diligently to spread the word and asked if the delay in data being captured, has affected an increase in vaccination numbers? Dr. Griffith stated yes, that has affected our reporting to some degree and there has been a decrease in the number of individuals looking to be vaccinated. Initially, we saw numerous individuals who were seeking vaccinations; however, those individuals have now been supported so our numbers have decreased. What we are trying to maintain now is a level of consistency for those who have questions or as they change their minds about obtaining the vaccine, we are truly meeting them where they are.



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President Harris asked if anybody heard about adolescents developing pericarditis after having received a vaccination? HO Kuteyi responded yes, there was some publication regarding Pfizer and young people ages 18 to 29 but the young people who received it may have had pre-existing conditions. Dr. Griffith added it is currently being researched but the percentage of individuals who had an issue did not warrant a full suspension of the vaccine.

President Harris shared some parents may have heard of the issue and become reluctant to allow their children to be vaccinated. Dr. Griffith stated we are at this point of not yet seeing too many individuals who are concerned about that. We want to wait until more information comes out and it is not so new. We have a percentage of our population that feels that way as well, but at least we are aware and it is something that we are looking at. During the clinics, we have seen many youths expressing an interest in receiving a vaccine, and we have had many who have gone far enough to make sure that they called their parents, or their parents took off to make sure if they could come, and so we did want to at least be able to offer them an opportunity to be vaccinated. We do not as a health department offer Pfizer, but that's where partnership comes in. Thursday is a prime example of the general response. We had this morning maybe 12 individuals that were registered and now we have almost 30. So, the number is certainly increasing, and if you again go back to the fact that on average of 50 is considered successful, we are close to that, for a clinic where we are offering Pfizer. But we will also make sure that we offer Moderna and J&J for individuals who come and are interested in that as well.

Trustee Corbitt asked if the storage temperature has been lowered for Pfizer. Dr. Griffith stated yes, and as a result, more organizations whether they are pharmacies, or the County also has Pfizer. Currently, the County is offering all three vaccines, Pfizer, Moderna, and J&J. Even in situations where we do not manage a particular vaccine through the partnerships, we will take advantage of being able to offer them to our residents. Dr. Griffith mentioned the State has a website that directs individuals to vaccine locations. While not exhaustive they do have a list of agencies that are offering different types of vaccines.

WIC Updates:

Reopening WIC Offices

Program Coordinator Ms. Chesney Blue, advised the State sent directives regarding possibly reopening to the public once the waivers expire in August. A meeting will occur on June 24th or 25th to provide clarity as the Governor has lifted some COVID-19 restrictions. The communication sent by the State indicated the desire to continue some remote services since the caseload increased statewide during the pandemic. Ms. Blue indicated the belief is that remote services give parents more access to the program via online & telephone services. Parents can avoid issues with transportation and not having the capability to bring their children to the office. The State realizes once remote services are suspended the caseload may decline. At this time, special guidelines are being crafted to define the types of clients and



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appointments that would qualify for remote services once the offices reopen. The Program clientele grew 7.9% since January 2021. We also had Rebecca, a Rutgers University intern majoring in dietetics, was with us for 2 weeks and she worked with our Nutrition Program.

eWIC Project

Ms. Blue shared another major undertaking is the eBook Project. The State is moving away from paper checks and transitioning to a debit card format. Ms. Blue stated they have begun training a select few as super users who will extend the training to additional staff. Pilot programs will begin in September at the Trenton & Central Jersey WIC offices. We, East Orange, are supposed to go live with our eWIC Debit Card project in January 2022. Benefits are loaded remotely if we have Internet access and people can also be removed from the system or benefit packages modified.

President Harris remarked the electronic debit card is going to be a big thing and the timeline will provide her with an opportunity to work out any kinks. Ms. Blue stated she likes the idea of having electronic services. In addition to it being easier to manage it also takes away the stigma of the paper checks when people are in the supermarket. Clients will have an electronic debit card that looks like a regular debit or credit card. Hopefully, it will make the process smoother in the stores for the clients. The debit cards will allow clients to receive and use their benefits right away. Clients will not be required to come into the office to receive their benefits in the event we encounter another public health emergency.

