

## **Erie County Board of Health – Meeting Minutes**

Monday, July 27, 2020

Erie County Department of Health, 606 W. 2<sup>nd</sup> St., Erie, PA

Zoom Conference Call

5:00 pm

### **Present:**

Richard A. Ortoski, DO, Chair  
Bishop Clifton McNair, III  
Carla Picardo, MD, MPH  
Mary Jean Taylor, PhD

### **In Attendance:**

Melissa Lyon  
Breanna Adams  
Charlotte Berringer  
Nicole Bolash  
Valerie Bukowski  
Mark Matlock  
Ellen Schauerman, County Council Liaison  
R. Anthony Snow, MD  
Tina Burling

- I. Call to Order - Dr. Ortoski, Board Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m.
- II. Public Comments - none
- III. Presentations - none
- IV. Approval of Minutes - The Board of Health meeting minutes and division reports from April 27, 2020 were approved on a motion from Dr. Picardo and seconded by MJ Taylor. All in favor.
- V. Board Updates
  - A. Division Reports - Formal Written Reports Provided in Advance of Board Meeting - Q&A
    1. V. Bukowski elaborated on the visit from the CDC Team, which came about as a suggestion from the lead epidemiologist at PADOH during the time when increasing case numbers was preventing Erie County from moving from the yellow to the green phase. It was a productive, and good learning experience.
      - a. The team conducted an overview of ECDH's investigation and contact tracing system, and provided an analysis of the statistical reporting and contact tracing database. They noted that there is a small group of staff with a large amount of work. They were pleased with the investigation and contact tracing system. However, they felt that the database for index cases and contacts was very cumbersome. Suggestions are being looked into as a solution to a possible surge in cases requiring ability to handle an increased work load.
      - b. The team looked at testing sites in Erie County, particularly in areas of need that have high positivity rates, such as the 16503 zip code. They recommend increasing testing in Erie County, using standardized testing sites as opposed to pop-up sites so residents know where to go for testing for free.
      - c. The team will be providing tips for communication with the community regarding testing sites and future endeavors.

2. N. Bolash explained that the Active Elders Program came about by creatively providing services in a way that is safe for those to participate during the pandemic. This is part of the Safe and Healthy Communities falls prevention program, A Matter of Balance. ECDH is partnering with WQLN to promote the program to the target age group.
3. C. Berringer explained that the STD clinic is only seeing contacts to confirmed cases or syphilis cases. All others are referred to PCPs or Adagio for follow up.
4. C. Berringer clarified that the Immunization Clinic was planned to reopen in August anticipating a demand with school starting. However, PADOH said that school immunizations will be waived for two months after school starts and so the clinic will not open in August unless there is a demand. As of now the clinic has not been receiving calls.

## VI. Director's Report

### A. NACCHO Town Hall Panel: "The Future of Public Health"

1. M. Lyon participated as a panelist in an annual meeting that was held virtually. There were over 100 attendees on the session. She will continue to highlight Erie on a national platform whenever invited. Main topics of discussion were:
  - a. Responding to COVID-19 with limited resources and attempting to be innovative.
    1. Maintaining resiliency in health departments, and rebuilding the national infrastructure. Maintaining public health reputation and trust within the community, considering damage from COVID-19.
    2. Social determinants, racism, law enforcement and violence as public health issues.
    3. Using opportunities if resources were available to leverage, and how to prioritize what we are addressing as public health professionals.
    4. Long-term resiliency of public health workforce as it pertains to limited staffing resources and mental health of staff to persevere for remaining months. Public health was already understaffed and under-resourced, and then the COVID-19 response was added on top. Across the nation, public health workers are only doing pressing work, not the preventative work as intended.
  - b. Public health moving forward
    1. Focusing more on how we can do better than what we were doing before, rather than just returning to what was normal, and considering components such as health equity, economy, and business tied to the community and public health.
    2. Providing an innovative space to integrate public health deeper into the community, rather than a government entity that provides services on to at risk populations.
    3. Public Health is often seen as a social service entity. Fixing a disinvestment of over 20 years in a matter of months: how to fund staff, where to put them, how to hire and train, etc.

### B. Returning to day-to-day public health business

1. ECDH is currently understaffed and under-resourced. Many staff are working within their grant deliverables in different ways in an effort to meet those deliverable as well as work on the COVID response. For example,

Environmental had not been doing regular food service inspections, and now that they are resuming inspections they call ahead to keep employees safe, and they discuss COVID guidelines such as mask wearing. Staff are being supported as much as possible to help them feel safe and are provided with PPE.

- a. Staff are tired from doing both the COVID response and their regular jobs, many taking very little time off.
  - b. Employees still deal with many complaints, confrontation, and argumentative people causing a lot of stress and tension. The guidance from state agencies has been unclear, and this makes answering questions from the public difficult. ECDH call takers all have reported that they get calls from people who are angry and talk about conspiracy theories.
  - c. Public actions are impactful and disheartening for ECDH employees.
    1. Recently an anti-mask protest was held outside of ECDH with about 20-30 people. D. George and B. Adams spoke with the organizers, but it was not a productive conversation.
    2. Baseball games are being held in Bayview Park next door, and nobody is wearing masks.
    3. The media announced a fundraiser, but there was no mask wearing and no social distancing.
    4. A local politician organized a police rally and there was no mask wearing.
  - d. The Board of Health expressed sincere gratitude and appreciation for the staff of ECDH, the work that they have done, and the work that they continue to do.
  - e. There is still a long way to go, and much more investment is needed in ECDH and the staff.
- C. ICS/COVID-19 Update - An updated ICS chart was provided, which shows expansion of the Public Health Operations Branch, and some movement of individuals within the structure. The ICS has moved to a Unified Command, which includes Public Health, Emergency Management, and Human Services.
- D. M. Lyon shared an article that describes removing partisanship out of public health. It describes an infrastructure that is already in place where public health reports to the Board of Health, rather than government. This is an example of innovation for the future of public health.

<https://www.statnews.com/2020/07/04/get-partisanship-out-of-public-health-science/>

VII. Financial Report - presented by Mark Matlock

- A. An expense summary was reviewed for the Crisis CoOp grant, which was for \$950,060 for March 15, 2020 through March 15, 2021. As of June 30 the grant has already been overspent. Expenses total over one million dollars to date. Going forward another grant will be received for a total of 30 months. The ELC Enhancing Detection grant will award \$8.1 million to ECDH. An official award letter is to come from PADOH.
- B. Erie County has received \$24 million in CARES Act funds, \$411,400 of which is allotted for ECDH. These funds must be spent by December 30, 2020.

VIII. Old Business

- A. By-laws revisions

1. Revisions to the bylaws based on the Board's discussion at the March meeting were reviewed and accepted on a motion by MJ Taylor and seconded by Bishop McNair. All in favor.
2. The final document will be prepared for signature by the Chairperson and the Secretary.

IX. New Business

A. Board of Health vacancy

1. The Board will use its current process of soliciting candidates to fill the vacant position. Resumes that were submitted in 2018 will be reviewed first. An executive meeting may be held separate from the regularly scheduled board meeting to discuss candidates.

B. Additional COVID-19 Discussion

1. There have not been any reports of COVID Parties locally, where kids gather with the intention of catching the virus. However, some early cases locally were a result of attending one of those alleged parties outside of Erie County.

- X. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned by Dr. Ortoski, Chairperson, at 6:06 p.m. All in favor.

- XI. Next meeting: Rescheduled to November 2, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,  
Tina Burling, Recording Secretary