

**MONTVILLE TOWNSHIP BOARD OF HEALTH
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
December 14, 2020 at 7:30pm**

Members Present

Mr. Charles Perry
Dr. Arnold Pallay
Ms. Betty Bowers
Dr. Steven Marcus
Dr. Sunil Shah

Members Absent:

Ms. Brielle Cook
Dr. Sachin Shah

Others Present:

Aimee Puluso, Health Officer
Amanda Rizzo, BOH Secretary
David Pennella, BOH Attorney
Victor Canning, Township Administrator
June Hercek, Asst. Twp. Administrator
Dr. Matthew Kayne, Twp. Committee Member
Sarah Foye, Member of Public
Carla Franzin, Member of Public
Steven Tuckman, Member of Public

Call to Order and Roll Call

With a quorum present, Mr. Charles Perry called the meeting to order at 7:37 p.m., and took a roll call of members present.

As required by the Open Public Meetings Act (a.k.a. "Sunshine Law"), adequate notice of this meeting was provided. The notice specified the meeting was to be held at 7:30 p.m. in the Health Department at the Montville Township Municipal Building, 195 Changebridge Road. Legal notice of this meeting emailed to The Daily Record Newspaper, posted on the public bulletin board in the lobby of the Municipal Building, posted with the agenda on the Montville Township website at www.montvillenj.org, filed with the Montville Township Clerk.

Approval of Minutes

MOTION: A motion was made by Dr. Pallay, to approve the minutes of the Board of Health meeting held on November 16, 2020. Seconded by Dr. Sunil Shah. Perry, Pallay, Bowers, Shah, one abstention, Marcus.

Public Comments

MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Perry, to open the meeting to public comments, from any citizen wishing to speak before the Montville Township Board of Health on items on the agenda, and items not on the agenda. Seconded by Dr. Pallay, all in favor.

Public Comments: None.

MOTION: A motion was made by Dr. Sunil Shah to close the meeting to public comments from any citizen. Seconded by Dr. Pallay, all in favor.

Unfinished Business

None.

Reports

Health Officer Aimee Puluso presented, and the Board reviewed, the Health Department's Monthly Activity Reports for November 2020, COVID-19 Summary as of December 4, 2020 and Health Officer's Epidemiologic study of COVID-19 cases.

Discussion – COVID Summary Report

Dr. Pallay asked about the Vital Statistic numbers on the December 2020 report: are the deaths that are listed and recorded as Montville residents the same as the total number of deaths, and please verify whether or not the Board is given the causes of death. Ms. Puluso stated that yes, the Registrar runs a report each month from EDRS (NJ State Electronic Death Report System), 7 days past the end of each month. This report provides the total number of deaths that occur in the Township, and the total number of residents who die, as we wait seven days after each month end which gives us those two figures provided with no additional information. Dr. Pallay asked if it was safe to say that all deaths, COVID-19 related and not, are included in these numbers. Ms. Puluso responded that was the case.

Dr. Sunil Shah asked if it was possible to find out the total number of deaths for COVID-19 from the beginning of the pandemic. Ms. Puluso stated that as instructed previously by the State of New Jersey the Health Department is not allowed to release any information on specific causes of death, including COVID.

Dr. Pallay asked if the number of deaths to Montville residents includes just those who are registered and have an address in town, or a person passing away in the Township due to an accident, or both. Ms. Puluso stated that any death that occurs in Montville Township boundaries due to any cause is recorded in the total number of deaths that occur within the Township, and the deaths of Montville residents are the number of Montville residents who pass away regardless of where that death took place. Dr. Pallay asked if a resident has an address in Montville and they pass away in an accident in Montville Township, are they counted more than once? Ms. Puluso stated that yes, there is certainly some overlap when it comes to the totals in numbers of persons who passed away within the Township boundaries, and Montville residents who passed away within the Township boundaries.

Dr. Pallay asked are these death numbers higher than normal? Ms. Puluso referred to the table on page 5 on the most recent COVID Summary Report. Ms. Puluso noted in the month of April that there were many more deaths recorded compared to the same month in the previous 3 years, and compared to any other month within 2020, and as such, it is clearly an outlier in the data. Ms. Puluso further stated that so far, for November the numbers are a little higher than in previous years but nothing like what had been seen in the spring of this year.

