

Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission
Meeting (via video conference)
June 7, 2021

1. Call to Order

The meeting of the Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission was held on the above date via video conference and called to order by President Mr. Greg Riley by reading the Sunshine Law Statement at 7:05 pm.

2. Roll Call

Green Brook: Dr. Jon Fourre

Warren: Mr. Greg Riley, Mr. Malcolm Plager, Ms. Angela Valerio

Watchung: Ms. Julia Gunther, Ms. Fran Ellis

Bridgewater: Ms. Christine Madrid, Mr. Wells Winegar

Others in attendance: Mr. Kevin Sumner, Health Officer, Ms. Diana Swiderski, Administrative Assistant, Dr. Eze Udensi, Vulnerable Populations Outreach Coordinator

Members of the Public: Darlene Carter, Warren Twp., Laura Keller, Warren Twp., Rachel Singleton, Warren Twp.

3. President's Opening Remarks

President Greg Riley announced that he would like to change the order of the agenda, if there is no objection, to address COVID-19 first. He proposes Kevin providing his report on COVID-19 at which point the members of the Commission would comment or ask questions, followed by an opportunity for the public to comment or ask questions.

4. Unfinished Business

a) COVID-19 Update

K. Sumner stated COVID case numbers are down to only 1 or 2 new cases per week. Approximately 50% of the 4 municipalities are fully vaccinated. Concern is that if more people do not get vaccinated throughout the summer, it could cause an increase in numbers again when the cold weather arrives. Much of the current work involves interpreting rapidly changing executive orders that cause confusion among the public. Members of the public have voiced their frustrations on schools continuing to mandate mask-wearing for children and having to quarantine their children upon returning from out of state travel. K. Sumner said that schools have to abide by orders of the State Department of Education, which still mandate these actions.

i. Grants status

K. Sumner has been negotiating grants with the State, as detailed on the agenda, two of which are still pending. One is extending the work that Eze is doing with

vulnerable populations, and will also include a COVID Generalist position to assist him with connecting the vulnerable public with resources in the community. A second small grant for \$50,000 will address COVID vaccinations in the communities.

ii. Dr. Eze Udensi spoke on the progress he has made with getting the right information into the hands of our community and finding those who have been negatively affected, i.e., vulnerable populations, with the goal of connecting them to agencies who are willing to offer aid. He has met and continues to meet with multiple members of our community, including church leaders, school superintendents, principals and nurses, the business community, law enforcement and the OEM.

iii. Dr. Fourre mentioned three new variants of COVID-19 that originated in India, one of which is 50% more transmissible than other variants, and has severely impacted the UK. There has also been a fairly big increase in adolescents contracting COVID, some of which have required hospitalization. Other countries throughout the world are also experiencing waves, such as Canada and Mexico, as well as multiple countries in Asia.

M. Plager addressed vaccine resistance. The rates of vaccine acceptance by the 15-75-year-old population has dropped. K. Sumner stated vaccine availability is currently greater than demand. To address hesitancy, the department is communicating the same messages as other local, county, state and federal agencies, to reduce confusion and build trust in the vaccine.

A. Valerio mentioned the state orders on travel being unclear and that it has brought confusion and pushback from parents and students. Since schools are back to in-person classes, there are crowded classrooms and social distancing is no longer possible.

J. Gunther speculates that the lower case rates have validated some people to thinking they don't need to get vaccinated, and she stresses education about the vaccine.

F. Ellis doesn't understand why people are hesitant about vaccination.

5. Public Portion

All three members of the public, Darlene Carter, Rachel Singleton and Laura Keller, were parents from Warren Township. They were all concerned about the continued mandates on mask-wearing and travel quarantining for children in schools, and the confusing and contradictory messages between the CDC, the State DOE, and local schools. K. Sumner explained that there are differences between the guidance from the CDC and the State, and other differences between schools and camps. Under a public health emergency, we are legally required to follow the governor's orders. Ultimately schools must follow what the State Department of Education sets in place. Rachel Singleton added that children have been the most victimized psychologically throughout this pandemic and that vaccine hesitancy occurs because vaccines can have horrific side effects.

Minutes

- a) Mr. Plager moved to adopt the minutes of the April 5, 2021, meeting as presented, second by J. Fourre. All in favor

6. Finance Reports

- a) Corrected reports for July 2020 through March 2021

K. Sumner explained that due to how QuickBooks calculates payment dates, some entries were not captured in the Commission reports. He caught these errors months later when he realized the QuickBooks account balance did not match the balances in the Finance Reports. His plan to prevent this in the future will be to balance these monthly. G. Riley, M. Plager and J. Fourre agreed that a different system should be used so that future issues do not arise.

