



CITY OF WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS
Department of Health & Human Services
Division of Public Health



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Matilde Castiel, MD
Health & Human Services
Commissioner

Karyn E. Clark
Public Health
Director

DATE: February 1, 2021
RE: WORCESTER BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING
START TIME: 6:30 PM
LOCATION: WEBEX MEETING

Welcome & Introductions:

Meeting was called to order at 6:32pm.

Members on WebEx: Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair, Frances Anthes, Chareese Allen and David Fort
WPDH Staff: Karyn Clark, Director of DPH, Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH, Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS and Patricia Bruchmann, RN, Chief Public Health Nurse; Guest: Stephanie Williams, Chief Diversity Officer

Approval of the January 4, 2021 Meeting Minutes:

Motion to approve the WBOH meeting minutes of January 4, 2021 made by Frances Anthes
Seconded by Chareese Allen – Approved

Review and discussion with Stephanie Williams, Chief Diversity Officer, for a conversation on “inequity, inequality, and institutional racism:

Stephanie Williams, Chief Diversity Officer: Have read the previous BOH meeting minutes to have a better understanding of what the discussions have been specifically around declaring institutional structural racism as a public health issue and concern. Primary role is to examine our policies and practices around diversity, equity and inclusion internally within the municipality. Primary focus around higher retention, policy, practice and procedures. Working on mission, vision and goals ensuring that they align with the municipality’s mission, vision and goals. Looking at every department to make sure that there are diversity, equity and inclusion goals within each department. Working around identifying and accessing who we are, where we have been, what we have done, what has worked and hasn’t worked for us as a municipality, then where do we go from here?

Review and discussion on legislation signed by Governor Baker about police reform and how it relates to the City of Worcester:

David Fort: There hasn’t been a lot of talk about the Capitol Building regarding how police reacted. Like most Black Lives Matter (BLM) supporters, we grieve with the family of Officer Brian Sicknick and many others that have been injured. I haven’t heard anything about condemning this type of violence. To see what those group of people did to the Capitol was horrific. How do we know if there are police officers in Worcester who share the same views of the people that stormed the

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Capitol? Read an article on Worcester City Councilors George Russell, Candy Mero-Carlson and Worcester City Manager, Edward Augustus all said that City Councilor Khrystian King should not be asking or insinuating that someone from the city, including police officers, were involved with that or had those types of views unless he has evidence. I am outraged by those comments. It's not our job as the residents of the city to provide the City Council or City Manager evidence about suspecting who's a white supremacist at the Capitol or amongst the ranks of the police department. There are many police departments around the country who are doing their due diligence and investigating who's on the force and has those views. No wonder the City of Worcester Chief of Police says there's no institutional racism or anti-black or brown views on the force. The leadership and City Councilors are not doing anything. I give support and thanks to State Senator Harriette Chandler for her vote to support police reform. I would like a public hearing at the next BOH meeting where the citizens of Worcester can speak about these issues.

Frances Anthes: The BOH took the 12 recommendations very seriously. We stated very clearly that we thought that the kind of health disparities that we were well aware of and seeing with in COVID-19 really came because of inequality in our world. The murder of George Floyd reiterated people of color who were more at danger for morbidity and mortality than others. That was often in the hands of police. Doesn't think that we as a community have a full understanding of the way in which law enforcement came out of Jim Crow Laws. It was a difficult discussion over the last couple of months because we weren't on the same page. We have stated that we know that racial inequities are a public health issue, we need to hear how the police reform bill is going to be implemented. What are the timelines and plans?

Chareese Allen: Looking back at the conversations we had with the WPD, it was ledged that there was no racism within the Police Department. Part of the recommendations we made was about the hiring process. We were told it was through civil service testing. There really are no people of color in leadership positions. The police reforms are calling for a specific set of standards which we would like to see implemented with the police department. We would like to see how they are going to handle that and how they are going to enact that. Hopefully working with Stephanie Williams, we can change the hiring practices at the police department that's going to help us have more equitable hiring amongst the ranks.

Stephanie Williams, Chief Diversity Officer: In terms of the police reform and how it will be enacted, I think that is a better conversation to have with the Chief of Police. It's something their looking at. There are a lot of things that have to be implemented. In terms of hiring, I'm still gathering the data. Chief Diversity Officer Sgt. Leto's (WPD) charge is diversifying the police department from within in terms with hiring recruitment. Diversity Inclusion Advisory Committee has been tasked to look at civil service and comparing it to other municipalities that do not utilize it and those that do. Weary of the intellectual and emotional labor that people of color are putting in. Having these meetings and coming to these forums, can retrigger the trauma that they are experiencing. There is an executive order that has been worked on. I have taken a look at it and made some suggestions. It does address some issues around police reform.

