



## **MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE BOSTON BOARD OF HEALTH**

A meeting of the Boston Board of Health (Board) was held on Wednesday, June 2, 2021 by remote participation pursuant to Governor Charles D. Baker's Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, s. 20.

### **Board Members Present**

Manny Lopes, Chair, Rebecca Gutman, Phillomin Laptiste, Kate Walsh, Gualde Valdez, Dr. Jennifer Childs-Roshak, John Fernandez

### **Also Present**

PJ McCann, Rita Nieves, Caitlin McLaughlin, Tim Harrington, Margaret Reid, Gerry Thomas, Grace Connolly, Katia Duarte, Chief Marty Martinez, Taylor Jolly, Sheila Lee, Debra Paul, Stacey Kokaram, Steve Simmons, Britt Frederick, Grace Connolly, Lindsay Arnold, Triniese Polk, Helen Ayanian, Leon Bethune, Tierney Flaherty, Marlen Cale, Alexandra Gugliuzza, Janine Barros, Becky Cruz Crosson, Cynthia Hamwey, David Susich, Laura Segal Anne McHugh, Sarimer Sanchez, Nazia Ashraful, Christy Moulin, Brianne Gilkes, Abeer Khatana, Erin Serino, Jannet Sanchez, Neel Batra.

### **Proceedings**

#### **Chairperson's Comments**

Chairperson Lopes: Hello and welcome, everyone, to the June Board of Health Meeting. Thank you everyone for joining, especially our Board members and members of the public.

This meeting is being conducted by remote participation as authorized by the Governor's Emergency Order. In keeping with our usual practice, members of the public and BPHC staff will be allowed to observe the proceedings and we will use the moderating features on the Zoom application to keep all on mute other than Board members and BPHC presenters and others as needed.

Since we are deliberating remotely, any votes will be taken by a roll call of the members.

I have one change to the agenda. We will postpone the report from the Executive Director Search Committee. Thank you for your patience.

### **Acceptance and Approval of March 3, 2021 Minutes**

The first order of business for the Board will be the acceptance and approval of the meeting minutes from March 3<sup>rd</sup>. A motion was made Ms. Walsh, seconded by Mr. Valdez, and approved unanimously by roll call to approve the meeting minutes.

**Executive Office Report**  
**Rita Nieves, Interim Executive Director**

Ms. Nieves: I will now turn it over to Rita Nieves for her Executive Office Report.

Ms. Nieves: Thank you, Manny. I know we have a busy and exciting agenda today, so I'll make a few but important updates. As of May 29<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted in the City of Boston and across Massachusetts. This comes after several weeks of very encouraging vaccination and our core COVID-19 metrics which Dr. Lo and Stacey Kokaram will share later. This means that city buildings will also be reopening, and our staff will be returning to our office spaces on a hybrid model starting June 7<sup>th</sup> and all employees will be required to report in person starting July 12<sup>th</sup>.

Our Administration and Finance Departments as well as our Workplace Safety Committee are working diligently to ensure safety for all staff as we move toward this date.

Last Thursday, May 26<sup>th</sup>, The City Council's Ways & Means Committee held its annual hearing on the budget of BPHC, EMS and Recovery Services. Overall, Councilors had positive reactions to the presentation and written question responses, and some raised concerns related to Mass/Cass. Key themes for questions were Mass/Cass issues, the new alternate response model pilot, the importance of involving community leaders and organizers in public health efforts, and youth homelessness. Several Councilors commended BPHC and EMS on the work done during the pandemic. I'd like to extend a big thank you to Tierney Flaherty and Abeer Khatana in Intergovernmental Relations and Grace Connelly and the finance team for their hard work in preparing all of the materials to make this a successful hearing.

I'm excited to provide some updates related to federal funding. This week we received notice of award for The Health Disparities Among Populations at High Risk and Underserved project. This is a CDC funded project for \$5.65 million-dollars over 24-months, starting 7/1/2021. Boston's project will address CoVID-19 and the effects on social determinants of health including mental health and racism, with a focus on historically marginalized populations which have been inequitably impacted by CoVID-19 and other health and economic conditions. Boston's project will also address BPHC's capacity to prepare for the public health workforce of the future and ensure that workforce is racially and ethnically representative. BPHC project priorities include: increase community capacity to respond and to address COVID-19 and the social and economic effects and promote vaccination; diversify and prepare the public health workforce; and improve data accessibility for use in planning and decision-making among multiple sectors including community.

Last week, Mayor Janey announced a fifty-million-dollar emergency relief plan using funding from the Biden Administration's American Rescue Plan. Ten million dollars are being prioritized for the public health response. Our priorities for funding included continued vaccination efforts, community ambassadors, testing, PPE and staffing support. Our request also addresses the continued and exacerbated issues due to COVID-19 including

the current HIV epidemic among people who inject drugs as well as supports for mental and behavioral health. This is an exciting opportunity and we will keep the Board updated as this process moves forward. Thank you all for all of your continued support as we work on navigating both COVID-19 response and recovery as well as the ongoing vaccination.

