

**WESTFIELD BOARD OF HEALTH  
WESTFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07090**

**MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF HEALTH REGULAR MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, MARCH 7, 2022.**

Pursuant to the rules of the Board of Health of the Town of Westfield, NJ, a meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM on Monday, March 7, 2022, in the Council Chambers of the Westfield Town Hall, 425 E. Broad St, Westfield, NJ. The statement of compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act was read.

**ROLL CALL:**

Dr. Elizabeth Talmont  
Dr. Lawrence Budnick  
Dr. Steven Gorelick  
Ms. Sharon Dorry  
Mr. Brendan Bertsch  
Dr. Daniel Halevy  
Ms. Tara Donnelly—Alternate #1

Also Present:

Megan Avallone—Health Officer  
Michael Dardia—Council Liaison  
Thomas Jardim—Town Attorney  
Helen Mendez—Principal REHS  
Denise Rizzolo—Covid-19 Generalist  
Ellen Shelley—Vulnerable Population Coordinator

**ABSENT:**

Dr. Andrea Marcus  
Ms. Maryann McCloskey

Dr. Talmont read the following statement:

Today, the Governor’s mask mandate has been lifted. This day signals a hopeful milestone in the pandemic. As a Board of Health, we are cautiously optimistic. We are optimistic because the numbers show us on the COVID-19 Activity Level Index (CALI) for Union County is moderate activity. (2/19/22)

<https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/statistics/covid/>

And yet, with all the excitement, we would also urge caution as we return to lives, we all hope will be less disrupted by this deadly virus.

**Lifting the mask mandate is a hopeful, welcome sign. But it is not the end of COVID-19.** We are in a new normal. COVID-19, at least for the foreseeable future, will be part of that new normal. Hopefully it will be less contagious and less deadly, but as long as the virus lives, new variants are possible.

That is why, as we transition to what we hope will be a continuing decline in rates of infection, we each -- individually and as a community – face a new challenge.

1. **Can we remain vigilant? Yes. We need to remember the importance of remaining vigilant and protecting those who are still vulnerable and at increased risk.**

**That is why we ask you all to:**

- a. Continue to assess personal risk and the risk for those with whom we come into contact.

- b. Consider masking when around others, particularly the elderly, those who are unvaccinated or care for children who are unvaccinated, and those who are challenged by health conditions that put them at increased risk.
- c. Continue to follow health news closely and remain informed about the progress of the virus. The virus is still circulating. As long as it is circulating, it will mutate and has the potential to cause harm.

2. **Has a new variant emerged that might require yet another change in our behavior?** There is no way we can know if this will happen, but we must stay prepared and informed.

3. **We also want to make it clear, masks work.** At recent BOH meetings, we have heard that masks do not work. This is false. Masks do work. High quality masks, when, worn properly, reduce your risk of getting sick and spreading disease. Ask a health care worker or anyone else on the front lines. Masks are the first line of defense and will remain so during this pandemic.

4. **We also know that vaccines work.** They work at reducing risk of infection AND protecting against the worst outcomes of hospitalizations and death. It remains possible that we will need boosters to combat COVID-19 going forward.

- a. **Are vaccines perfect?** No. Nor would we expect them to be.
- b. What is very clear is that those who are vaccinated and boosted suffer less and are less likely to die if they get COVID-19.
- c. People who are vaccinated protect the public health and decrease transmission of disease. It is that simple. If you don't get vaccinated for yourself, do it for someone else.
- d. Happily, the community of Westfield's vaccination rates are very good, as of 2/24/22

5-11-year-olds with at least 1 dose: 60%

12-17-year-olds with at least 1 dose: 76%

68% of residents who are eligible for a booster dose have received one.

Booster rates:

AGE	PERCENT
12-15	30%
16-17	45%
18-29	58%
30-49	69%
50-64	72%
65-79	82%
80+	80%

[https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019\\_dashboard.shtml](https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019_dashboard.shtml)

5. **Bottom line**, when masks, vaccines and physical distancing are taken together, they reduce risk.

**Does it eliminate risk?** No, but they are the best tools for combatting the virus.

In closing, we would like to remember the close to 1 million people in the United States who have died from COVID-19 and the many millions more who have suffered from the infection. Over 60 of those precious lives were friends, family and fellow citizens here in Westfield.