Dr. Marcus stated that he took the liberty of doing some statistics for Dr. Pallay, and that the last three years the average number of deaths was a 146 per year. This year there were 172 deaths by the end of

November, and that is a very significant increase for total number of deaths. Dr. Marcus stated they are still relatively low numbers but that is about a 20% increase without the month of December.

Dr. Marcus noted that on the COVID Summary Report, the number of persons who were hospitalized was included, which he thought was unusual since the Health Department is prohibited from releasing the number of deaths. Ms. Puluso said that as the number of hospitalizations was not a vital statistic (as are births, marriages, and deaths) and sharing hospitalization data in this case is not prohibited.

Dr. Marcus asked that if it was not too time consuming, could the Health Department compile a monthly report on hospitalizations, either retrospectively or going forward. Ms. Puluso indicated that would be a cumbersome task, but that general information on hospitalizations are included in the monthly COVID-19 Summary Reports.

Dr. Marcus asked Ms. Puluso if it would it be too cumbersome to change the age stratification that is reported since we are now being told that the middle school and high school are being closed to in school instruction due to excess number of cases in the schools. Dr. Marcus is less concerned regarding the younger children, since there much lower attack rates. Dr. Marcus suggested the age stratification be changed to ages 0-5, 5-10, and so on. Ms. Puluso indicated she could change the stratification to 0-10, 11 to 18 without too much difficulty for future COVID-19 Summary Reports.

Discussion – COVID Summary Report

Dr. Marcus asked about the status of the kennel that the department had received a complaint about and whether or not it had been closed. Ms. Puluso stated that the kennel remains open, but is prohibited from taking in any additional dogs to board from the public, and that the owner has a fair number of their own dogs which they are being allowed to keep there for the time being. Ms. Puluso further stated that the Health Department has been advised that the property is up for sale at this time, and there is a possibility that another kennel in town may purchase this property and improve it. Mr. Perry asked whether or not this same kennel had had problems in the past. Ms. Puluso stated that in this particular situation, the owner was called away from the property and the person who was left in charge was not fully aware of what needed to be done. The Health Inspector, Animal Control Officer and Humane Law Enforcement are all involved and are keeping a close eye on it. Ms. Puluso asked if there were any further questions.

Discussion – COVID Epidemiology Report

Dr. Pally stated that this was an excellent report, notwithstanding the small numbers. Dr. Pally requested that Ms. Puluso give an executive summary, and asked if anything in the data surprised her? Ms. Puluso provided a brief summary of the report, and stated that she did not see anything that really surprised her during her analysis; although she noted the very first month of the pandemic, there was a big difference in the percentage of cases within the three zip codes of the Township. Since then and as more cases are registered the difference in those percentages seem to be decreasing and leveling off toward the percentage of the population in those zip codes. Ms. Puluso further noted that this analysis is a representation only of those people who sought testing; there is no way of knowing how many people did not seek testing and how those cases may affect the data.

Dr. Pallay commented that on page 11, it was interesting that there is no real distinction in some of the data, for example, healthcare workers, all those workers have entirely different exposures, and it difficult to interpret, can't make much of it when it comes to data. Ms. Puluso stated it doesn't seem to have a correlation with the representation per zip code and the idea that perhaps that initial bump was due to more healthcare workers in that zip code, as it could be as simple as them being tested more often and identifying more cases that way. Ms. Puluso noted in the conclusion that there was not one factor that stood out as being responsible for the small difference in percentage of cases compared to percentage of population in each zip code. Mr. Perry stated that it goes to show how widespread the virus is and it is systemic. Ms. Puluso said there so are many factors that could be responsible, for example, it's possible that perhaps more persons in one area travel into and out of New York City regularly, or are more likely to take mass transit, or age distributions within certain areas, and that it might be a combination of factors.

Dr. Marcus thanked Ms. Puluso for this report and commented that what she is describing is a statistical concept of regression to the mean, the more times that you measure differences the more likely it regresses to the mean. There may be a statistical aberration which is what was hoped for from the very beginning. Dr. Marcus asked if in determinant and/or inconclusive tests are part of the total count of cases. Ms. Puluso stated that they are not, only positive cases are part of the total count.

