

FLORHAM PARK BOARD OF HEALTH

September 8, 2021

Minutes

Present: Peter Kleban, Stanley Wisnewski, Marianne Nucci, Raymond Holmes, Kathleen Green

Also present: Kristen Santoro (Council Liaison), Thomas Cantisano (Health Officer), Gina McConeghy (Registered Environmental Health Specialist- REHS), Jean Vrablik (Public Health Nurse) and Maryann Lang (Board of Health Secretary)

Absent: Sabrina Edmunds, Tana LaPlaca, Thomas Michalowski and Jo-Anna Finegan

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Ms. Lang took attendance, and stated that the requirements of the Open Public Meeting Act had been met.

Approval of Minutes:

Ms. Nucci made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 9, 2021 meeting. Dr. Holmes seconded the motion, and all members present approved.

Approval of Reports:

Mr. Wisnewski asked for clarification on the COVID 19 case numbers reported in the monthly reports. The monthly, and year-to-date, numbers do not seem to correlate. Mr. Cantisano responded that all of the data is correct. It is how the data was reported, and formatted for the reports, that may cause confusion.

Ms. Nucci asked if there have been COVID 19 cases in the long term care facilities in town. Ms. Vrablik responded that there have been occasional cases, which involved staff not residents. Mr. Kleban asked if there is a one hundred percent vaccination rate at the facilities. Ms. Vrablik responded that residents at all three facilities are vaccinated. Brighton Gardens has vaccine mandates for staff. Ms. Vrablik responded that, to the best of her knowledge, Brookdale Senior Living and Cheshire Home don't have mandates. However, there is weekly testing for COVID 19, for unvaccinated staff.

Mr. Wisnewski made a motion to approve the reports which included: Vital Statistics monthly report for June, July and August; Pequannock Township monthly report for May (revised), June and July; Pequannock Township year-to-date report; Pequannock Township inspection activity report for June, July and August. Dr. Holmes seconded the motion, and all members present approved.

Communications:

None

Report from Health Department Staff:

Gina McConeghy provided the following update:

Several new businesses in town: Playa Bowls, Jersey Mikes, Anita's Baked Goods, Kathy D's cosmetic tattoo artist.

Dr. Holmes asked if mobile food vendors are required to have a home base. Ms. McConeghy responded in the affirmative. The vendors go through a thorough licensing process: licensing information paperwork must be completed, proof of Serve Safe Certification required, fire safety permit and inspection (if required by Fire Department), and inspection by Health Department.

Report from Health Department Staff (continued):

Mr. Wisnewski asked if food establishment inspections are up-to-date. Ms. McConeghy responded that she, and Caterina Cappuccia (REHS), worked together to complete all inspections on time. Mr. Cantisano added that the department also made sure that businesses were operating at the maximum capacity that is allowed under NJ State guidelines. Many businesses were doing less, due to confusion with guidelines.

Ms. McConeghy stated that inspections were completed for day camps and pools. She mentioned that the outdoor pool, at the new Del Webb housing community, is ready to go. The indoor pool is not operational yet.

Mr. Wisnewski congratulated staff for keeping the Borough in good shape, especially with added responsibilities during the pandemic. Mr. Cantisano stated that the department has always exceeded minimum State requirements, and continued to do so during the pandemic.

New Business:

None

Unfinished Business:

None

Ratification of Licenses:

The Board ratified licenses issued in June, July and August.

Public Hearing - Privilege of the Floor:

Mr. Kleban opened the meeting to the public at 7:17 pm. Ms. Lang advised any attendee wishing to speak, to please come to the podium, and state their name and address for the record.

Maria Quigley, 6 Insley Road, Florham Park

Ms. Quigley thanked the Board for coming back to in person meetings. She brought up points, and concerns, that she has made at previous Health Department meetings regarding COVID 19 public health guidance, masking, and the efficacy and safety of vaccines, especially for children. She also presented research and statistical data, which she emailed to the Board.

Mr. Cantisano responded, as he had in the past, that local entities rely on the State, Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the institutions that are in place to provide public health guidance. There is a tremendous amount of data that is collected by the various agencies. It is a very complicated issue, and the situation keeps evolving. The State collects regional data to set policy. You can't have local policy, it is problematic. The local entity has no authority on Executive Orders and Directives issued by the State.

