

City of East Orange

NEW JERSEY



EAST ORANGE BOARD OF HEALTH
REGULAR MEETING
East Orange Department of Health & Human Services
143 New Street East Orange, New Jersey 07017
April 19, 2022

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Call to Order – 5:35 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 Communication ID: 856 5419 8465

Meeting Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85654198465?pwd=OWVuMWlYMKlhT3hYeTY5NUdNRWdsZz09>

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:

Tameika Garrett-Ward - absent

Board of Health Counsel:

Attorney Farah Abuobead

Health Department Staff:

Dr. Griffith, HHS Director
Victor Kuteyi, Health Officer

Mayoral Staff:

None

Guests:

None



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Public in attendance:

None

Approval of March 15, 2022, Meeting Minutes:

Approved Unanimously

Announcements President Harris:

1. NJDOH Financial Disclosure due April 30, 2022
2. Create an administrative committee to hear issues on business license suspension and/or revocation.
3. Create an operating procedure for administrative hearings.
4. Barber Shop, Cosmetology and Nail Salon Ordinance.

President Harris Announcements:

President Harris attended the Health and Education meeting last week with Dr. Griffith, and adult marijuana was not discussed. President Harris raised the subject of gender education in schools in view of the governor's signed executive order regarding same. During this discussion, it was indicated that the Board of Education is autonomous and therefore, those discussions will be held privately, not inclusive of the committee or the public. President Harris expressed that gender education should be discussed with the larger committee as a public health issue.

Trustee Corbitt asked for clarity on the subject. President Harris explained that schools would teach gender identification at the second-grade level. Governor Murphy initially signed an executive order mandating gender education; however, it appears he has taken a step back recently. The subject of gender identity is an issue that parents would be deeply concerned about, possibly affecting actionable changes.

President Harris reminded the Board to complete their financial disclosures.

President Harris mentioned the creation of an administrative committee to address licensure, suspension, and revocation for the barbershop cosmetology and nail salons. The Board asked for clarification before going further and made the presumption that either Attorney Abuobead or HO Kuteyi would look into it. Once clarification is received, the Board will create procedures to address, i.e., advanced notification, violations, actions taken, and so forth.



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**Dr. Griffith Updates:
Homelessness Initiatives**

Dr. Griffith stated there is nothing additional to add since last month's meeting. The board will be hearing more about one of the initiatives, related to homelessness, which is closer to fruition. Under the Mayor's wellness campaign, we are poised to respond to the outcome of the pandemic, specifically as it pertains to the need for community resilience. There is an emerging, larger-scale initiative where multiple pillars will address wellness.

Historically when looking at the Mayor's health-related wellness campaigns, we are examining traditional activities. However, the pandemic has shown us that we have to shift from this standpoint. The department is looking globally at how the pandemic has impacted our community and what can be done. We are looking at the social determinants of health. We need to position the community differently from before the pandemic because there are reasons for the significant disparities between our community and other communities

Before the pandemic, we were aware that homelessness needed to be addressed. Homelessness can be defined by those who fall into the categories of sheltered and unsheltered. Sheltered consists of individuals categorized as homeless because they do not have a permanent address but are sleeping on someone's couch.

Unsheltered applies to chronically homeless people who have been identified for years or living in shelters. Since the first two years of the pandemic, more individuals are becoming unsheltered. Therefore, the initial phase will target those who are unsheltered. We will rapidly rehouse individuals that we identify as being unsheltered and then also work to provide support to those who identify themselves as sheltered but need help transitioning to a state where they can be housed more independently. As a result, they can feel as though their belongings are secure while we provide therapeutic services to help them transition to a more independent housing option.

We may receive reports of homelessness individuals from residents, council, or colleagues in other departments. The community reporting will also help us identify many individuals who dwell in unconventional areas like businesses and residential buildings that are not secure. Businesses, residential buildings, and others have difficulty removing homeless individuals who access the facilities before closing. The Health Department has a small team that collaborates with the EOPD regarding these efforts. Additionally, we are looking to promote one of our staff members, trained as a social worker, to operate fully in this capacity and provide her support



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She will not serve in a case management or caseworker capacity because that is beyond the scope of our department, but to connect with individuals in the community who can manage individual cases and help with the referral process once we identify individuals who require support. She will also work to leverage relationships and partnerships with our other nonprofit organizations to make sure that we can streamline the level of support that we can offer.

Once the homelessness initiative plan is finalized, we will share it with the Board. The plan includes adults who might be employed and unable to support their household because of other financial demands, seniors transitioning into retirement, families who left the workforce due to pandemic quarantines, and those burdened with childcare costs that require support as it compromises their ability to seek employment.

Updating the resource guide is a needed component of this initiative to ensure the resources we included in the previous version are still relevant. Once we confirm the businesses and nonprofits are still open and servicing the community in the same way, we will reprint and disseminate the updated resource guide to the community, police department, school district, businesses, and other organizations.

