

**BOARD OF HEALTH
MINUTES
May 19, 2020**

The regular monthly meeting of the Board of Health of the Township of Mahwah was held via Zoom video conference. The meeting was called to order at 7:32 PM by Board of Health President, George Cimis.

The Opening Statement was read according to the Sunshine Law and was followed by Roll Call:

PRESENT: Mr. Cimis
Dr. DeMaria (7:36 pm)
Mrs. DeSilva
Ms. Esty
Mr. Harris
Mr. LoFaso
Mr. Matysiak

PROFESSIONALS: Mrs. Musella, Health Officer
Mr. Jeffrey Mason, Esq.
Mrs. Homler, REHS
Mr. Maas, REHS
Mr. Ervin, Council Liaison
Mrs. Campbell, Administrative Secretary
Mrs. Hagan, Recording Secretary

APPROVAL OF MARCH 2020 MEETING MINUTES

Moved by Mrs. DeSilva and, seconded by Mr. Matysiak and, unanimously agreed to by all present to approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 2020.

APPROVAL OF MARCH/APRIL 2020 HEALTH ACTIVITIES REPORTS

Moved by Mr. Harris and, seconded by Mrs. DeSilva to approve the Health Activities Report for March/April 2020.

Mrs. DeSilva queried payment of boarding fees for the care of Potentially Dangerous Dog, Bella. Per Mrs. Homler, no payment had been received by Tyco for the care of this animal.

The Court has ordered the Township to seek payment from Bella's owner, Ms. Hulse, and the Township would then reimburse Tyco. The total bill for Bella's care exceeded \$9,000.

Mr. Mason will reach out to the Prosecutor and the Judge to suggest that litigants in these cases be required to post bond for costs associated with impounded animals.

Mr. LoFaso queried the opening of public recreational bathing facilities for the 2020 Summer season. Mr. Maas informed the Board that a decision on this will be forthcoming from the Office of the Governor. At that time, our office will proceed accordingly in notifying all operators of public bathing facilities.

Mr. LoFaso stated that he is aware that both Indian Field and Indian Hollow have decided not to open their pools to swimming. Mrs. Homler stated that Homewood Suites has chosen this course of action as well.

Mrs. Homler explained that prior to any facility opening, a mitigation plan must be presented to and approved by the Local Health Department. An acceptable electrical inspection must also be performed, a satisfactory water report received, and the license application and fee must be submitted.

Mr. Cimis queried any updates regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Mrs. Musella relayed the following information:

- As a first step towards reopening, the State Commissioner of Health wishes to expand testing capabilities to 25,000/day reaching approximately 600,000 individuals by the end of June.
- Pharmacists are now permitted to perform the nasal swab test.
- Increased monies have been made available to enable hiring of up to 5,000 contact tracers. These contact tracers will be using a system identified as CommCare which will feed directly into CDRSS (NJ's Communicable Disease Reporting & Surveillance System.)
- The State is researching locations where individuals can go to quarantine and isolate if they do not have a place of their own or are unable to do so at home.

Mr. Matysiak queried how these initiatives will be funded. Mrs. Musella has heard discussion of \$5 million dollars being distributed amongst local health departments. There are also monies available from FEMA for which the Office of Emergency Management would apply. It was not made clear by the Commissioner exactly whom would be responsible for payment of these initiatives.

Mr. Matysiak wished further clarification on contact tracing. Mrs. Musella and the staff at Northwest Bergen Regional Health Commission have investigated numerous positive COVID-19 cases and find the task extremely challenging. It has proven to be difficult to obtain the

necessary cooperation from exposed and/or potentially exposed individuals. She worries that potential contacts will be even less likely to provide information to an unknown entity, one not affiliated with their local government or an established medical facility. Mrs. Musella then confirmed that Mahwah's public health nurse, Joanne Wendolowski, has performed the contact tracing for Mahwah.

Mr. Mason requested data regarding the number of positive COVID cases in Mahwah. As of this date, 280 confirmed cases have been reported with 22 expirations. Mr. Mason wished more information regarding the demographics of these cases. Being unsure whether reporting gender, age, locations of outbreaks, etc. would be considered a violation of HIPPA laws, Mrs. Musella was reluctant to release such information at this time. She did confirm that both long-term care facilities located in Mahwah have active outbreaks and are being monitored accordingly.

