

Wayne County Board of Health

Minutes

☒ Regular January 12, 2022 @ 12:15PM

Wayne County Health Department

3rd Floor Conference Room

301 N. Herman Street, Box CC, Goldsboro, NC 27530

- **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Dr. George R. Silver, Jr. at 12:15PM

Members Present	Ms. Pam Anderson, Registered Nurse Member; Mr. Joe Daughtery, Commissioner; Dr. Thurston Greenwood, Dentist Member Dr. Stephen Lies, Physician Member, Vice-Chairperson; Dr. Emilee Pilkington, Dentist Member; Mr. Dr. Rick Sessions, Pharmacist Member; Parker Sherard, Engineer; George R. Silver, Jr., Veterinarian Member, Chairperson; and Dr. Brenda Weis, Health Director.
Members Absent	Mr. Charles Gibson, Public Member; VACANT Optometrist; VACANT Public Member.
Staff Members Present	Leah Grimmer, Stephanie Howard, Steve Mohr, Dr. James Stackhouse and JoAnn Whitfield.

A quorum was established with eight members present; one absent member and two vacant positions.

Ms. Bonnie Crouse reviewed the Safety Emergency Information board with all attendees for the roles needed in case of an emergency. The board is placed in the conference room where everyone can view what their role will be.

- **Invocation:** Invocation – Dr. Rick Sessions
- **Introduction of Guests:** None
- **Presentation of Employee Retirement:** Miriam Hatch-Torres
Dr. Silver presented Ms. Hatch-Torres with a plaque for 25 years of dedication service to the Health Department.
- **Presentation of Out-Going Member:** Mr. James Faulk: Absent
- **Approval of Meeting Agenda**
Ms. Anderson made a motion to approve the agenda as emailed. Dr. Sessions seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- **Approval of December 8, 2021 Minutes**

Ms. Anderson made a motion to approve the December 8, 2021 Minutes as emailed to the Board. Dr. Sessions seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT REPORTS	
Health Director's Report:	Dr. Weis shared the following information with the Board: <u>COVID-19:</u> Our positivity national rate has gone up quite a bit due to the COVID-19 Omicron variant. Even with the booster vaccine, the rate is still high, higher than we saw with Delta variant and with the previous strain of COVID. The Omicron variant also appears to be more transmissible. We are seeing a lot more cases among those who are not vaccinated. The testing in the County is spotty largely because of the availability of the test kits right now. The primary testing sites in the County are the Health Department and pharmacies. GOSHEN and Seymour Johnson AFB are also doing some testing. Many of these positive cases come to our nursing staff to enter into the State's disease surveillance system (NCEDSS). We are getting faxes of thousands of sheets of paper every day to enter into the system on their behalf. The nursing staff is getting overwhelmed and they really should be focusing on providing nursing services. Across the State, NCDHHS is reporting a positivity rate of over 30%. At the Health Department's vaccine and testing site, and for the County as a whole last week, we had a 26% positivity rate. That is the highest we have ever been. The week prior to that, the rate was 18%. The expectations from the State and federal government (CDC) are that the rates may continue to climb through February. Jessie Tucker sent out an update to stakeholders about the hospital's rates of hospitalization due to COVID-19. Patients are reportedly younger, but thankfully, the cases do not appear as severe as previously reported. If you are vaccinated, the symptoms are presumably less. Unfortunately, the CDC did not do a very good job messaging around new guidelines for isolation and quarantine recently, and this created a lot of confusion among public health professionals at the state and local level. Honestly, people are following the guidelines for isolation and quarantine anyway. In addition, we were losing our workforce due to CDC requirements for isolation and quarantine. CDC is just trying to balance economics and social pressures with the science when they changed the isolation and quarantine guidelines recently. Unfortunately, they have made it very confusing for state and local health, and thus for the community with these unclear changes in the requirements for isolation and quarantine. Health Department staff,

including myself, spend a lot of our resources responding to calls that we receive from schools, businesses and the public about how to interpret these new guidelines.

The Health Department is still providing community vaccinations and testing at the Food Lion site. We have been struggling with the lack of availability of COVID rapid test kits. The State has run out and they are trying to hustle and find possible test kit vendors. They have moved us to the Quidel testing System for now. The test requires a swirling step that is difficult to perform in inclement weather since we do not have a tent for cars coming to the testing site.