M. Plager moved to adopt the corrected finance reports for July 2020 through March 2021 as presented, second by F. Ellis. All in favor

- b) April 2021

A Paychex error correction due to K. Sumner's waiving of health benefits was noted.

M. Plager moved to adopt the financial report for April 2021 as presented, second by J. Fourre. All in favor

- c) May 2021

An \$81.13 correction from the NJACCHO due to an oversight on their end regarding a COVID Grant was noted. \$200 was paid to Dr. Frank for new employee pre-employment physicals for Ms. Swiderski and Dr. Udensi.

J. Fourre moved to adopt the financial report for May 2021 as presented, second by A. Valerio. All in favor

7. Unfinished Business

- a) Bridgewater Township Status & Welcome!

G. Riley again welcomed Bridgewater Township to the Commission

- b) Commission 2019 Audit

Accounting firm, Samuel Klein & Company, has still not produced its 2019 audit report, despite our continued prodding through various means of communication. Our state grants for \$300,000 have potential to be jeopardized if we do not produce this report to the State, and we have notified the firm that we will hold them accountable if we lose the grants. However, the Commission members agreed that we will give the firm an additional two weeks to produce the report but will most likely hire a different company for future audits.

c) REHS Position

K. Sumner has currently received 4-5 applications and hopes to choose an applicant to fill the position in the next couple of weeks.

d) Independence Day Holiday – July 2?

K. Sumner is proposing Friday, July 2nd in addition to July 5th to celebrate the Independence Day holiday as a thank you to the work the Health Department staff has been doing in the last year. G. Riley will not oppose the motion if the members are in favor.

While acknowledging the hard work, G. Riley expressed budget concerns and public perception about adding another holiday to the 2021 calendar.

F. Ellis moved to approve a compensatory holiday on July 2nd, 2021, as presented, second by M. Plager. All in favor

e) Financial Disclosure Statements

K. Sumner is giving a friendly reminder for those who have not completed their Financial Disclosure Statements to do so, otherwise they will be fined by the State.

8. New Business

a) Agreement for public health nursing services with Community VNA

The only difference in this agreement from ones prior is that Bridgewater is included. A key component included in the agreement is that the VNA can provide other services as needed, which could be to assist with COVID vaccination clinics.

J. Fourre moved to approve the contract with the VNA as presented, second by F. Ellis. All in favor

b) Resolution 21-04 in lieu of contract for Green Brook

c) Resolution 21-05 in lieu of contract for Warren

d) Resolution 21-06 in lieu of contract for Watchung

G. Riley proposed to replace the “contracts” the Commission previously had with the municipalities, with resolutions recognizing them as members and detailing the costs. Mr. Riley explained that under the statute, the towns are members of the Commission, not contracting parties.

M. Plager moved to adopt Resolution 21-04 in lieu of contract for Green Brook as presented, second by J. Fourre. All in favor

M. Plager moved to adopt Resolution 21-05 in lieu of contract for Warren as presented, second by J. Fourre. All in favor

J. Gunther moved to adopt Resolution 21-06 in lieu of contract for Watchung as presented, second by F. Ellis. All in favor

e) School-aged immunization status update

K. Sumner stated that there were concerns about the maintenance of routine immunizations and people caring for themselves during the pandemic. Immunization audits of the schools thus far in Green Brook, Warren and Watchung schools indicate 97-99% compliance.

f) Bill to require notification of elevated lead levels in drinking water

When an individual has elevated levels of lead in his blood, one of the areas the department investigates as a possible source is the water. K. Sumner believes this bill would improve health because it could identify the source of lead before someone is exposed.

g) Cannabis information in light of legalization

The Watchung Borough Council approached K. Sumner and the Borough’s BOH regarding the sale of cannabis in town. After discussion, a Q & A document about potential health concerns related to use of cannabis, as opposed to the sale of cannabis, was prepared to better address public health issues. The document will be posted on the Commission website.

h) Appointment of Bridgewater representative to Finance and Budget Committee for 2021

This will be tabled until the Bridgewater Township Committee appoints the representatives to the Commission.

i) Proposed Limits on Public Health Authority Document

This does not specifically pertain to NJ because the local health department and Health Director does not have authority to enact local directives during public health emergencies. However, it is a concern in other parts of the country where local health officials can determine local policy, even during public health emergencies, and that authority is being removed to prevent public health actions.

9. Addendum to Agenda

K. Sumner mentioned he had a presentation with the Community Health Program at RWJ Barnabas Health accepted for the NACCHO Annual meeting on public health collaborations.

10. Adjournment

There being no further business, M. Plager made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:15 pm, seconded by J. Fourre. Vote: All in favor.