Mrs. Campbell informed the Board that our local office used to report communicable diseases within the Township as part of the monthly Health Activities Report. When the Township first began contracting with HARP for public health nursing services in 2006, Mrs. Wendolowski informed her that we should not be reporting any incidence of disease when less than five cases presented. This was to ensure the privacy of the individuals who had been reported in CDRSS. Mrs. Campbell suggested that perhaps this was a Hackensack Hospital directive, and that nurses employed by a Local Health Department were not operating under the same mandate.

Mrs. Musella noted that the State has put specific protocols in place for the reporting of communicable diseases at Long-Term Care facilities. There is a designated portal to which information is recorded regarding outbreaks, number of residents and staff infected, symptoms, cohorting procedures, etc.

Mr. Mason would be amenable to speaking directly with Mrs. Wendolowski to determine where the outbreaks are located, risks associated with the outbreaks, preventative measures that can be taken, etc. This information would give the Board better clarification on protocol that may be helpful in the future.

Having a background in epidemiology, Mr. Cimis believes the most significant piece of data to be collected is the number of positive cases that required hospitalization. Expanded testing may indicate that many more people have been exposed yet not developed any remarkable symptoms. He further queried the number of people who have recovered from an infection. This data allows for responsible decisions to be made regarding lifting and/or altering the current restrictions that are in place.

According to Mrs. Musella, questions regarding hospitalizations and the need for a respirator/ventilator are addressed in the contact tracing interview.

Mrs. Campbell reported that per our public health nurse, the category of "Recovered" was removed from the reporting system. Individuals who had reported being well at the time of their interview later fell ill. Mrs. Musella stated that the official definition for Recovered is when a return to the patients' baseline state of health for a prolonged period of time is reported. There is no way to know that has happened without long term follow up.

Mr. Matysiak commented that in the early stages of the pandemic, only the sickest patients admitted to the hospital were being tested. Many individuals were sent home if they did not exhibit all of the known indicators of the virus. It is conceivable that many more people were infected than has been reported. With the expansion of antibody testing, the numbers are expected to rise exponentially. Opening public places and loosening restrictions without more reliable data could have a detrimental effect on the community as a whole.

Mrs. Musella commented that the State Health Department does not want extensive antibody testing routinely performed to diagnose past infection. A preponderance of false negatives, inconsistent quality control between labs and the failure to provide reliable scientific information does not render this testing valuable at the current time. Testing positive for the antibody may encourage individuals to believe they now carry an immunity to the illness, and not enough information about the disease is available to make such a prediction.

Mr. Cimis believes that precisely because so little is known about the virus, more antibody testing should be encouraged. This data will help should a predicted "second wave" hit. While in agreement with Mr. Cimis, Mrs. Musella explained why this was a resource allocation issue; that public health has never received sufficient funding. State and Local Health Departments have been establishing guidelines for public health threats on an as-needed basis. Clear protocols for handling a pandemic of this magnitude were not in place.

There being no further comments or discussion, the Health Activities Report for March/April 2020 was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF HEALTH OFFICER'S REPORT FOR MARCH / APRIL 2020

Moved by Mr. Matysiak and, seconded by Dr. DeMaria and, unanimously agreed by all present to approve the Health Officer's Reports for March 2020 and April 2020.

BILLS

Moved by Mrs. DeSilva, seconded by Mr. Harris, and unanimously agreed to by all present to approve the bills for March/April 2020.

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

No Reports to present.

REPORT OF ATTORNEY

Mr. Mason had no report per se, but wished to thank the Health Officer, the staff at NWRHC and the Mahwah staff for the long hours and time spent in handling this unprecedented health crisis.

CORRESPONDENCE

5/13/2020 From: Commissioners of NWRHC To: Mahwah Board of Health

Mrs. Campbell presented a letter from Northwest Bergen Regional Health Commission announcing the pending retirement of Health Officer, Angela Musella, on July 1, 2020. NWRHC is actively seeking her replacement and assures that all Health Officer services will continue through the term of our contract. The Members expressed their disappointment, but thanked Mrs. Musella for her 11 years of service and wished her well as she moves on to the next chapter.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Cimis took this opportunity to introduce the newest member of the Board of Health, Patricia Etsy. The members welcomed Ms. Etsy and look forward to meeting her in person when regular meetings resume. Due to audio difficulties, Ms. Etsy will take the Oath of Allegiance at a later date.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public present.

A motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:43 pm was made by Mr. Matysiak and, seconded by Mrs. DeSilva and, unanimously agreed to by all present.

The next meeting is scheduled for June 9, 2020, at 7:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathryn Hagan
Recording Secretary