

# HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

February 21, 2023 1:00pm

## **Members Present**

Mr. James McCoy  
Dr. Leslie Hutchins  
Mr. Travis Craver  
Mr. Randy Williams  
Dr. Paige Lemasters

## **Staff Present**

Ms. Annette Lerma  
Dr. Gary Goodnight  
Ms. Lexi Ritchie  
Ms. Cari Waller  
Ms. Melissa Holland  
Mr. Stanley Smith, City Attorney

## **CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. James McCoy called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. and Mrs. Kara Pitney recorded the minutes. A quorum of members was present, and the meeting proceeded.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. McCoy asked the board to review the minutes from the last meeting on November 15, 2022 and asked for a motion to approve the minutes as written. Mr. McCoy made the motion and Mr. Craver seconded. Motion passed unanimously and minutes were approved.

**The Board approved the minutes.**

## **AGENDA ITEMS & PUBLIC HEARINGS**

1. Mr. McCoy presented that there are two open positions for the board of health: dental and food industry.
  - 1.1. The dental nomination is Dr. Garret Turner. A vote across the board was held and passed. His name will be brought forward to the Mayor for approval.
  - 1.2. The food industry nomination was suggested to be Michelle McAlister who is currently a dietitian. This is a potential nomination, but the group wanted to review and look into the food industry representative a bit further.
  - 1.3. The board of health suggested the following ideas for looking into other food industry nominations: Cyprus Street, Perinis, and a restaurant association.

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- 1.4. Ms. Annette Lerma added once the board of health has looked into the matter to send any nominations to her or board chair, James McCoy.
2. Dr. Gary Goodnight updated the board on MERCY and the Refugee programs at the Health Department.
  - 2.1. Dr. Goodnight said that the MERCY clinic has been doing very well overall. Dr. Goodnight then expressed that he does believe with the ending of the Covid emergency act that the clinic will be seeing an uptake of patients while also losing some due to the medicaid programs expiring in the near future. Dr. Goodnight shared that the only way to continue onto the program is to reapply, whereas throughout the public health emergency declaration, there was no expiration date. No one was kicked off of Medicaid or SNAP. This is expiring March 31, 2023.
  - 2.2. Dr. Goodnight presented on the Health Department's Refugee program. He started by explaining that the department does a lot of physicals. Dr. Goodnight elaborated, explaining that he is the local civil surgeon. Dr. Phillip, the contractual physician on-site, performs the I693 physicals and they are reviewed and signed by Dr. Goodnight. Dr. Goodnight continued his presentation, mentioning that it is important to note that the individuals participating in the refugee program are vetted through the International Rescue Committee and come through the Office of Refugee and Resettlement at the federal level. Which means that most of these individuals have had a physical and been screened at least once before coming to the Health Department for their intake physical. The screenings done at the health department helps identify any diseases, provides treatments for parasites, and makes sure there is no Tuberculosis exposure. These screenings can sometimes lead to chest XRays. If the patients do have an infectious disease, then they are treated or referred to a local provider. We have an infectious disease doctor on contract, Dr. Daniel Canario.
  - 2.3. Dr. Lelsie Hutchins proceeds to ask, are we screening for Sickle Cell? In which, Cari Waller responded that we do, and that there are specific countries of origin at greater risk. Most of the Sickle Cell patients who arrive typically have medical assistance upon entry. So with Sickle Cell, the health department only has 48 hours to get their initial labs done. If the health department is unable to get to them right away, they are sent to the ER for immediate labs. There are barriers that can prevent initiating treatment of the disease, such as language barriers and some children don't have care upon arrival.