President Harris remarked this is a comprehensive initiative encompassing many aspects, including housing which is insufficient. President Harris asked if the City would make affordable housing available and whether supplemental childcare is long-term or short-term. Dr. Griffith shared that the goal would not be to provide long-term emergency support. Instead, we will provide for a finite period based on what we believe is appropriate for an individual or a family; to have a little buffer to either save or to get back on their feet if they are at risk or if they are in an emergent situation secure housing and support.

Trustee Corbitt asked about the status of the homelessness committee that was established pre-COVID. Dr. Griffith shared there has only been one meeting with the nonprofits. There has not been a task force meeting; the Board and committee members will be alerted when we reconvene. We are engaging community partners, the BOH, and the Health and Education committee. Dr. Griffith stated that the five-year strategic plan has to be evaluated due to COVID to ensure that the resources are still available. This would occur before implementing the items offered back then. Dr. Griffith stated she would share the presentation and some of the critical points of the original strategic plan. The other piece would be a code red/code blue ordinance, which we are still evaluating. Nothing has been drafted, but we know that there is a statewide determination as to what triggers a code red or code blue incident; code blue being temperatures that fall below a certain level and create risk for anybody outdoors.



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That usually triggers warming centers and then codes red for overly hot temperatures, activating cooling centers. We do not have anything on the books that highlights our local response related to that, which is triggered by what the state does. Still, we would like to locally implement measures that may be a degree shy of what would start a code blue or a code red on the State level and make an executive decision to trigger that response.

Panhandling

President Harris stated there was a discussion about panhandling at the Health and Education commission meeting and shared that the ordinances she received were disseminated to the group. President Harris inquired how homelessness and panhandling will be?

Dr. Griffith shared that the document circulated is a copy of the ordinance that is in place in Newark, so it is not ours. However, the Board would see anything we intend to draft as legislation or documentation related to homelessness, including panhandling. Implementing a panhandling ordinance within the City, and a homeless bill of rights identifies homeless individuals and humanizes the homeless population.

Many people think that homeless individuals are the ones who are panhandling when it appears that the majority are affiliated with group homes. So, they are not homeless, but it does not mean that we cannot intervene. We are also getting reports that safety is being compromised, whether our residents are going to drive-throughs, ATMs, or various locations. So, the goals behind a panhandling ordinance are promoting safety and combatting aggressive panhandling while addressing homelessness.

We are not looking to punish individuals who give money or absolve those who panhandle from any responsibility. Instead of a fine, other communities have assigned community service.

President Harris stated that it would be challenging to have panhandler account for their actions, and it will be interesting to see how this gets implemented once it is drafted. Dr. Griffith shared it has worked in other municipalities once enforced. We know repeat offenders go to Wendy's or specific locations to ask for money on Central and Main. So, enforcement with any legislation is critical, and that is where the relationship with the PD comes into play, but we must start somewhere, and right now, we have nothing.



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Health Educator Surveys

The health educator is working on surveys and assessments to pull and understand from a pandemic standpoint what our needs are because we know that hospitals have done it before the pandemic. St. Barnabas is in the process of revisiting the community health needs assessment. They did a preliminary survey, and all of the things and factors that we identified as possible outcomes of the pandemic were revealed. We realized St. Barnabas' assessment only captured responses from 93 EO residents, a low number.

In response, our health educator is developing a survey to be utilized at clinics and inform programming. We have the funding and are building out programming, but we want to make sure that it is informed. There are challenges in trying to meet all of the needs. We will disseminate the tools and questions via a link before officially releasing them. President Harris expressed concern about the miniature representation of EO. Dr. Griffith shared that this is common, having smaller numbers captured at St. Barnabas, but Newark assumed a more significant role in covering EO. Dr. Griffith expressed pleasure that these entities could capture more excellent coverage data.

HO Kuteyi Updates:

COVID Vaccinations

We continue to provide vaccines at two local sites, two days a week, at the EO public library on Mondays and Fridays, and we have added two more in the evenings at City Hall. Sometime in May, we will collaborate with Orange to provide vaccinations at Wendy's at the boundary of Orange and EO to seniors. We are also working with the YMCA on Saturdays to provide vaccines for children. President Harris remarked that we our population is covered between our vaccination efforts and those of the hospital.

HO Kuteyi shared we have new COVID cases, but the hospitalization rate is low. Unlike previously, people test positive, but they can cope with the disease, recover, and then go on with their lives.

President Harris mentioned a new variant circulating in China and remarked how difficult it is to keep up with the mutations. HO Kuteyi stated he is unsure of the variant in China but is aware that it exists.

Registered Environmental Health Specialist Positions

President Harris shared that one takeaway from the annual conference at AC was the idea of the specialist positions being more in line with what the State statutes recommended. Some staff has been employed with the city for a while, and they may not be slotted into those promotional positions.



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HO Kuteyi clarified that we discussed promoting Mr. Besra, REHS supervisor, to Chief REHS. Mr. Besra would be the best candidate for that role based on his knowledge, temperament, and background. President Harris asked if that included additional responsibilities. HO Kuteyi stated yes because he would need to supervise the REHS and maybe join them in some inspections or assist them with other tasks.

