



Westport Weston
Health District

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

WWHD BOARD OF DIRECTORS

November 29, 2021

Subject to change until approved by the Board of Directors.

The Regular Meeting was called to order by Chairman Otis Crawford at 7:04 pm.

The following voting Board Members were present: Chairman Otis Crawford, Vice Chairman Catherine Revzon, Director Linda Bruce, Director Nussbaum, Director Paul Shaum and Director Doreen Collins were present in the room.

Also, present was Mark A.R. Cooper, Director of Health.

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Crawford asked if there were any questions or comments on the September 13, 2021, Regular Meeting Minutes.

On a motion made by Director Bruce, and seconded by Director Nussbaum, the Board voted to approve the September 13, 2021, Regular Meeting Minutes. Chairman Crawford voted yes; Vice Chairman Revzon voted yes, Director Nussbaum voted yes, Director Bruce voted yes, Director Shaum voted yes, and Director Collins voted yes.

Motion was approved 6 to 0.

Communications

Mr. Cooper noted the good news that the State Department of Health has approved the WWHD's Per Capita Application for SFY2022. This brings an additional \$120,286.40 of funding. He explained that the funds are being used to pay for much of the WWHD's COVID response activities including offsetting the salaries of some part-time and per diem staff doing COVID work. The funds were received shortly after the letter was received.

Mr. Cooper noted that he thought the next communication was important to share with the Board because if involved a public official, most FOI requests are not brought to the Board. Staff has responded to the request finding no relevant information in WWHD files.

Mr. Cooper noted that the third item of communications from CT-DPH Commissioner Juthani to area pediatricians was needed. Until the letter from Commissioner Juthani, area pediatricians seemed reluctant to order COVID19 vaccine and start vaccinating the patients in their practice. Since the letter, area pediatricians began meeting and planning large childhood vaccination

clinics. The clinics are planned for Staples Field House; the first clinic vaccinating just over 700 kids. The second dose clinic is planned for December 3rd with over 1200 childhood doses being ordered. Connecticut Children's Hospital has taken the lead as organizer, the WWHD will be ordering and be the keeper of the vaccine, and many others are helping logistically.

COVID-19 Update

Confirmed and Probable Cases

Mr. Cooper update the Board on the most current number of confirmed and probable cases, vaccination rates and Ct-DPH's 14-day average case rate per 100, 000 population. He noted the case numbers had been going down significantly across Connecticut but now there is the emergence of the new strain called the omicron variant out of South Africa. It is being studied, there is not much known about it at this time other than it seems to be much more transmissible than the Delta strain. There have been a lot of questions about omicron, unfortunately they cannot be answered at this time due to the lack of scientific and/or medical studies on this new variant. There is concern about what the future holds, traditionally flu and other upper respiratory illnesses tend to increase during the winter months when people congregate inside and enjoy a variety of holidays involving people getting together. The number of COVID cases has increased recently, there is an additional Thanksgiving effect increase that is expected in about 10 days. It was also noted that it is likely that the official number of COVID cases is under reported in that there are likely more people who become infected but are asymptomatic and never get tested, or perhaps do a home test and never report that they are positive.

Director Bruce asked if there are any thoughts by the CDC or CT-DPH that perhaps COVID shouldn't be considered a pandemic at this point that it has become endemic and should just be treated like the seasonal flu? Mr. Cooper responded that he has heard some commentary to that point, but it has not been acknowledged officially.

Director Nussbaum shared that on a recent trip out of the country she found the COVID response is much different with the community at large and hospitals that were visited treating it as an endemic illness.

COVID Clinics

Mr. Cooper noted the report from Vanessa Hurta, Director of Clinical Services regarding the department's vaccination clinics. Because of the rescheduling of the meeting, the clinics mentioned in the report were in the planning process, now they have been held. Saturday November 13th the clinic for children held at the Staples field house inoculated about 700, while the clinic for adult boosters held at the WWHD offices inoculated about 100. Additional clinics at the WWHD are in the planning phase that will include normal workday vaccination appointments.