Dr. Pallay wanted to confirm that Ms. Puluso authored the Epidemiology Report. Ms. Puluso confirmed that. Dr. Pallay asked if it had been placed on the Township website. Ms. Puluso stated that his has been placed on the Township's Board of Health page. Dr. Pallay asked if this should be presented as a product of the Board of Health or Health Department or jointly, as a means of disseminating information to the public. He stated that there has been some social media disinformation and this would certainly clear up any misgivings. Dr. Pallay asked Mr. Pennella if this is appropriate to publish more widely. Ms. Puluso stated that the report was commissioned by the Board of Health, and produced by the Health Department, and that the information is available for public view already so this should not be a problem. Mr. Pennella saw no issue with publishing the material and said that it is not inappropriate to have this posted to the website and/or social media. He noted that the public does have a right to asked questions. Whether or not it appropriate to answer a particular question, or if certain information is privileged, is up to the Board. Ms. Puluso added that perhaps an additional way to publicize the report more widely is to have the Board of Health liaison, Dr. Kayne, mention this report at the next regular public meeting of the Township Committee. Dr. Kayne responded that he does give Liasion Reports at the Township Committee meetings and he can mention the report specifically and certainly stress what Dr. Pallay has requested. Dr. Pallay, Mr. Perry, Dr. Shah commented and agreed that social media would not be appropriate medium for disseminating this information. Ms. Puluso stated that this could be a "News Item" on the Township's Board of Health page in lieu of social media.

MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Perry to post the Epidemiology Report on the Health Department COVID-19 page. Seconded by Dr. Pallay, all in favor.

New Business

Dr. Pallay requested that Ms. Puluso share information regarding vaccine dissemination. Ms. Puluso stated that the vaccine was currently on its way to New Jersey. The initial distribution will be in closed PODS (Point

of Distribution Clinics) to long-term care facilities, which will not be open to the general public. These facilities will be vaccinating both their residents and staff. For the rest of the population, there will be three vaccination phases. The first phase is Group 1A, which includes healthcare workers, hospitals, long-term care facilities, veteran homes, homecare workers, EMTs, urgent clinic workers, dialysis center workers, dental office workers, morticians, funeral homes, pharmacy workers, other non-hospital healthcare facilities, public health workers, group home workers, unpaid and paid healthcare workers, licensed and unlicensed healthcare workers, and other first responders such as police and firefighters. Phase 2 includes those at high risk of severe COVID illness, and those people over the age of 65. Phase 3 includes the general public. In Morris County, the vaccine will be distributed at a central “mega” site, run by the county in conjunction with Atlantic Health. At this time, local health departments are not offering the vaccine. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines requires special refrigeration of either 70 or 90 below zero, depending on the vaccine, and most health departments do not have those freezers. The vaccine comes packed in dry ice, and the specialty gloves to work with dry ice, as well as replacement dry ice pellets, are currently in short supply. There are also restrictions on how long the vaccine can be stored once the vial is opened. For the other sites besides the county, there will be a state online system where members of the public will pre-register for appointments. This website will be working in conjunction with NJ Immunization and Information Center. There will also be a call center for those who are not comfortable with online registration, or who do not have access to the internet. The local health departments will be assisting the county with support for the county vaccination site.

Ms. Bowers asked for clarification on whether or not all Montville Township employees would be vaccinated in the Phase 1. Ms. Puluso clarified that those receiving the immunization first would be those in the health department and other first responders such as police/fire/EMS. At some point, according to the phases set by the NJ Department of Health, the vaccine will be available to everyone, including other Montville Township employees.

Dr. Pallay added that while on telephone meetings with health commissioners he was advised that local doctors’ offices will be administering the vaccine once available. Dr. Pallay would like to stress how important it is to get vaccinated once this vaccine is available to all. Ms. Puluso suggested drafting a resolution.

MOTION: A motion was made by Dr. Pallay to draft a Resolution as follows: *“The Montville Board of Health strongly encourages its residents to receive the COVID vaccination when made available to them.”* Seconded by Mr. Perry, all in favor.

Adjournment

MOTION: *There being no further business to come before the Board, a motion was made by Mr. Perry, seconded by Dr. Pallay, all in favor, to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 8:36 p.m.*