

BERRIEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes
January 13, 2022

CHAIRMAN TO CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER:

Chairperson Elliott called the regular meeting to order at 8:35 A.M. in the Board of Commissioners' (BOC) room at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main Street, St. Joseph, Michigan.

ROLL CALL:

Chairperson Elliott instructed the Clerk to take a roll call with the following results:

11 PRESENT: Rayonte Bell, Jim Curran, Teri Sue Freehling, Robert Harrison, Jon Hinkelman, Michael Majerek, Ezra Scott, David Vollrath, Julie Wuerfel, Mamie Yarbrough and R. McKinley Elliott.

1 ABSENT: Don Meeks.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 16, 2021 MEETING:

Commissioner Majerek moved, seconded by Commissioner Freehling, to approve the last Committee of the Whole minutes held on December 16, 2021. Motion carried, no nays.

REQUISITION REVIEW:

Executive Administrative Assistant Annette Christie presented the requisitions to the Board for their review and discussion.

SCHEDULED DISCUSSION: COVID Update

Guy Miller, Acting Berrien County Health Officer and Eric Hoppstock, Superintendent of Berrien RESA gave PowerPoint presentation which is on the Berrien County Website under Committee of the Whole meeting agenda and minutes.

Acting Director Miller reviewed the COVID-19 Response in 2021 and gave a COVID Update:

- Held 200+ Community vaccine clinics in Benton Harbor, Niles, senior centers, high schools, fire stations, churches and more.
- Implemented COVID-19 vaccine newsletter with over 24,000 subscribers throughout the county.
- Partnered with community influencers who reached communities of color by holding vaccination clinics at churches, Boys & Girls Club, schools and other organizations where members feel safe and respected.
- Role of the Health Department:
 - Protect and promote the health of your community through the assurance, assessment, and policy development.
 - Provide required services including: immunizations, infectious disease control; STI control, TB control; Emergency Management; prenatal care; family planning services, health education, nutrition services, HIV/AIDS services, care of individuals with serious communicable disease or infection; hearing and vision screening, public swimming pool inspections; campground inspections; public/private on-site wastewater; food protection; pregnancy testing, and public/private water supply.

- Rules and responsibilities to uphold these services set forth by the Public Health Code.
- Under Michigan’s Public Health Code, the Health Department may choose to:
 - Require specific action to be taken by individuals who are carriers of hazardous communicable diseases, such as COVID-19 (MCL 333.2451).
 - Prohibit the presence of these individuals in locations or under conditions where the imminent danger exists (MCL 333.2451).
 - Issue an emergency order to prohibit the gathering of people for any purpose (MCL 333.2453).
 - Establish procedures to be followed by persons, including a local governmental entity, during a pandemic to ensure continuation of essential public health services and enforcement of health law (MCL 333.2453).
- Role of the School District:
 - Michigan School Districts have legal authority to protect students within their jurisdiction: School Authority – General Powers (MCL 380.11a(b)) and adopt policies (20 USC 1323(h)); obligation under Federal Civil Rights Law; Governmental Immunity does not apply to Gross Negligence.
 - Schools in Michigan have long played a critical role in protecting student health by: being in compliance with immunization requirements (MCL 380.1177) and helping to manage communicable disease (R 325.175(2)).
- Understanding Responsibilities:
 - A local health department’s authority and actions are independent of a school district’s authority and actions.
 - School Districts do not need a health department order to act.
 - BCHD and Berrien County School Districts continue to work in concert to keep schools in person during the time of a global pandemic.
- Isolation and Quarantine:
 - You isolate when you are already infected with COVID-19 and have tested positive, even if you do not have symptoms. Isolation is used to separate people who are infected with COVID-19 from those who are not infected.
 - You quarantine when you might have been exposed to COVID-19. This is because you might become infected with COVID-19 and could spread COVID-19 to others.
 - Guidance is constantly changing: recent guidance from Public Health research indicates the ability to reduce isolation and quarantine days from 10 days to 5 days.

Discussion followed. It was by consensus of the full Board to give Acting Director Miller a directive to provide the Board with data on the number of people in Berrien County that tested positive for COVID-19 in the following categories: unvaccinated, vaccinated without the booster shot, vaccinated with the booster shot, and for those who have gotten COVID-19 a second time.

Acting Director Miller stated that the Dashboard is still down but that programmers at Abonmarche are working with the County I/S Department to get the Dashboard up and running.

PUBLIC COMMENTS – Per the Berrien County Board of Commissioners’ Bylaws, those speaking during public comments may do so no longer than two minutes and shall identify themselves by name and city, township, or village. (Article III, 3.9B-C):

Richard McCoy, Stevensville – stated that the presentation only included fragments of laws and statutes and that he would like to provide the Board with a written submission regarding the statute MCL 3811 and 3811a.

Robyn Graffenius, Lincoln Township – spoke about research on the infection rate of children who wear masks and those who do not wear masks in school.

Chokwe Pitchford, Benton Charter Township – spoke about child care when schools close due to COVID and parents have to work.

Matt Kirkus, New Buffalo – spoke about COVID-19 and government control.

Christina Dahlquist, Coloma – spoke about the State Board of Education and governmental control.

Keith Lubbers – St. Joseph Charter Township – spoke about the disconnect between the CDC and the Berrien County Health Department regarding quarantine.

Aimee Foster, Stevensville – spoke about the Health Department’s Return to Learn Plan and the disconnect between the Health Department and the Lakeshore Public Schools.

Shawn Hill, St. Joseph City – spoke about funding loss to schools who have an attendance of less than 75% and that the Health Department should focus on giving antibodies to the older population.

Matt Belcher, Stevensville – spoke about schools not being in the high risk category and that vaccinated people are still getting COVID, being hospitalized and dying.

Jennifer Mayo Fujawa, Stevensville – spoke about the public facing a health crisis because the public no longer has faith in the healthcare community.

Victory Woodall, Covert Township – spoke about schools being designated in a high risk category and that Health Department policies are designed to force schools into implementing mask mandates.

Alan Ales, Bridgman – COVID has been politicalized and not focused on health. Americans should have freedom of choice to make decisions on their children’s healthcare.

OTHER BUSINESS: None.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:47 A.M.

R. McKinley Elliott, Chairperson

Diane Mensinger, Chief Deputy Clerk

Minutes are to be approved at the next Committee of the Whole meeting.