Unfortunately, there are few to no tents to buy because of the excessive demand. In addition, the state sent us the testing system but not the test cartridges that are needed to use the system. We are waiting to see about getting a tent and awaiting more testing equipment. We have ceased testing for the past two weeks due to lack of test kits.

We are providing about 100 vaccines per day approximately the past two weeks. Last week we provided about 80 vaccines per day.

OSHA's ruling on proof of vaccination or weekly testing for businesses with more than 100 employees, which would include the County, is still in the courts. The County has drafted a draft plan to address the ruling if it becomes law. Ms. Grimmer shared information on the Quidel test system with the Board. This kit does have a longer turn-around time than the previous BINEX-Now test kit.

Dr. Weis shared with the Board Melissa Miller, a former State surge staff and current Health Department contractor, is running point with Dr. Stackhouse and Ms. Grimmer at the Health Department's community COVID-19 testing and vaccination site.

Ms. Anderson stated, at the hospital, they are back up to 50 percent positivity rate at the hospital. Of that 50, only four are in the ICU. The numbers have not been that high in months. It is about 38% rate among patients. Also, because of the long lines for testing at GOSHEN, people are now coming to the hospital ED for testing. Their ED provided 250 tests last week. So, if you are at the hospital for an emergency, it takes longer to be seen.

New Building:

Dr. Weis stated we are moving forward with planning with the architect for the new Health-DSS facility. We are in negotiation on the square footage, cost, etc.

Mr. Daughtery commented the final rule came out in regards to County's use of federal COVID monies. They have awarded \$22,000,000 for Wayne County. The strings they put on this is

money make it so difficult to use. For example, you can use the monies for loss of revenue, but you may not count it for every County department. You have to count it for the County as a whole. When you do that, Wayne County actually has increased revenue because NC implemented the sales tax on internet sales. The bottom line is there are so many restrictions on the use of federal COVID dollars. We argued about this last year as well. The final rule has come out though and \$10,000,000 may be used on any entities' lost revenue with no documentation requirement. We may also use it, amongst other things, to support healthcare facilities. We will use the \$10,000,000 of the money for facilities. This will help support the Health Department/DSS facility and the jail. It did help us out tremendously. The cost of construction is through the roof.

Mr. Daughtery also shared he is concerned about using so much staff time to answer questions about COVID for the public. Let's try to find a messaging that will answer a majority of those questions. Dr. Stackhouse stated that IT has been trying to work on this, although there are so many types of questions that are situation specific that would not be addressed well in a standardized message.

Salary Study: Dr. Weis stated we are grateful for our Commissioners for supporting a review of salaries for our staff. Some of our job categories, like Environmental Health and Processing Assistants, are low historically compared to other nearby counties. These are some of the job categories where a salary study may help us out a bit. The problem is that when we increase and level set the salaries in one job classification, we have to pay for these adjustments into the future.

I have spoken with colleagues in other health departments about how they handle this, and many choose to liquidate one position and use the monies to increase the job classification and pay for that job classification or another job classification. The end result is that we would have fewer positions that are paid more. This may help retain existing employees for a longer time. We need to find a way to keep employees. It is going to require some new strategies. I am hoping the salary study will help us to figure out where to be on that. County HR is hiring an outside consultant to conduct the salary study. It is hopefully going to be completed by budget planning time.

We will put in our salary adjustment requests when we get the results of the salary study. If we have to collapse some of our categories to make fewer jobs with higher pay, I think we should consider that. I am informing the Board for comments. Mr. Daughtery asked if the study would be done and completed before the Budget so it can be incorporated in the Budget. Dr. Weis stated it is the goal to have this done before the Budget. We gave County HR our position and salary data a couple of weeks ago.

