



**EAST ORANGE BOARD OF HEALTH
REGULAR MEETING
East Orange Department of Health & Human Services
143 New Street
East Orange, New Jersey 07017
November 17, 2020
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 Telecommunication ID: 566 679 1670

After the roll call, it was determined there was a quorum to convene the meeting.

Board Members Present:

Christine Harris, President
Horace H. Henry
Tobbia M. Corbitt
Deanna Phillips
Angela Jones-Williams
Dr. Tonya X. Cook

Council Liaison:

Leneus Bergson

Board of Health Counsel:

Joseph Campbell, Attorney assigned to the Board of Health – absent

Health Department Staff:

Dr. Griffith, HHS Director
Victor Kuteyi, Health Officer
Iman Johnson, Health Educator

Mayoral Staff:

Mayor Ted Green

Public in attendance:

None

Approval of October 20, 2020, Meeting Minutes:

Approved Unanimously



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Announcements President Harris:

1. President Harris shared she will be speaking at the League of Municipalities, Annual Conference on Thursday, November 19, 2020, from 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM. The topic of discussion will be *The Status of Public Health in NJ*. She will follow NJDOH Commissioner Perschilli's presentation. The conference will be held virtually this year, which grants everyone an opportunity to access a multitude of lectures and informational materials. President Harris will also include the orientation manual created by the BOH and will disseminate it to the BOH.
2. President Harris announced the outstanding Nail Salon, Barbershop, E-Cigarette, and other related mercantile ordinances will be placed on hold until further notice. It has been deemed that the matters related to COVID-19 take precedence over these matters.
3. President Harris announced the agenda is brief to prioritize efforts regarding COVID-19.

Dr. Griffith Updates:

Medical Student Rotation

President Harris inquired whether the student medical rotation began. Dr. Griffith stated we have a female resident who is set to begin on November 30, but the rotation has not begun.

Teleconference with Faith-Based Organizations

Dr. Griffith revealed we recently had a teleconference with several faith-based organizations. The purpose of the call was to explain our position and the reasoning behind it. We also wanted to collaborate with the faith-based entities to impart crucial guidance when managing the public post-COVID-19. During the call, we learned most are operating virtually, and those that were not had an opportunity to ask our opinion as opposed to us mandating a closure. We plan to create a newsletter to disseminate either monthly or bi-weekly to the faith-based entities and they are going to share the information we provide to them with their congregants.

Virtual Contact for Senior Residents

President Harris asked if we made progress with the virtual contact for senior residents. Dr. Griffith shared we are waiting for the technology, everything else in place. The technology has been delayed and backordered but as soon as we have that Ms. Butts will be able to begin. President Harris remarked it is really a great idea as many seniors are immobile and are restricted as to the amount of information they receive.

Holiday Communications

Dr. Griffith shared the BOH will see different communications concerning Holidays and travel.



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It would be greatly appreciated if the BOH can support and share that information. The BOH agreed to support and share broadly.

Rainbow Group Updates

President Harris asked if Dr. Griffith completed her research on the Rainbow Group. Dr. Griffith stated they were aware of the program but needed to identify a community agency to facilitate it. We have since identified the community agency and will share further details once finalized. A faith-based agency is also in talks to sponsor a peer-support group and she is looking to finalize everything prior to the end of the month, so the training can occur in December.

Health Officer Kuteyi Updates:

EO COVID-19 Updates

As of today, the total cases in East Orange are 2,636 and the number of deaths has remained stable at 235 with none reported within the last two months. Two (2) cases of COVID-19 were reported at 2 separate nursing homes, involving staff that contracted the virus outside. They are in quarantine and weekly testing is being conducted. No residents were infected. The State is monitoring both cases and has provided guidance indicating how the residents should be protected and the frequency to which testing should be conducted.

Dr. Griffith & HO Kuteyi are currently working on updating guidelines to include the new Executive Order for retail food stores, barbershops, nail salons, and multi-family dwellings. They are also updating guidelines for City Inspectors, to provide clarity for conducting inspections and engaging with the public in a safe manner post-COVID-19.

COVID-19 Vaccine

HO Kuteyi informed the BOH, the City has applied for the COVID-19 vaccine from the State and expressed hope, that we will be selected as one of the sites to administer the vaccine. President Harris asked if we were informed of the protocols involving the rollout of the vaccine. HO Kuteyi stated he believes the rollout will begin with healthcare workers and first responders as stated by President Harris but has not received any additional information. HO Kuteyi has been in discussion with the State to prepare for how the vaccine will be stored.

There has been word that the Pfizer vaccine would require a storage temperature of approximately -80 degrees necessitating a freezer that can keep the vaccine at that temperature. Dr. Cook indicated that the information she obtained indicates temperature to be in degrees Fahrenheit. Discussion ensued on refrigeration requirements. President Harris asked what the normal injectable temperature for vaccines is. Vice-President Henry remarked vaccines are usually injectable at 40-41 degrees Fahrenheit. President Harris suggested the refrigerated system may be supplied when the vaccines are delivered. Trustee Corbitt remarked Moderna created a vaccine that does not have a temperature storage requirement.