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- 2.4. Dr. Goodnight explained that although there are language barriers, we have several in-house nurses who speak a variety of languages to help with translations, and on top of that, we also have an online translator we can reach out to if necessary. In addition to translation, one of the big areas the health department covers is the screening for mental health and substance abuse, making sure these necessary questions are covered.
3. Ms. Annette Lerma Updates the Board of Health on the Health Department's Infrastructure grant.
  - 3.1. Ms. Lerma presents that during covid there was a lot of grant money available, but now as we are transitioning out of the pandemic, there is less grant money available.
  - 3.2. Ms. Lerma explains that originally the health department had a grant called the workforce grant, which was a pretty sizable grant, almost \$2 million dollars which was combined with the health disparities grant. The planning then began to focus on staff retention, how was the health department going to keep the staff that was hired during the height of covid.
  - 3.3. A new grant was presented called the infrastructure grant, which is less money (\$1.965 million over a five year period) than the workforce grant but is dedicated to maintaining and growing the department's infrastructure. The money is for a 5 year period, which is \$393,000 per year. There are narrow restrictions on how this money can be used, it is limited to staff, infrastructure planning, systems, data collection, and things of that nature. The biggest focus of this grant will go towards covering staff. The health department is going to be requesting full time positions for their contractual staff members, which requires city council approval.
  - 3.4. Ms. Lerma shares that the new positions to be added are an accountant, media specialist, lab tech support, PHEP assistant, computer technician, and training specialist. The rest of the funds will be dedicated to professional training and services. There are a lot of new staff who don't have any training in public health, so we are working hard to give all staff a foundation in public health..
  - 3.5. Ms. Lerma asks the board if they would support this recommendation to the city council by way of a vote. The vote is unanimous that they agree and support these transitions and new added positions.
4. Ms. Lerma announces that there are a large number of bills at the legislative level that support anti-vaccination. One of the most concerning bills is taking away the decision of what vaccines children need in school from the commissioner of health and placing it with lawmakers. It is a

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danger that opens the door to it being a political decision. Ms. Lerma encourages others to speak on behalf of public health, letting others know the dangers of this bill.

- 4.1. Ms. Lerma gave a quick update, explaining that public health is funded under article 2 and there will be DSHS personnel at these hearings. The main focus of new public health funding is to maintain staff, while current grants have remained stagnant over the course of many years which leads to underfunding with the continued inflation of supplies and increase in staff salaries..
5. Ms. Lexi Ritchie presented information related to her position as the media specialist. It is her goal through marketing to improve awareness of the public health district, as well as the health and knowledge for those in Taylor County while building trust as misinformation is debunked/corrected. There is a large focus on increasing the public's trust with the health department as a whole.
  - 5.1. Ms. Ritchie explains that the health department's social media currently has 5.94k followers, and the goal is to increase the number of followers to 6,300 by the beginning of April, which is a %5 increase. Between April and August the goal is to increase 10% in the number of followers.
  - 5.2. Ms. Ritchie explains that the advertising approach for the long term goals is to focus on more direct advertising to get information out to the public. This includes, using our grants, working with partners (colleges, local businesses) to help with education, working with radio providers to help spread important and useful information, and adding to the public health website an area to request a presentation from the public health department. There will also be a Q&A video posted monthly addressing frequently asked medical questions. Councilman Craver expressed his interest in this topic and suggested a college ambassador program. Ms. Ritchie said she would look into this.

## ADJOURNMENT

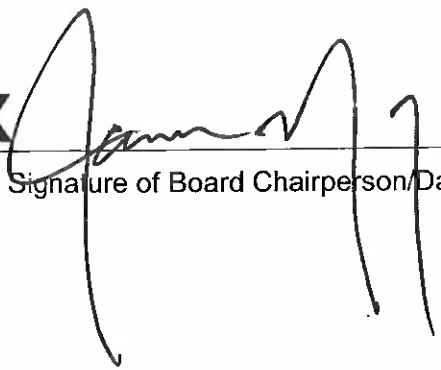
Chairman McCoy had to depart the meeting early and Commissioner Randy Williams adjourned the meeting at 2:13 p.m. The next Board of Health meeting will be May 16, 2023, at 1:00 p.m.

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**X**

Signature of Board Chairperson/Date

A handwritten signature in black ink, written over a horizontal line. The signature is cursive and appears to be 'James M. [unclear]'. The line extends to the right of the signature.