Dr. Greenwood asked who mandates these job categories in the government. I have dealt with the government before. Dr. Weis

	stated that Health and DSS are under the State HR system for certain things. One of those things is job classification. We have to follow the category and descriptions that they provide us. They state HR system also regulates employee discipline, corrective action, and appeals processes. However, when it comes to the salary associated with a specific job category, that is decided at the local level via County Commissioners. Mr. Daughtery asked if all the salaries are decided at the local level. Dr. Weis stated only the Health Department and DSS. Mr. Daughtery stated that DSS is reimbursed by the State at a rate of 16%. Dr. Weis stated the reimbursement is a different topic. I am talking about the job classifications and the salary ranges that go with them. The classification and the duties for that classification come from the State. We cannot change those. At the local level, we set the salary level. Mr. Daughtery asked if you set the salary level, are you reimbursed any from the State. Dr. Weis commented that reimbursement is determined on a programmatic level. If you are a nurse and you spend so many hours on maternal health, or so many on immunizations, JoAnn Whitfield has the meticulous job of having to allocate that person's time to the specific program that will reimburse us for that time. Ms. Whitfield commented the HR office does have to submit a salary pay plan that should be comparable with the State. They have to submit it to OSHR annually. Dr. Weis asked Board members if their organizations are grappling with staff shortages like the Health Department. Ms. Anderson stated her purview at the hospital includes community areas. Historically, when nurses were tired of working in the hospital settings, and wanted something slower paced, they would come to my area to continue nursing. Whenever I had an opening, I would have many applicants. Now, I have had openings for months. This has never happened to us before. In my area, we do not have the bonuses that the hospital has. We typically do not ever have a position open for this long. In addition of being tired of having to take COVID precautions, it seems there is fewer people who want to work. I don't know what the answer is. Dr. Lies added that he has seen staffing shortages in his area of healthcare as well. Dr. Pinklington stated that they have been lucky to have managed pretty well during the pandemic.
Finance Report	<u>Revenue Report:</u> Steve Mohr reviewed the Revenue Report of current and past Decembers. Finances are on the right track. Increases are where we expected. Revenue did go down from last year. COVID still has our regular service down. Vaccines and testing have kept the Revenue above previous numbers. Once COVID subsides, our program numbers should be at a positive level. Mr. Daughtery commented he is a little concerned about this presentation from this standpoint that the graph depicts FY21-22, yet only covers six months and not 12 months. With these numbers for

	six months, could you possibly add a column giving us percentage of budgeted amounts? Example, are we at 50% at six months, etc.? Mr. Mohr stated he would add a column showing that. Dr. Weis commented every year we budget as we have a full complement of employees. We have a 26% vacancy for the last six years or so. We are not likely to ever have a full employee roster for to a variety of reasons. It will always look like we did not spend as much as we did because we are not going to fill those positions. We will not pay those salaries but we will budget for them. Staff turnover rate is really important to us because it is going to impact that bottom line, the budgeted amount and ultimately the expenses. We are assuming we are going to fill the roster, but we cannot. That is an important rationale for getting a new building. If I could increase the salaries of the employees and get a new building, I think I can continue and even expand services without getting a lot of new positions.
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- **Public Comments:** None

- **Old Business:** None

- **New Business:** None

- **Board Member Comments:**

- Dr. Silver stated he had a comment. I guess everybody received Celita Graham's email earlier this week. The Board agreed. Dr. Weis stated there is staff in the audience and they have no idea of the email. I will let you use your discretion on this. We can go into "Closed Session" if you want to. Dr. Silver stated he already said he was not going to go into "Closed Session". I am in the process of doing the back finding and I will report back to the Board. I have sent an email out to the Board. Right now I don't think there is anything further to say about it.
- Mr. Daughtery commented the flu is back. It has the same symptoms as COVID.

Mr. Daughtery stated the "Public Member" position that Mr. Faulk filled is now vacant. We need to follow the procedures we have in place for the appointment of a new "Public Member".

Ms. Crouse stated an ad has been placed in the newspaper and has been placed on the County Website for this position. We have received one application to date. I will also advertise for the "Optometrist Member" position.

Mr. Daughtery commented to the Board if they hear of anyone or should know of anyone that is a professional member, please share. Dr. Weis stated she would like to have someone with a finance background. We will do the best we can, but it would be great.

Mr. Daughtery shared we should know that Dr. Weis has been put in an awkward situation. That is that this is a combined human resources building. It is Health Department and DSS. Up until Thursday of last week, DSS always felt we had a little