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New Ordinance Addressing Violations and Fees Associated with Mask-Wearing

There have been no updates regarding the ordinance for addressing violations and fees regarding the wearing of masks. The State has mandated the use of masks as non-optional. The inspectors' frequent areas where they believe crowding may occur to ensure the enforcement of mask-wearing. HO Kuteyi shared they visited a residence where over 100 individuals were gathered. Once they arrived full cooperation ensued and the crowd minimized to a group of approximately 30 individuals. HO Kuteyi noted the activity appeared to occur after a funeral and he did not want to disrupt their time of mourning, however; the space occupied was not adequate to adhere to social distancing.

Bodegas

HO Kuteyi shared the Environmental Team is still following-up with the local bodegas. Due to the rise in COVID-19 numbers, the inspection team hasn't had enough time to focus on monitoring. The Environmental Team is cognizant of the need to monitor the bodegas and will continue to ensure the safety of staff and residents who frequent those locales.

Inspection Updates

Vice-President Henry asked about our efforts to monitor retail establishments and regular inspections. HO Kuteyi shared the Environmental team has caught up with their inspections from January to the present. We are also on track with our complaints. They just need to step up efforts to enforce the Executive Order, as the utilization of masks, social distancing, and other regulations are of extreme importance. Vice President Henry inquired about the status of our communicable disease reporting in the CDRSS. HO Kuteyi stated we are not overlooking those cases and are managing those in addition to the COVID cases.

Ms. Iman Johnson Updates:

The Nature Conservancy & Rutgers School of Public Health

Ms. Iman stated two contacts from the Conservancy were to reach out to BOH members to gain their participation in the program. The BOH shared they have all been contacted. Ms. Iman stated Najah, of the Conservancy will be conducting the interviews. President Harris asked if Ms. Iman was privy to any of the questions. Ms. Iman shared they are interested in people's general experiences with COVID-19. They will be asking questions about people's living, health, and working situations and how they have been impacted by COVID-19. Because they are taking a qualitative approach, the information will be largely guided by whatever information you share. This could relate to a loved one experiencing COVID, a loss of employment, etc.

The Conservancy is looking for how COVID has affected the populace in its entirety. Ms. Iman shared the purpose of this is to generate various people's stories. Particularly when people think about the urban center for NJ they think about Newark, but the surrounding municipalities have also had these similar experiences. It is very important to tell those stories as well and these stories will be used to draft policy at the various levels and media messaging surrounding COVID. Ms. Iman thanked the BOH for their willingness to participate.



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President Harris remarked she is looking forward to seeing the policies that will come of this experience.

Open Discussion:

President Harris shared she witnessed the long lines while testing was being conducted near the Turtleback Zoo, and noted her satisfaction with individuals getting tested and recognizing the seriousness of the virus.

Trustee Corbitt shared her experience with a retail store not adhering to social distancing and inquired whether the Environmental Team monitors social distancing throughout the City. HO Kuteyi stated they will visit the establishment the next day to ensure they are following the guidelines for social distancing. HO Kuteyi revealed that many of the patrons enter the shop from the back entrance which is not visible from the main entrance on Central Avenue.

Trustee Corbitt also expressed businesses should be penalized if they do not comply with the safety guidelines. Trustee Corbitt shared Cuban Pete's of Montclair was shut down after violating the Municipalities regulation several times. They even broadcast the shutdown on the news as an example to other businesses. Dr. Griffith shared the City has also shut down businesses that continually refuse to comply. We are also partnering with the EOPD to create a larger task force to encourage compliance. Governor Murphy has allowed the Municipalities to create restrictions that don't supersede what the State imposed but act as a supplement to those guidelines. We are trying to give the residents and businesses a chance to comply because shutting down created a significant economic impact, but we want to be responsive while protecting public health.

President Harris remarked the Town Hall and ward meetings have been instrumental in terms of providing information regarding protocols and asked what more can be done to impress upon people the importance of adhering to the restrictions and guidelines which serve their own best interest. Dr. Griffith stated we are trying to urge residents to do what they know to do. Dr. Griffith shared we are trying to find creative ways to share the information apart from the Town Hall, such as door tags for dissemination by Code Enforcement and Inspectors who go out in the field. Ms. Iman and she are working on finalizing content relating to what individuals should be doing when observing the Holidays.

Dr. Griffith remarked the Mayor stated appropriately during the Town Hall, "Sometimes legislation and government have to step in to protect individuals that aren't disciplined enough to protect themselves." We have begun the process of drafting legislation related to COVID-19 and will likely have to implement such if individuals cannot manage mask-wearing and other restrictions to force compliance for the greater good. Dr. Griffith concurred with President Harris, all information and safety precautions regarding COVID-19 are being disseminated broadly and if anyone is not adhering to the policies they are doing so because they want to. Members of the BOH expressed an understanding for having personal freedoms, yet, individuals should be respectful of others by following COVID-19 protocols.