Thank you, that's all for the Executive Office Update, I'll turn it back over to you Manny.

Lopes: Thank you, Rita. Now we'll have a budget presentation for the FY22 budget from Grace Connolly.

**FY22 Budget Presentation and Vote**  
**Grace Connolly, Director of Administration and Finance**

Ms. Connolly delivered the posted presentation. She noted that the good news is that the budget remain unchanged from the initial presentation in March, and there were no cuts. All in all a very strong budget with support from the federal government and City Hall, which has been incredibly supportive of all our efforts.

Mr. Valdez asked about the approval process for the budget moving forward. Connolly: The full budget is with the full counsel and they will vote on it, though our role is complete at this point.

Ms. Walsh asked if the lack of cuts was because of federal funding, and whether we will we be looking at a different budget without it in the future. Ms. Connolly said it is hard to say, though the federal rescue act money is definitely helping to avoid cuts.

Mr. Fernandez asked about warning signs for next year's budget. Ms. Connolly said she did not expect that because the Rescue Act funding will hopefully last through the economic recovery.

Mr. Lopes asked about the spend period. Connolly confirmed that the spend period is through December 31, 2024. Mr. Lopes asked if the money was coming to the City rather than through the State. Ms. Connolly confirmed.

Hearing no additional questions, I will take a motion to approve the FY2022 Boston Public Health Commission Budget. A motion was made by Mr. Fernandez, seconded by Childs-Roshak and approved unanimously by role call.

Our next presentation is an update on COVID-19 and Vaccination efforts. Dr. Lo and Stacey, the floor is yours.

**COVID-19 and Vaccination Update**  
**Stacey Kokaram, Director of the Office of Public Health Preparedness**  
**Dr. Jennifer Lo, Medical Director**

Ms. Kokaram and Dr. Lo presented the posted presentation.

Mr. Lopes asked about the peak positive test rate in East Boston. Ms. Kokaram said she did not have the numbers on hand, but it was consistently the highest for a long period of time.

Ms. Walsh said that early in the pandemic, we were also testing largely people that we thought had it, which may be reflected in the positivity rates.

Mr. Lopes asked for additional detail about the rates in Mattapan. Mr. Valdez noted that the challenge remains with vaccine hesitancy and highlighted work with BPHC, the State, and a consultant. We're running ads on ethnic radio, looking at newspaper and even cable. We have four vaccination sites with walk-in service as well as faith-based vaccination sites. We're giving it all we've got. A question is whether the Commission has considered incentives?

Dr. Lo said we've been doing some research and asked Margaret Reid, Interim Chief of Staff for an update. She said: we are seeing that incentives are seeing success in other places. We received some guidance to address some of our concerns about using federal funding for incentives. A lot of what is happening elsewhere is being funded through public-private partnerships, and there may be some opportunity for that. We welcome thoughts about what people value in different communities, and welcome additional conversations.

Ms. Walsh said that the State is having a conversation about using the Lottery as a vehicle.

Ms. Gutman asked about data by occupation with respect to take-up rate and raised the idea of vaccination clinics at worksites, particularly in the hardest-hit communities.

Dr. Lo said that employment data is not captured in the state MIIS data system. Some may be captured through other avenues and we're willing to reach out to others. The State has launched a program where an employer with a certain number of employees can request a vaccination at their worksite. We in general welcome requests from anyone and everyone, so definitely also reach out to us about vaccination clinics.

Dr. Gutman referenced the vaccine ambassador idea, and suggested that there may be a role that employees can play in influencing each other, in employment and church settings, for example.

Ms. Nieves said that is a good idea, and we've been doing some work with influencers. We will definitely take this idea under advisement as we deploy our ambassadors.

Ms. Walsh said that we have an agency that's helping us to reach specific communities, with things like what you'd see in a political campaign. A challenge is that a successful mobile site does 60 vaccinations in a day and a successful traditional site does 1,000. A lot of it is patience.

Mr. Valdez said when you look at the numbers, and the correlation with the black population and the neighborhoods. So our approach needs to be by location but also by ethnicity.

Mr. Lopes said that the Haitian population has one of the greatest degrees of hesitancy. Is it possible to communicate within the home country, the consulates, and other groups that have connections back in these home countries to get accurate information out?

Ms. Laptiste said that there is some uneasiness about incentives and how it relates to financial incentives. Effort and conversation with influencers can go a long way.

Dr. Lo said that with respect to the Haitian community, we are working with Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement, and learning that we need to work within different segments of communities. We also had information sessions in Vietnamese, Cape Verdean, and other languages, and we know those were shared back to home countries.

At approximately 5:30, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn by roll call, moved by Ms. Gutman and approved unanimously.

/s/PJ McCann  
Deputy General Counsel