Frances Anthes: Would like to understand how we as a community are going to hear about the implementation of the police reform bill?

Chareese Allen: Prior to the reform being implemented the police department needs to hear from the community. Then move forward with changes.

David Fort: Our purview is to deal with any public health issues. The community needs to have their voice heard. The City Manager, Chief of Police and City Council need to be at the meeting.

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair: Believes this issue should be talked about at every BOH meeting. Wants to understand better how the police reform will be implemented in the city. Are there other people that can come to our BOH meetings and can round up our discussion and help us craft something that's in the best interest of the City of Worcester and our ability as a Board to be impactful? Wants to make sure we don't pursue things that the BOH doesn't have the ability to do, based on any rules or regulations. Would like to speak with City Solicitor, Michael Traynor to get a better answer.

Frances Anthes: Agrees that it is time for a forum. Is the BOH the right people to do it? The issues of racial injustice, which we have been focused on, need to be addressed in a way that there is an open forum. Would like to look for a way to figure out what the structure is.

David Fort made a motion to have a forum on police reform and institutional racism and how it relates to the police and accountability. For the BOH meeting in March. We will delay the forum to April BOH meeting should pandemic activities of the Division need to take precedence. Seconded by Chareese Allen. Motion passed unanimously.

COVID-19 Updates:

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: The surge that we had during the holidays seems to have ebbed. We are seeing fewer hospitalizations and cases. 20,000 vaccinations have been given at UMass Hospital and 7,000 in Saint Vincent Hospital to hospital workers. We believe this is the reason we are seeing less positive cases in healthcare workers. This will help continue the care for patients that have COVID-19 or other medical issues. DCU occupancy is also decreasing. Our only concern is the variant strains that are coming to the US. The UK strain from England has been detected here in Massachusetts and New York. The South African strain has been detected in Minnesota and South Carolina. The Brazilian strain has been detected in Florida and California. These strains are variants from the inner core of the virus. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccine have been effective in trials in Europe against the UK and South African strain. The vaccination program is going to be augmented soon by products from Novartis and Johnson & Johnson. The Johnson & Johnson will be a one dose vaccine. But is only 66% effective. Novartis is 70% effective. . Businesses have been allowed to operate after 9:30pm. Effective Monday, February 8th, some of the recent temporary occupancy restrictions are being lifted to 40% capacity. We have been administering COVID-19 vaccines at the Worcester Senior Center, starting with Phase 1, for Worcester and our surrounding alliance towns (Grafton, Holden, Leicester, Millbury, Shrewsbury and West Boylston). We will be starting Phase 2 step 1 this coming week. If you would like to volunteer, you may send an email to volunteer@worcesterma.gov and provide your name and phone number and how you would like to help.

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: It was heartwarming to be able to go to the shelters in Worcester and get individuals vaccinated. The Latino Community has the highest numbers of COVID-19. Latino Community has about 37% with COVID-19, for a total of 4,908. Black Community has about 18% with COVID-19, for a total of 2,435. Looking at hospitalizations, 40% are white with an average age of 71. 33% are Latino with an average age of 61. Looking at the numbers of those getting vaccinated, Latino's and blacks are extremely low compared to the white population.

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair: Read a statement regarding “The Worcester BOH on COVID-19 Vaccination”.

BOH members: Support this statement after having a brief discussion.

David Fort made a motion for the BOH members to endorse and approve the statement read by Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair. Seconded by Chareese Allen - Motion passed unanimously

Review and discuss updates on opioid epidemic and communicable diseases:

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: In 2019 we had 1,270 overdoses. In 2020 we decreased to 1,140. Overdoses were down but mortality rates went up. The site with the most overdoses is 25 Queen Street with 47 overdoses.

Motion to adjourn; Chareese Allen - seconded by Frances Anthes

Adjourn 8:30pm

Next Meeting -- March 1, 2021 at 6:30pm

Potential Future Meeting Topics:

Update discussion on police reform and how it relates Worcester
Updates on COVID19

Guest speaker to discuss mental health/education with children

Discussion on children going back to school vs. working remotely

Public Meeting – March or April