

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG  
BOARD OF HEALTH  
MINUTES  
November 17, 2021  
7:00pm Virtual Meeting  
Phone Number: 1 -646- 558- 8656  
Conference Code: 507843  
Via Zoom:**

<https://zoom.us/j/94234059374?pwd=QjhOKzQySXhkQ3RiQ3VPY2swektvUT09>

**Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 7:10pm.

**President's Statement**

Under the provisions of N.J.S.A 10:4-6 et seq., notice of time and place of this meeting has been posted and sent to the official newspapers.

**Roll Call**

**Present:** Bruce Ruck (President), Julia Gunther (Vice President), Joel S. Cohen, Diana Logan, Francesca Escaleira, Meghana Anandarangam, Charlene Vergilio, Kimberly Brown.

**Absent:** Fran Ellis

**Also present:** Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission, Health Officer Kevin Sumner (on call) with REHS Robyn Key and Council Liaison Ronald Jubin.

Bruce Ruck welcomed new committee member Dr. Joel S. Cohen and new secretary Dámaris Quiñones-Gray. He asked members to introduce themselves.

Kevin Sumner stated that he was at the Annual State Health Officers' meeting in Atlantic City at present time and was not able to attend the whole meeting, but Robyn Key of the Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission would have information regarding the BOH Budget for 2022 and should be able to answer Board members' questions (if any). Bruce Ruck changed order of the meeting to discuss the budget while Kevin Sumner was still available.

**New Business**

2022 Board of Health Budget – Bruce Ruck inquired if Robyn Key would be going over the budget or if the Board members will be reviewing it to discuss at next meeting. Kevin assured him that Robyn Key had all his recommendations and that the budget had to be voted on at this meeting.

Kevin Sumner stated that his recommendation is to leave everything the way it is with no increases, with the exception of the Commission line. He also stated that it is difficult to budget with COVID, not knowing what the future will bring. Kevin also stated that the Board is spending less dollars because less activities are being held due to COVID-19 and in time things can change.

Bruce Ruck informed the BOH that the budget was able to be maintained without significant increases due to most COVID expenses being offset by various Federal and State grants. Kevin Sumner also explained last year's budget increase was due to an additional Health Inspector that was serving Watchung and Green Brook.

Bruce Ruck wanted to re-iterate that the Watchung Board of Health is a member of the Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission, which consists of various towns which are serviced by the Commission and towns share in the expense of the Commission's operation.

Kevin Sumner explained that Watchung is a member of the Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission which is a separate governmental unit with the sole purpose of providing public health services and it is not a contractual relationship, so the Budget is approved by the Commission, with consensus from the members. Kevin Sumner stated that over the years, the Commission has tried to keep budget increases to 2% (at least as much as possible) and that the current inflation rate based on cost of living and consumer price index is roughly at 5½%. He continued explaining these calculations ultimately lead to the total budget which is then shared across the four towns of the Commission and is based on population and workload determination. He continued that due to Watchung's number of septic systems and wells the Commission spends more time working in Watchung.

Ronald Jubin spoke regarding cannabis and suggested that the Board look into a future plan and budget for creating educational materials and finding ways to educate residents on potency of product use and sales. Kevin Sumner responded that there is a line in the budget for training materials that can be utilized for the purpose of distributing information on use and sale of cannabis products.

A motion to adopt the 2022 Board of Health Budget as presented was made by Bruce Ruck (President), seconded by Julia Gunther (Vice President) and adopted by the following votes:

**Yes:** Bruce Ruck (President), Julia Gunther (Vice President), Joel S. Cohen, Diana Logan, Francesca Escalera, Meghana Anandarangam, Charlene Vergilio, Kimberly Brown.

Absent: Francis Ellis

Bruce Ruck inquired about the Health Officer's Report of what has transpired for this past year. Kevin Sumner informed that he will provide this report at next meeting.

Kevin Sumner left the meeting at 7:29pm.