Mrs. Quigley asked if school data is being reviewed. Mr. Cantisano replied that all diseases are reported through the Communicable Disease Reporting Surveillance System (CDRSS), which has been in place for forty years. Ms. Quigley asked if the data is broken down by age group. Mr. Cantisano responded that it is at the State level. The State looks at everything -- opioid use, suicides, etc. -- to set policies. Mr. Cantisano stated that the disease rate in young children is lower. If an Emergency Use Authorization is approved to vaccinate children under twelve, the question is whether they should be vaccinated. Their level of disease is usually mild or asymptomatic. With children ages twelve to sixteen, you begin to see more serious illness. There is a lot of data, with sometimes conflicting information. A lot is still not known. You can take every piece of data in a circular discussion, and then nothing is done. Policy makers have to take a course, and it is to err on the side of caution. Ms. Quigley responded, that she would like to believe that, but the issue has become political. She stated that she feels we are not erring on side of caution, and the collateral damage is children. Mr. Cantisano responded that one can look at data and challenge it with data from other sources. The local entity relies on the institutions appointed to protect society. It is not for us to make decisions contrary to them. The mandates come from the State.

Public Hearing - Privilege of the Floor (continued):

Dr. Holmes commented that this is a novel virus. We are not used to living through the science. Science is data collection and hypothesis. It is a continuing rolling process. Recommendations may change as time goes on. Ultimately, the government has to come up with policies. It is frustrating for all of us to live through the science. Mr. Kleban agreed with Dr. Holmes. He stated that he saw this in the Intensive Care Unit, at the beginning of COVID. Things were changing on a daily basis. The State has to try to make the best decision, and it is to err on the side of caution.

Erin Szonyi , 44 Ridgedale Avenue:

Ms. Szonyi discussed the quarantine guidelines for school. Currently, non vaccinated individuals that come in close contact with a positive COVID case, must quarantine. Vaccinated individuals do not need to quarantine. With many fully vaccinated individuals testing positive, why has this decision been made? It doesn't add up to science. It should be either no one quarantines, or everyone quarantines.

Ms. Szonyi also questioned the excused absence policy, when quarantining, in some districts. In some cases, if the student was not exposed in school, it was not counted as an excused absence. In certain circumstances, this would affect the ability of the student to move up to the next grade and to graduate. There is the added issue that there is no longer a remote option.

Mr. Cantisano stated that the guidance for vaccinated people not needing to quarantine, has been in place for a while. Studies show different results regarding vaccinated people spreading the virus. It will never be no one needs to quarantine, it would be everyone would have to quarantine. With this scenario, schools would be closed. Kids have to be in school, even if it is with masks. It is a very complex, evolving issue and it is frustrating for everyone. He added that Superintendent Caponegro is trying to make it as normal as possible for the students, while following State Department of Health and Department of Education guidelines. Mr. Cantisano added that the Delta variant has somewhat diminished vaccine effectiveness. However, the vaccines still protect against serious illness and hospitalization.

Ms. Vrablik added that guidance for vaccinated individuals, who are in close contact with a positive case, is that there is no restriction on activity per CDC. The individual must still monitor symptoms and is strongly recommended that they be tested between days three and five. If the test comes back positive, the person should isolate.

Ms. Santoro asked if quarantining is required for students after traveling. Mr. Cantisano responded that New Jersey has lifted their travel restrictions. However, people are advised to visit the CDC website for guidance on traveling and quarantining.

Ms. Greene asked why can't unvaccinated, and vaccinated, people get tested during days three through five, if exposed to COVID 19. Then, only quarantine if they test positive? Mr. Cantisano responded that the risk of disease, and spread, is higher with the unvaccinated. Ms. Greene asked if an individual can still get sick, if they don't have the virus by day five? Mr. Cantisano responded "yes". We now have a new variant "Mu", so it is a never ending thing.

Ms. Greene stated that the MRNA vaccines were developed for the whole COVID family. It should still work on the Delta variant. The Delta variant is more virulent though, so more breakthroughs, and probably more mutations will occur. Hopefully, at some point it will die out. However, this may take years.

The public portion of the meeting was closed at 8:00 pm.

Adjournment:

Mr. Kleban made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:01 pm. Ms. Greene seconded the motion, and all members present approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Maryann Lang, Board of Health Secretary