

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 10, 2021**

ATTENDANCE: Jorge Cruz, Co-chair; Marcus Brown, Michael DeFilippo, Michelle Lyons, Maria Pereira, Samia Suliman

OTHERS: Council Member(s): D. Taylor-Moye, M. McCarthy, M. Valle, R. Roman-Christy, E. Newton, Council President A. Nieves, M. McBride-Lee & J. Herron; S. Appleby, Director, Emergency Operations Center; T. Papa, Acting Deputy Director, Health Department; T. Gaudett, Aide to the Mayor; State Senator M. Moore; Barbara, Ericka Castillo, iPhone, Johanna, Bob W, 203-414-0712; 203-275-6420; 203-864-7652

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Cruz called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. A quorum was present.

Co-chair Cruz said Co-chair Silva would not be attending the meeting due to another obligation.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES OF JANUARY 13, 2021
(Regular Meeting).

Council Member Pereira said that Council Member Brown was listed in the Others as well as being in Attendance. Unless he has a twin, he should only be listed as a Committee Member.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER PEREIRA MOVED TO APPROVE THE AMEND THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 13, 2021 TO REMOVE THE DUPLICATE LISTING FOR COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN IN THE OTHER ATTENDANCE CATEGORY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER SULIMAN SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO AMEND THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 13, 2021 PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER PEREIRA MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 13, 2021 AS AMENDED.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER LYONS SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 13, 2021 AS AMENDED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Informational Session with Mr. Scott Appleby, Director, Emergency Operations Center and Ms. Tammy Papa Acting Deputy Director, Health Department to discuss the availability of COVID vaccines for senior residents living in senior buildings.

Council Member Cruz thanked Mr. Appleby and Ms. Papa for their attendance at the meeting despite the snow and COVID-19.

Ms. Papa said that there was a presentation that was sent to the Committee members. Council Member Pereira said that they had received the presentation earlier but received a revision she received at 3:05 p.m.

Mr. Appleby said that this had been the longest EOC activation in history. He said they started planning for vaccines long before it was available. This is a national strategy.

He then narrated the beginning of the PowerPoint presentation.

Ms. Papa noted that Phase 1 individuals would be eligible for the vaccine throughout the process. She said that they would be starting vaccinations for 64 to 74 on February 12, 2021 and continued to give an overview of the PowerPoint presentation.

Mr. Appleby said that they had met with the State the previous evening. He said that if the City had been consistently receiving 500 doses of the vaccine and it would take 17 weeks to inoculate all the seniors 65 or older. The plan is not customizable. If the City receives 3,500 doses, they could inoculate every senior in five weeks. However, Mr. Appleby pointed out that with VAMS, someone who was not a Bridgeport resident could come to Bridgeport for their inoculation.

Ms. Papa said that the VAMS system has deterred a number of seniors for a variety of reasons such as the seniors not having the technology, the seniors not being able to navigate the system or possibly not having family support. She spoke about how they were working on a solution for the issue.

Council Member Pereira said that the State site had the information from February 3rd. She added that there were other cities that received more doses. She noted that Mr. Mario Testa and Mr. Mike Giannotti had been escorted in for their vaccines and they were not 75. She also mentioned that when she was at the vaccination distribution center, there was only 1 person there.

Ms. Papa said that the City had been given 1,000 doses of the vaccine and the State had told them that if they could not distribute it to the 75 and older population, it would be acceptable to give the vaccine to those 65 and older. She said that they were only getting feedback from about 50% of the population. They have been encouraging people to put their testimonies on a video so that people will see them. When the vaccine clinic opened, all the vaccine stations were staffed and there were people waiting.

Council Member Lyons asked about Hollander House. Ms. Papa said that Marie Heller had been making calls to all the senior housing complexes. Ms. Papa said that she could not speak directly about Hollander House, but she would check on this and get back to Council Member Lyons.

Mr. Appleby said that when there is no response from the senior complexes, they continue to work on reaching out to them.

Council Member Cruz stated that when people are speaking, they should avoid using the individual's names due to the HIPPA regulations.

Council Member McBride-Lee said she was uneasy with the pandemic under way, the City does not have a Health Director. She asked if Ms. Papa or Mr. Appleby knew if anyone had been selected for Health Director. She said that she was disappointed that the Mayor had not filled the position with someone who had medical experience.