Director of Health Reports

Consolidated Income Statement and Operational & Permit Activity Reports

Mr. Cooper stated that the Board package contains Consolidated Income Statements, Permit Activity Reports and Plan Submittal reports for September and October. He noted that the numbers of plans being submitted for review continues to be significantly higher than pre-COVID levels. This equates to additional income as well as site visits and associated field work. Efforts to replace the field sanitarian that left have not been successful, the candidates submitting resumes have not met minimum requirements of having certain state training certifications. These certifications are important and needed to do the work needed, especially because it has become very difficult to get anyone trained through the CT-DPH since the start of COVID.

Chairman Crawford noted that the WWHD is behind on restaurant inspections. Mr. Cooper agreed indicating it is the WWHD's food sanitarian position he is looking to fill. He noted that there are a number of local health jurisdictions looking to hire staff and it has gotten very competitive.

Director Collins asked if there is enough work for a full-time position. Mr. Cooper replied that there is more than enough work that will include plan reviews and associated field work, restaurant inspections, complaint investigations, etc.

There was general discussion on the difficulty of hiring staff and the amount of work existing staff is handling. It was noted that overtime has been authorized for staff to get caught up. A question has arisen regarding overtime for a salaried exempt position. Differing opinions have been offered as to whether it is ok to pay a salaried exempt position overtime, some saying absolutely not, other thinking it is alright. The accountants questioned have not provided definitive guidance, a labor attorney will need to be asked.

Community Needs Assessment/Community Health Improvement Plan

Mr. Cooper noted the report prepared by Kerri Hagan, Special Projects Coordinator, regarding the WWHD's Community Needs Assessment/Community Health Improvement Planning efforts to date, in each Directors meeting package. The Community Health Improvement Plan is something CT-DPH would like to see done now that the WWHD received per capita funding. With the addition of Easton and the changes the delivery of public health services is undergoing due to COVID the Community Needs Assessment/Community Health Improvement Plan will help bring into better focus what public health services may be needed and appropriate for our member towns. A consultant, the Strategy Group, was contacted and came in for a discussion of how it might be best to proceed. It was found that a lot of the work needed to develop these plans has already been done and would not have to be reinvented. The Strategy Group offered to prepare a timeline and cost break down of what they thought the next steps could be.

After the Strategy Group meeting staff reviewed all the available information and concluded the full scope of what the Strategy Group could provide was not needed, much of the preliminary

work has been done, but there might be a need for certain services such as facilitating a session for Board members to finalize and/or adapt a plan. Another important need is to have some guidance on reviewing and focusing staff responsibilities, making sure their job descriptions capture what they are really doing, and reviewing the salary/pay scale to make sure they are in line with the responsibilities.

Director Bruce agreed that the full scope of services outlined in the Strategy Group proposal would not be needed since a lot of the data collection has already been completed and WWHD staff know pretty well the internal and external factors that may impact the future provision of public health services.

Director Collins noted that there is a group called the HBS Club of CT Community Partners which does pro bono work of this nature for non-profit organizations and that she would be willing to reach out to them to see if they could offer any help in this effort. Board members felt this was worth pursuing.

Salary/Job Description Update

Mr. Cooper distributed a salary survey recently conducted by the Connecticut Association of Director's of Health which was received after the Board Meeting Package had been sent out. The survey is very recent and covers the majority of health jurisdictions in Connecticut. Also distributed was information on all of WWHD's current staff and pay levels. He noted that back in January the Board talked about a two- and one-half percent pay increase but decided to grant a one percent increase at that time and would revisit the issue after the start of the new fiscal year, July 1. Additionally, the most recent (last done in 2007), WWHD Salary Ranges for Professional Positions worksheet outlining position grade levels with the minimum, midpoint and maximum salaries was distributed to Board members. Mr. Cooper stated that the practice of public health has changed significantly, the WWHD workforce has had significant turnover in the past few years, and the amount as well as nature of the work being done has increased since the arrival of COVID19. He believes a review of staff tasks, job descriptions, pay scale is overdue.

Director Nussbaum stated that all of the employees who stayed with the WWHD this past year have all gone up and beyond the normal call of duty.

There was general discussion on the work hours, staff positions, and pay scales of the various public health jurisdictions across the state, as well as various options of how to proceed with evaluating each staff members responsibilities and job description.