**Everyone has been impacted by this virus.** We are living in a time of often ambiguous loss and challenge. We were presented with the challenge of moving ahead with our lives during a period in which we were buffeted, again and again, by unknowns and confusing developments. We met that challenge. But those unknowns will remain, and we must continue to see the virus as the enemy. It is understandable and fully human to fall into the trap of searching for blame in the midst of catastrophic events. But blaming each other, particularly those in charge of protecting the public health, is very much a trap that can leave a strong community with less compassion and less ability to face the next major challenge, whatever it might be. We can't let that happen.

**We would like to applaud** the efforts of Megan Avallone and her team at the Westfield Regional Health Department who have worked around the clock, 7 days a week for over two years. We know the work was far from easy. We thank you.

**With cautious optimism,** we hope that we have lived through the worst of this pandemic and encourage us all to take the lifting of the mask mandate seriously. Some situations still require masking. On a personal note, managing during this pandemic has been hard and the ambiguity of the virus has been frustrating. But together we will prevail and continue to take care of ourselves, family, friends and neighbors.

Thank you.

## **BOARD HEARING:**

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

On a motion by Mr. Bertsch, seconded by Dr. Budnick, Minutes of the January 10, 2022 meeting were approved as amended and ordered filed.

### **BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

#### **Administration/Consumer Health (Restaurant/Environmental Inspections):**

The Health Department, Vital Statistics, Animal Control, Pest Control and Nursing Reports were all accepted as presented and ordered filed.

Dr. Talmont presented the Financial Report and the February bills, totaling \$8,357.32, for approval. A motion was made by Dr. Budnick, seconded by Dr. Halevy, and the following Roll Call vote was taken:

Dr. Talmont—Aye,    Dr. Budnick—Aye,    Dr. Gorelick—Aye,  
Mr. Bertsch—Aye,    Dr. Halevy—Aye,    Ms. Donnelly—Aye,

The record shall reflect the unanimous approval of bills by all members present.

### **OLD BUSINESS:**

Ms. Avallone provided an update on the Food Truck Subcommittee and informed the Board that 49 food trucks have been licensed by Wonder.

Dr. Budnick, Bylaws Committee Chair, presented a draft of the proposed bylaws, as updated by the subcommittee. Dr. Budnick reviewed the changes from the previous version. A short discussion took place.

Dr. Talmont will work with the Communications Subcommittee to draft a letter to the editor summarizing the Board's meeting.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

Ms. Avallone informed the Board that the Municipal Alliance was looking for a Board of Health appointee to sit on their Board. Dr. Gorelick volunteered to join and was thanked by Dr. Talmont.

Dr. Budnick reviewed the Health Rankings Report for the Board, focusing on indicators that are lagging in New Jersey and locally. Discussion took place.

Dr. Talmont then presented Resolution 4-2022, authorizing Summit Medical Group as the Child Health Conference provider. A motion was made by Dr. Halevy, seconded by Ms. Dorry, and the following a Roll Call vote was taken:

Dr. Talmont—Aye, Dr. Budnick—Aye, Dr. Gorelick—Aye, Ms. Dorry—Aye, Dr. Marcus—Aye,  
Mr. Bertsch—Aye, Dr. Halevy—Aye, Ms. Donnelly—Aye, Ms. McClosky—Aye

The record will reflect unanimous approval for BOH Resolution 4-2022.

Dr. Talmont requested a rotation of three members to participate in a Communications Subcommittee that would develop a summary of our meeting to share with the community. Dr. Talmont stated that she has sent emails to Dr. Halevy and Ms. Dorry to participate in this subcommittee.

## **OTHER BUSINESS:**

Ms. Avallone provided a covid update that summarized the past month as well as the past two years, as March 4<sup>th</sup> marks the two-year anniversary of the first covid case identified in New Jersey. Ms. Avallone shared that the Westfield Regional Health Department has had a total of 20,718 covid cases reported for the communities it serves throughout the past 24 months. This is equivalent to 18.9% of the total service area, and does not include home tests or provider antigen tests that are not reported. In Westfield, 5538 covid cases have been reported during this timeframe, 17.8% of Westfield residents. Ms. Avallone stated that one in four Union County residents have had a reported covid test and one in 237 Union County residents have died from covid-related causes. In Westfield, 66 residents have had a covid associated death.