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Councilman Leneus asked if the Executive Order applies to larger supermarkets regarding the capacity of individuals allowed in the store at one time. Dr. Griffith stated the limited capacity does apply to the supermarkets. Dr. Griffith stated inspectors noticed stores are no longer counting the number of people who are allowed in at one time. It was shared the Health Department is working with EOPD to begin enforcing the limited capacity guidelines. Vice-President Henry asked if we would return to having special shopping hours for Senior & disabled residents. Dr. Griffith shared that the number of cases has tripled to over 300 new cases since September, which would give cause to creating special shopping hours for those that are most vulnerable. During the first wave of the pandemic, the State communicated the need for special shopping hours for the vulnerable. At this point, we would have to work with the surrounding Municipalities if we are responsible for putting those restrictions in place.

President Harris asked how do we enforce these measures and remarked the larger stores can hire additional staff to monitor the number of individuals allowed inside, however; smaller stores may not have the resources to do so. President Harris noted we do not have the manpower to ensure these measures are enforced daily; short of shutting them down and letting them reopen. Dr. Griffith stated they are in discussion about this now. We have some businesses that are no longer regulating the number of patrons in a store at one time some stores have continued to enforce the capacity limitations and are pretty strict with their regulation. Dr. Griffith stated we have multiple departments that touch the establishments making it easier to strategize and coordinate efforts to increase the level of monitoring. Vice-President Henry noted that reducing the occupancy of establishments will be harder to do during the second wave because it will be harder for individuals to stand outside in the colder months. Dr. Griffith concurred but stated our focus has to be the enforcement of the regulations from the standpoint of public health. We understand the climate is changing but the businesses would need to make accommodations for comfort, while we focus on the regulation of capacity and social distancing guidelines.

Mayor Green expressed happiness to see that all were doing well and thanked the BOH and their daily efforts to promote health and keep everyone safe. Mayor Green commended Dr. Griffith and the Health Department staff for their efforts in guiding us through COVID-19. Mayor Green stated we have remarkable members on our board and welcomed Dr. Cook as another great addition to the BOH. Mayor Green extended the invitation to the BOH to participate in the Town Hall meetings and share their efforts and experiences. Trustee Corbitt commended Mayor Green for the united front being put forth by himself and the Mayors of Newark, Irvington, and Orange. President Harris stated they truly appreciate his leadership for this City and stated she has not seen this kind of leadership in any Municipality ever.

Trustee Corbitt expressed concern over the students and staff of the EO School District being required to commence in-person learning in January. Trustee Corbitt cited issues such as a lack of proper ventilation throughout the buildings, a rise in the number of individuals



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contracting COVID, and existing sanitation protocols making it seem as disadvantageous to resume in-person learning while noting adult staff should be protected as well.

Dr. Griffith shared the communication with the school district is ongoing because as the numbers change within the community we are also communicating with the district. Everything they reported relating to contact tracing and seeking our input occurred because we are responsible for everything that takes place in the City but our focus is risk mitigation and reducing risk. So, having all students remain home and assigned to a virtual learning schedule has greatly reduced the risk of spread within the building. To her understanding based on the strategies in place, the schools are operating at a limited capacity and there are much fewer teachers within the building. Additionally, without the children there the teachers are able to social distance themselves.

Dr. Griffith expressed the number of children contracting COVID-19 has increased during the second wave. This is driving the support for children to remain home at this time. It is not indicative of the district's prioritization of children's lives over the adult staff. Dr. Griffith expressed there is a community spread everywhere we go even outside of East Orange. It is inevitable that there would be positive COVID cases even amongst the school district staff, as this is happening state-wide.

President Harris asked HO Kuteyi what specific instructions were provided to the school district's maintenance crew. Dr. Griffith shared the CDC guidelines for deep cleaning, contact tracing, and sanitation are being followed and provided to the school district. Dr. Griffith shared if the numbers shift in a manner that it would be advantageous to close completely, the numerous entities such as the State and Health Department who are making these decisions collaboratively would make that call. Trustee Phillips shared that she believes it is imperative both the special education and general populations of students receive as much in-person learning as possible. Trustee Phillips stated virtual learning is not an optimal long-term solution. She noted that parents, children, and staff are experiencing stress and frustration with the virtual learning format. Trustee Phillips also noted she purchases her own PPE to ensure she is protected when coming in contact with others in the school buildings. Trustee Cook concurred, stating less than 1% of dentists have contracted COVID nationwide, which she contributes to having proper PPE. Trustee Phillips mentioned another school district that allows students to attend on flex schedules and expressed hope that we may be able to implement a similar system that is conducive to both parents and staff.

President Harris thanked both Trustees Corbitt and Phillips for providing the often-unheard perspective of the teachers and school staff. President Harris stated we will eventually overcome COVID-19.

City of East Orange

NEW JERSEY



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At the conclusion of Board business, President Harris adjourned the meeting at 6:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jo-Ann Mills
Board Clerk