President Harris suggested that the BOH should not be involved if this was an internal procedure. Still, if filling the positions is a State requirement, we should ensure the City becomes compliant. Dr. Griffith stated she and HO Kuteyi would discuss this further after reviewing the titles with HR.

Attorney Farah Updates:

Cosmetology, Barbershop, & Nail Salon Ordinances

President Harris asked if the three ordinances regarding cosmetology, barbershop, and nail salons, were revised to modify some of the language. HO Kuteyi stated he removed the need for the administrative hearing from the cosmetology, barbershop, and nail salon ordinances as it is not required.

President Harris asked if he had removed that component completely. HO Kuteyi stated yes, and advised that component is a carryover from the retail food inspection ordinance, which states retail food inspections can occur whenever there is an exposure to infection. In these cases, the facility has to be shut down; then, the responsible party will be allowed to address the issues before the HD or the health authority.

President Harris asked if HO Kuteyi provided Attorney Abuobead with the ordinances for review. HO Kuteyi stated he has not done so but will be submitting them shortly. Dr. Griffith stated before they can be forwarded to Attn. Abuobead, HO Kuteyi should submit the ordinances to her, and she will submit them to our attorney along with additional ordinances. Dr. Griffith remarked some aspects of the ordinance needs refining, such as questions about licenses, larger-scale complaints, and defining the Board's role.

Cannabis Ordinance

Board members expressed disappointment that their position paper appears to have not been considered by the H&E committee meeting; except for the (distance restrictions) from schools. One of the businesses identified, has a greater distance between themselves than it does to schools, which is concerning.

President Harris stated she is not aware if it is under additional review and asked other BOH members if they noticed the same. Trustee Corbitt stated she has not read the document in its entirety but hopes that a representative from the HD is on the commission created for the



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City. Dr. Griffith shared there will be health representation and will keep the Board posted once the person(s) have been identified.

Trustee Corbitt asked if a poll was conducted amongst EO residents regarding their opinions about recreational marijuana coming into their community. Dr. Griffith shared that it was not generated from the HD if a survey was conducted. Usually, the polling and the public meetings when there is a new industry, the Planning Department will facilitate those meetings. Dr. Griffith stated she would reach out to Planning to determine what the feedback might have been.

President Harris reminded the Board of the short turnaround time for municipalities to declare whether they were participating or opting out. Given that constraint, you can undoubtedly opt-in, but then it gives you time to determine whether you genuinely want to participate. Assuming that there is a procedure to rescind your opt-in, you do not necessarily have to finalize your decision.

President Harris shared that new cannabis products such as odorless flowers and suppositories are being developed for use.

Open Discussion

Food Truck Vendors

Trustee Corbitt brought to the attention of the BOH two new food truck vendors who have been operating and asked whether they have received approval from the Health Department to operate in EO. HO Kuteyi shared the City has changed its stance on food trucks. The HD inspects all food trucks that operate in EO as a part of licensing. Food truck vendors who are out of compliance will be escorted out of EO immediately.

CareWell Health

Trustee Corbitt shared her family has had unpleasant experiences as patients of CareWell Health. Specifically, during their visits there was a lack of supplies, poor communication with PCD's, and overall dissatisfaction with services. President Harris shared that patient satisfaction surveys are supposed to be provided upon discharge and asked if Trustee Corbitt launched a complaint. Dr. Griffith concurred and stated she would set up a meeting with Dr. Mehta to address these issues. Trustee Corbitt believes her family lodged a complaint but stated she would follow up.

Cottage Industry

Vice President Henry reiterated details regarding the Cottage Industry. The state will provide licenses for cottage food operators. The Cottage Food Operator would apply for the license via the State website and pay a fee of \$100. The license is renewable every two years. Board members asked for clarity on the Cottage Food Operator's role. VP Henry gave an example



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stating, that at a farmer's market, various people come in with their products and their produce to sell. So, the EO Health Department would inspect these businesses, but the licensure would be granted by the State instead of the City since our health department does not have the power to license them or to regulate them. In the event someone makes a purchase from one of these businesses and expresses dissatisfaction, the State will come out and do an investigation and make the Health Department privy to collaborate during the inspection if they see fit.

HO Kuteyi believes there will be webinars to share more information regarding the cottage food industry in the coming months and could be enacted within the next few years. President Harris asked which foods will be applicable for sale in this industry. HO Kuteyi shared the operators are allowed to sell non-temperature foods. So again, if the health inspector, sees temperature foods being sold at a farmer's market setting, then they are empowered to pull it and caution the sellers. Board members asked if this new legislation legalizes these sales practices; including for individuals who were previously operating illegally and without licensure. HO Kuteyi stated yes, they will be legally allowed to sell items such as foods out of the cars or homes if they are licensed, and their area is clean and sanitized.

President Harris suggested creating a policy to reflect precisely what is being discussed. So, we know locally how or what that means for our inspectors when we are triggered. This will alleviate misunderstandings about when the health department should act, when the state is supposed to be called in, and identifies who should call the State.

At the conclusion of Board business, President Harris adjourned the meeting at 6:59 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jo-Ann Mills
Board Clerk