Trustee Corbitt asked if there are restrictions on locations where the eDebit Cards can be utilized and items that can be purchased. Ms. Blue indicated the cards will be accepted in stores similar to the WIC checks, however, the State will have to identify which stores will accept the payments and which items can be purchased. Stores will also need to modify their systems to detail which types or quantities of items can be purchased. The eDebit Card also allows for purchases as needed, as opposed to mandatory bulk purchases as paper vouchers are often required. President Harris asked if unused benefits will automatically roll over? Ms. Blue stated unused benefits will not roll over, but that may change. An application will be put in place for clients so they can review their accounts which may help to alleviate wasted benefits. The only downside would be if clients forget to check the app., as there is no daily reminder. It may also be detrimental for seniors who are not tech-savvy. On the plus side, the app. will track if there has been underutilization of the debit card and local spending, we could ask clients if they would like their benefits reduced.

Program Growth

Ms. Blue shared the program caseload has grown about 8% since January 2021. The growth can mostly be attributed to remote services making it easier for parents to complete the eligibility certification process.



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Interns

Ms. Blue shared that her program currently has an intern as well. Her name is Rebecca, from Rutgers University majoring in Nutrition and Dietary Sciences. Rebecca has been in the internship for two weeks and has contributed to the Nutrition Program.

Farmer's Market

Ms. Blue shared there will be a Farmer's Market on the last Saturday of each month from June until October. In June and September, we issue Farmer's Market checks to our clients on the program except for children aged one year old. The Farmer's Market is promoted via the schools and social media such as Facebook. We also send a mass mailing that lists all the Essex County farmer's markets where their checks can be utilized. This year there will be extra vegetables through the American Recovery Act and the check amounts have been increased from \$25 to \$35. The checks cannot be cashed at a regular supermarket they can only be utilized at the farmer's market. We are working on ways to implement creative solutions for encouraging clients to cash their checks. We will also be providing vaccines at our farmer's market sites. The Farmer's Market will take place in the City Hall parking lot.

Nurse Karen LaRusso Updates:

Introduction of Student Intern

Nurse LaRusso introduced Ms. Rosina Sackey, of Montclair State University as our newest intern. Nurse Karen commended Ms. Sackey for her bravery in applying for an internship during the pandemic and her enthusiastic efforts during her tenure with the Health Department. Nurse LaRusso shared that Ms. Sackey is completing a hybrid internship, on-site some days and virtual others; and this is her second week of the internship. Nurse LaRusso also shared she advised Ms. Sackey of the work that we do and about how the BOH operates. Nurse LaRusso complimented the Board on its proactivity.

Ms. Sackey introduced herself to the BOH and explained she will be graduating from Montclair State in December. She shared she is a Public Health major with a concentration in Community Health Education. Ms. Sackey shared her experiences working at the vaccination clinics and expressed happiness with her program and DHHS staff thus far. BOH members welcomed Ms. Sackey to the Health Department.

Pfizer Campaign

Nurse LaRusso shared she received feedback from students who are very knowledgeable regarding COVID-19 and have expressed their desire to get vaccinated. Many students felt left out of the vaccination process before the dissemination of the Pfizer vaccine. Interestingly, they are mature enough to recognize if something is infiltrating a community, the solution really should be disseminated through the whole population and not just through segments of the population. Nurse LaRusso stated she participated in two school systems' online forums; a Summit and the other was the Health Fair, and it is so amazing to see how these kids have adapted and survived through the pandemic.



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Open Discussion:

Trustee Corbitt asked what can be done to support a collaborative effort aiming to encourage millennials to get on board because many of our millennials are a little reluctant about getting the vaccine. Dr. Griffith replied education is key at this point and you can help by helping us understand what the concerns are for millennials. Currently, all the data is available widely. So, we will continue to send information and hold informational sessions. When it comes to targeting certain age groups we are in a municipality without a college, which caters to that population. Cities that do have colleges within their area are also going into those schools and providing specific information for that age grouping. Understanding the questions that exist and the conversations that are occurring we can tailor our health education efforts towards responding to those questions.

Trustee Corbitt asked our stance as a municipality with the Governor's lifting of the public health emergency. Dr. Griffith answered, as a municipality, we cannot supersede the Governor's executive order, but we are focusing on what is occurring within our jurisdiction. We are also not seeing as many COVID-related deaths. So, whether it is looking at activities in our parks, the municipal buildings, or any of our recreational facilities, we are still focusing on the fact we still need safety protocols such as wearing masks in indoor spaces and social distancing to remain in place.

Dr. Griffith shared seniors will continue to receive vouchers and support for those attending the Farmers Market and they will be able to use the vouchers. You will also notice an influx of activities being held for our seniors beginning with the senior barbecue taking place next week. Public activities will become more prevalent during the upcoming months, which means we must ensure safety standards.

At the conclusion of Board business, President Harris adjourned the meeting at 7:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jo-Ann Mills
Board Clerk