Mr. Cooper asked about the Board's position on a pay increase for employees. He indicated it has been difficult replacing staff, there two important positions unfilled, one nurse and one sanitarian. Director Collins asked when pay increase have traditionally been given. Mr. Cooper replied that typically pay increases are granted at the beginning of a new fiscal year, July 1, but noted that it has been a couple years since the last increase and there have been times when no increase has been given.

There was general discussion on the history of the WWHD finances and the earlier need to reduce staff by twenty six percent when the town cut funding, the WWHD lost funding from the state and the economy crashed. Chairman Crawford acknowledged the difficult financial situation the WWHD had been in. Director Collins asked what the budgetary impact would be to grant a one and one half pay increase. Mr. Cooper replied that funds for such were put into the current year's operating budget, the salaries of the staff members who left have been accruing, and between the new state per capita and COVID grant funds that have been coming in offsetting many of the salaries, there are plenty of funds to cover the cost. Chairman Crawford noted that the town has been granting increases in the three to three- and one-half range. Mr. Cooper added that not only has inflation been on the increase but staff's contributions for health insurance and pension have increased, essentially negating the one percent increase that was granted in January.

On a motion made by Director Nussbaum and seconded by Director Collins, the Board voted to grant a one- and one-half percent wage increase for all eligible and full-time employees retroactive to July 1, 2021. Chairman Crawford voted yes; Vice Chairman Revzon voted yes, Director Nussbaum voted yes, Director Bruce voted yes, Director Shaum voted yes, and Director Collins voted yes.

Motion was approved 6 to 0.

Name Change Update

Mr. Cooper updated the Board on changing WWHD's name to the Aspetuck Health District. He has met with bank executives who are in the process of initially adding the name Aspetuck to the WWHD existing accounts so checks received with either name can be cashed. Eventually, the WWHD will be dropped. He has also discussed making the change with Charles Costello, WWHD auditor who suggested waiting until after January 1, 2022, before notifying the IRS and others so as not to cause any tax confusion. The change is in progress and will continue into January.

Update on Legal Issue

Mr. Cooper reported that there is not much new since the last meeting and update. The attorneys for the WWHD have filed their response with the court to dismiss the matter, the other side has twenty-one days from that filing to respond.

Election of WWHD Officers

Chairman Crawford indicated that in accordance with WWHD's By-laws it is time for the Board to elect officers. After twenty-two years on the Board, and since his term is expiring, Chairman Crawford indicated he will not be seeking reappointment to the Board. Chairman Crawford indicated he has talked to Vice Chairman Revzon who is willing to continue on as Vice Chairman. He asked if there was anybody else interested in the position.

On a motion made by Director Bruce and seconded by Director Collins, the Board voted to appoint Vice Chairman Revzon to another term as Vice Chairman. Chairman Crawford voted yes; Director Nussbaum voted yes, Director Bruce voted yes, Director Shaum voted yes, and Director Collins voted yes. Vice Chairman Revzon abstained.

Motion was approved 5 to 0.

Chairman Crawford indicated he has talked to Board members and Director Shaum has indicated a willingness to serve as Chairman. He asked if there was anybody else interested in the position.

On a motion made by Director Collins and seconded by Director Nussbaum, the Board voted to appoint Director Shaum as Chairman, to become effective at the conclusion of this meeting. Chairman Crawford voted yes; Director Nussbaum voted yes, Director Bruce voted yes, and Director Collins voted yes. Director Shaum abstained.

Motion was approved 5 to 0.

Board members thanked Chairman Crawford for his many years of service and doing an outstanding job during some difficult times.

Adjournment

Chairman Crawford asked if there is any other business that needs to come before the Board.

Hearing none, on a motion made by Director Collins, and seconded by Vice Chairman Revzon, the Board voted to adjourn at 8:22 PM. Chairman Crawford voted yes; Vice Chairman Revzon voted yes, Director Bruce voted yes, Director Shaum voted yes, and Director Collins.

Motion was approved 6 to 0.

Respectfully submitted



Mark A.R. Cooper Director of Health
Westport Weston Health District