Ms. Avallone informed the Board that the Department provided 3,287 vaccinations to residents and that 61% of children age 5-11 now have at least one dose of vaccine and that 53% of 5–11-year-olds are now fully vaccinated.

Dr. Talmont presented an invoice for the New Jersey Local Boards of Health Association 2022 Membership. After some discussion, the Board authorized for processing of a single membership to the Association.

## **President's Comments:**

Dr. Talmont read the following statement:

Before we open the floor to public comment, as the President of the Board, I feel it is necessary to outline ground rules and expectations for the public comment period.

The board of health meetings are open to the public and press. While boards of health are not required by law to allow public comment at meetings, we have traditionally set aside time during our meetings for the public to comment on any matters under our jurisdiction. This public comment period is just that – public comment, and it

is not intended to be a time for back-and-forth debate between members of the public and the Board members, or among members of the public.

Our goal and tradition with including a public comment period is to provide an opportunity to hear from the public on a wide variety of issues. Typically, they have been related to agenda items. In the past those have ranged from tobacco use and vaping to concerns to COVID-19 public health measures.

By and large, these have been productive opportunities for the community and the Board. However, at our last meeting, hours after Governor Murphy announced the expiration of the mask mandate on March 7<sup>th</sup>, we had over 20 people speak. The tone was heated, to say the least, and in at least two instances, explicit threats were made to Town staff and volunteers. I want to be clear that this type of behavior will not be tolerated. At all.

Like many of you, I too have wrestled with personal and professional impacts of COVID-19. It can be exhausting to navigate the dynamic nature of evolving data, guidance, policies to say nothing of how we each interpret and manage personal risk and the responsibility we have towards each other. I hear the frustration and yet, I will ask you to be your best selves. The enemy is not each other; it is the virus.

For public comments, all speakers will be required to uphold the principle of respect and demonstrate decorum appropriate for a public meeting.

- Each speaker will be asked to give their full name and address for the record.

*Not to be spoken but for reference:*

*To check name/address - [http://tax1.co.monmouth.nj.us/cgi-bin/prc6.cgi?district=2020&ms\\_user=monm](http://tax1.co.monmouth.nj.us/cgi-bin/prc6.cgi?district=2020&ms_user=monm).*

*As a rule, allow anyone who does not live in town to speak during public comment period.*

- Each speaker will be limited to 3 minutes.
  - Dr. Budnick has been asked to be the time keeper. Thank you in advance Dr. Budnick.
- If at any time meeting decorum is not maintained or a threat is made to any member of the board or staff, the speaker will not be permitted to speak further.
- If required because of time limitations, duplicative comments, or a lack of decorum, I will use my discretion to close the public comment period.
- If order cannot be maintained, we will adjourn the meeting.

I appeal to the best in all of you. It is possible to hold differences of opinion and be civil. That is the expectation of this meeting and those going forward.

Lastly, the Board of Health is made up of volunteers by and for the Westfield community. The board is made up of doctors, nurses, teachers, entrepreneurs, and business people, just like you. We volunteer our time because we care about public health and we care about Westfield. While you may disagree with the policies and guidance from the NJ Department of Health, we, as a Board are obligated to follow State Public Health law and regulations. The scope of our authority – like all local boards of health in New Jersey -- is set out in Title 8, Chapter 52 of the New Jersey Administrative Code and while these regulations contain a lot of detail which I will not go into here,

under NJAC 8:52-1.3, each local “shall” adhere to the standards of performance to the Public Health Council and to the Department pursuant to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 26:3A-2 et seq. We do not have a choice on that. With that, I would like to open the floor for the public comment period and thank the speakers for upholding the code of conduct I have outlined.

Thank you.

**PUBLIC PORTION OF THE MEETING:**

**CLOSED SESSION:** A motion was made by Dr. Budnick, and seconded by Mr. Bertsch to enter closed session at 6:31pm.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

A motion was made by Dr. Budnick, seconded by Dr. Gorelick, and unanimously approved by all members present to adjourn the meeting at 7:18 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Megan Avallone  
Board Secretary