

**Western U.P. Board of Health
Health Department Office
540 Depot Street Hancock, MI 49930
Virtual "Google Meet"
Monday, March 27, 2023**

Minutes

Opening

Chair Rajala opened the meeting at 6:01 p.m. (EST). Present were J. Byrns, B. Dakota, G. Eilola, J. Keranen, R. Nousiainen, and D. Rajala. Absent was G. Anderson, R. Britz, J. Cane, R. DeMarois, and D Siirila. Also, in attendance were Kate Beer, Health Officer/Administrator; Dr Robert Van Howe, Medical Director; Pete Baril, Deputy Health Officer & Director of Community Planning; Tanya Rule, Environmental Health Director; Sara Heathman, Environmental Health Operations Supervisor; and Julie Heikkinen, Administrative/HR Assistant. There were 4 people virtually in attendance as audience.

Chair Rajala requested action on the agenda. This action followed:

Motion: Keranen/second Eilola to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried on roll call vote, all voting yes.

Chair Rajala asked for public comment, no one spoke.

Minutes of the February 27, 2023 meeting were reviewed and approved with this action:

Motion: Byrns/second Nousiainen to approve the minutes of the February 27, 2023 Board of Health meeting as prepared. Motion carried on roll call vote, all voting yes.

Minutes of the February 27, 2023 Public Hearing were reviewed and approved with this action:

Motion: Eilola/second Byrns to approve the minutes of the February 27, 2023 Public Hearing as prepared. Motion carried on roll call vote, all voting yes.

The board reviewed expenditures for the month of March 2023, leading to this action:

Motion: Byrns/second Keranen to approve the general expenditures for the period 2/17/2023 to 03/16/2023, voucher # 11 and voucher # 12 in the amount of \$69,623.15. Carried on roll call vote, all voting yes.

Reports

Kate Beer, Health Officer:

Lynne Madison has accepted the open sanitarian position on a part-time basis. Lynne is posting in from the L'Anse clerk position, so we are currently recruiting in that location.

Two summer Environmental Health Tech positions are posted to assist with beach sampling. One will be in Gogebic/Ontonagon and the other in Houghton/Keweenaw/Baraga. Beach sampling this year will include a “soft” opening of our water testing capabilities at our lab in Hancock.

We have successfully billed for substance use treatment services and are now a paneled provider for NorthCare. Staff is seeking additional grant funding to continue jail-based and recovery support services.

Financials:

Auditors completed the FY22 audit the first week of March, with no findings. Draft financial statements were received this afternoon. Beer will review and have copies printed for the Board for approval at next month's meeting.

Financial statements through February 23 were presented.

The health department has been notified of increases in several grants including the Regional Lab, Workforce Development, and Harm reduction. The health department is waiting to hear about several grant applications submitted last week and is looking at the viability of several grants due over the next month.

The Medicaid Cost Report has been completed and submitted for FY23. As expected, the health department will be required to return payments due to decreased activity during COVID. Current interim payments were also reduced for FY22. Beer is evaluating the impact on the financial statements.

Beer will compile a budget amendment once additional numbers are available.

Other:

Beer is working with the Gogebic county administrator on a possible lease renewal for Gogebic county. Beer is also working on a possible build-to-suit arrangement with Snow Country Contracting for the commercial space in Ironwood. Build-out costs came in higher than anticipated and the space does not allow for any future expansion beyond the number of workers currently there. The Gogebic County Administrator assures us that there is no urgent need to relocate.

Dr Robert Van Howe, Medical Director:

Blastomycosis

As you may or may not be aware there has been an outbreak of Blastomycosis at a paper plant in Escanaba. There have been over 50 plant workers who have tested positive for the infection.

Blastomycosis is caused by *Blastomyces dermatitidis*, a dimorphic fungus. Dimorphic means it can exist in yeast form or mycelial form. The fungus lives in soil and rotting vegetation in the midwestern states around the Great Lakes. The infection is acquired through inhalation of the fungus in the soil. When I practiced in northern Wisconsin we had a number of cases from Eagle River, Wisconsin that were linked to excavation associated with new construction. A large number of dogs, probably from digging in the soil also got sick.

It usually presents with pulmonary symptoms and is often misdiagnosed as bacterial pneumonia. Since it is a fungus, antibiotics are not effective. After several rounds of different antibiotics, a chest x-ray will reveal a mass that will often be mistaken for tuberculosis or a malignancy. Because of delays of diagnosis, the start of the infection can be difficult to pinpoint. Even without these delays in diagnosis, the incubation period is approximately 30 to 45 days.

In Escanaba, nearly all the cases are young men and all work in the paper plant. The dogs in Delta County are not getting blastomycosis, so the source of infection is not the local soil.

The diagnosis can be made based on blood tests.

The treatment for blastomycosis can be an ordeal. For mild to moderately severe infections, the treatment is six to twelve months of oral itraconazole. Both can cause liver damage. Amphotericin B is indicated for severe infections. It has the nickname of “amphoterrible” because it has horrible side effects.

In addition to tracking where the workers spent time in the plant, other basic epidemiological data is being collected. Epidemiologist from the state have called in as well as industrial experts. Mycologists (fungus experts) from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention are involved. Filters have been changed on the plant’s ventilation system, and testing and cleaning of the plant is ongoing. MIOSHA will be inspecting the plant in the near future. Unless something changes from when this was written, the plant remains open.

Old Business

Kate Beer provided an update on the proposed U.P. Environmental Health Code. Keweenaw, Ontonagon, Baraga, and Gogebic counties have all adopted the proposed code. Houghton county will decide at their upcoming meeting.

New Business

The board reviewed the Gift Card Policy for the agency, leading to this action:

Motion: Eilola/Keranen second to approve the Gift Card Policy for the agency. Carried on roll call, all voting yes.

The board reviewed the Criminal Background Policy for the agency, leading to this action:

Motion: Nousiainen/second Byrns to approve the Criminal Background Policy for the agency. Carried on roll call, all voting yes.

The board reviewed the Annual Sliding Fee Scale and Family Planning Fee Schedule, leading to this action:

Motion: Byrns/second Eilola to approve the Annual Sliding Fee Scale and Family Planning Fee Schedule as presented. Carried on roll call, all voting yes.

Other

With no other business, Chair Rajala set the next meeting for 6:00 pm (EST), April 24, 2023, in person at the health department office in L'Anse and also available via Google Meet.

Chair Rajala then asked for public comment and heard from 2 people.

Kris Kyro from WMPL Radio inquired on the Family Planning Program.

Chair Rajala reminded Kris Kyro that this is Public Comment, not exchange.

Karen Timonen expressed her distrust of the health department. She feels there is a lack of truth and transparency on the ingredients in the injection.

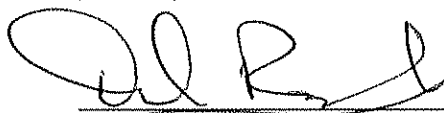
Chair Rajala called for additional comments and heard none.


Adjourn

The final motion occurred at 6:43 p.m.

Motion: Keranen/second Byrns to adjourn at 6:43 p.m. Carried on roll call vote, all voting yes.

Respectfully submitted,



Del Rajala, Chair

Brad Dakota, Secretary

Prepared by Kate Beer
KB/jh