### **Consent Agenda**

A motion to approve the minutes for the September 22, 2021 meeting was made by Diana Logan and seconded by Francesca Escalera and adopted by the following votes:

**Yes:** Bruce Ruck (President), Julia Gunther (Vice President), Joel S. Cohen, Diana Logan, and Meghana Anandarangam. Kimberly Brown

**Abstain:** Joel S. Cohen, Francesca Escalera Charlene Vergilio and

**Absent:** Francis Ellis

## **Old Business**

### **COVID-19 Update**

Bruce Ruck stated that many Executive Orders have been lifted in terms of COVID-19. He informed that a vaccination program for children 5 years and up has been offered in the borough's schools. Bruce said that he was informed of slots being filled very quickly and the program was very successful. He also stated that there are no longer restrictions on walking around the lake and masks are no longer required. He also indicated that there are no real concerns with slight uptick in the numbers, but there is concern with the Holidays that the numbers may increase. He also mentioned that no travel restrictions nor quarantines are required in the State.

Joel Cohen commented on the increase of break-through cases. He questioned if they are due to testing or actual people in the hospital with significant symptoms?

Bruce Ruck asked Charlene Vergilio regarding the JFK Hospital situation in Edison. She shared that today was the first down-trending day that number of discharges were more than number of admissions. She stated that there are less than 10% Covid cases, mostly unvaccinated but many break-through cases as well. She notes that break-through increases may be of those who were vaccinated in the first wave of available vaccines such as care workers, nursing facilities, and the elderly. Joel Cohen asked if these were persons that did not receive the booster shot yet. She replied that it was a mix of cases.

Bruce Ruck also inquired with Julia Gunther about Summit Medical Pediatrics. She responded that it's very labile, some weeks up and other weeks down. She continued that she is seeing an increase in Flu cases which is early for this season.

Bruce Ruck suggested that the BOH continue to urge testing, booster shots, masking when necessary and good hygiene.

Robyn Key brought up an inquiry Bruce had made as to obtaining proof of vaccination on line. Bruce Ruck explained that residents can download to cellphones an app called the DOCKET app where you can obtain your COVID vaccine records. He also provided information regarding NJIIS system. He instructed to go to the NJ COVID – hub and click on "I LOST MY CARD" to obtain the online record.

Robyn Key stated that there was an overwhelming response to the Childcare Clinics and available slots continue to fill up rapidly. She concluded that the program will be re-occurring.

### **New Business (continued)**

Watchung Walks – Bruce Ruck started conversation on what the Board can do to promote health and proposed a Watchung Walks incentive to encourage residents to walk around the lake with other residents two nights a week at 7pm. He said no registration would be needed. He said that the benefit would be several-fold – (1) health (2) community – to establish friendliness, meet your neighbor, that all are welcomed to walk and talk to get to know each other. (3) honor system – once 50 miles or more is completed, participants would receive a Watchung Walk t-shirt. Bruce Ruck requested committee members suggestions and comments and reminded the committee that this is still a work in progress.

Kimberly Brown commended Bruce for the idea and offered to help in any way. She left the meeting at 7:49pm.

Ronald Jubin stated that the largest part of health is prevention. He stated that most persons

affected by COVID were those in poor health. He also updated the committee regarding the Mayor's Wellness Campaign. He wanted to re-initiate the Borough's inclusion to the Mayor's program. He shared that he attended a meeting with the WIDER committee (Watchung Inclusive Diversity Equality and Respect) and the community group call the Watchung IDEA (Inclusion Diversity Equality and Advancement) which also want to get on board to bring together the community to promote good health. He also asked the Board of Health to create a survey and a list of activities that can be done throughout next year. He asked Robyn Key to provide a vision/mission packet to new members.

Bruce Ruck suggested to bring someone from the Recreation committee to assist in the planning of future community activities and events.

Bruce Ruck mentioned the term expiration dates of the Board members and asked that members reach out to the Mayor and inform him if they are interested to be re-appointed to another term. Dámaris was directed to send application for appointment to the members of the Board.

Bruce Ruck also informed the Board that the Council will resume in-person meetings and if there is no objection, he recommends that the BOH continue the virtual form of meeting. No one opposed.

Ronald Jubin suggested at least one in-person meeting throughout the year in the Council Chamber.

#### **Public Portion**

No Public Present.

#### **Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:09pm was make by Charlene Vergilio and seconded by Diana Logan.

The next scheduled Board of Health meeting will be held on January 19,2022 at 7:00 pm. virtually at: <https://zoom.us/j/94234059374?pwd=QjhOKzQySXhkQ3RiQ3VPY2swektvUT09>.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dámaris Quiñones-Gray

Approved: 1/19/2022