Mr. Appleby said that the administration would be handling the interviews for a Health Director. He said that one of the Yale New Haven employed at Bridgeport Hospital is overseeing this program. The City is lockstep with the State of Connecticut and is in constant communication with the State Health Department, along with many of the health clinic experts. They are following the CDC guidelines. Having a Health Director would be nice, but there is oversight from medical professions.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that she thought that someone from the medical profession should have been speaking to the Committee at this meeting.

Council Member Newton asked if the CVS or a Rite Aid location in the urban areas that would be giving the vaccine. Ms. Papa said that one CVS pharmacy on 1875 Boston Ave along with three Walgreens would be opening for vaccines on February 12th.

Council Member Newton suggested that the next meeting should be with the Bridgeport legislative delegation because the delegation really dropped the ball on this.

Council Member Cruz said that he felt he should get as much information as possible to answer his constituent's questions.

Council Member Taylor-Moye asked how they were getting all the information out to those families with bed-ridden individuals that are not in nursing homes or other medical facilities. Council Member Taylor-Moye said that she knew people who had taken the first vaccine but were not planning on taking the second shot.

Ms. Papa said that they had been taking phone numbers and making a list of those individuals who were house bound. They will be reaching out with more information about getting vaccines from the mobile units. She said that they were hopeful that now that the hospitals were working on some of the larger groups.

Ms. Papa said that with the Moderna vaccine, it only gives about 50% protection with only the first dose. The individuals need that second dose to bring the protection rate up to over 90%.

Council Member Herron asked that next time they discuss COVID, they need to have some of the medical experts available. The minority population is afraid of these vaccines.

Ms. Papa said that the doctor has made herself available to answer questions as would the clinic staff.

Council Member Valle said that on January 30th, she had seen the work being done and Ms. Papa may not have a medical degree but was doing a phenomenal job. She described what she had witnessed when she was at the clinic.

Council Member Valle said that she had heard that the State delegation had not done their job. Council Member Valle said that she had spoken with a State Senator Moore and Council Member Valle told Senator Moore that Ms. Papa was very efficient. The biggest problem is the VAMS system, which is too complex for many of the non-computer savvy seniors. She thanked Ms. Papa for her wonderful work with the Bridgeport residents.

Council Member Cruz said that he would like to take a vote regarding allowing State Senator Moore to address the Committee.

Ms. Papa said that she just wanted to get the Bridgeport residents vaccinated. It has been a team effort on all fronts, including the senior center staffs, and other volunteers. She said that she was pleased to hear that there were five sheets of individuals who were interested in the vaccinations. There were a few pockets of time where there were lags in the vaccine administration, but 280 doses were administered earlier in the day.

Council Member Pereira said that she had heard Mr. Appleby and Ms. Papa talk about the vaccine. She said that Bridgeport was lagging behind Hartford and New Haven.

She noted that the State law states that a Health Director must have a medical degree or degree in Public Health, but Ms. Papa does not have that. This is not okay.

Council Member Pereira said that many of the seniors in the senior housing were house bound and the other seniors often cannot walk to the location where the mobile unit is stationed. She said that there were four courts in a nearby senior housing, but the unit will only be located in one court. Many of the residents will not be able to walk to the unit and would have to be driven there.

Mr. Appleby said that they heard the percentage and the data. Bridgeport has the highest number of 75 years and older, but Bridgeport is right there with the larger cities in terms of administering to the seniors based on the number of doses they have been given by the State. He added that Bridgeport started out a week after the other cities.

Ms. Papa said that she did not have an MPH and never claimed to have one. However, Terron Jones, who is on the team, does have one. The State is aware that she does not have an MPH. She said that Dr. Didi was available to supervise.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER PEREIRA MOVED TO ALLOW STATE SENATOR MARILYN MOORE TO ADDRESS THE COMMITTEE AT THE CONCLUSION OF COUNCIL PRESIDENT NIEVES' REMARKS.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER LYONS SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Council President Nieves said that she would like to address the fact that Stamford started before Bridgeport. She said that this was one of the issues about health care inequality because they started in the southern portion of the state rather than the largest cities.

Council President Nieves pointed out that when they got 2,100 doses, it actually means that there were 2,100 doses that had to be distributed between clinics like Southwest or Optimus, the hospitals and the City. The VAMS system had amplified the health inequities in the State. Council President Nieves said that she felt that the City was moving forward with the number of vaccines and adapting to the various challenges. Once a vial is opened, it cannot be refrigerated again.

Council Member Cruz said that he had been concerned about the fact that they did not have a Health Director but felt Ms. Papa was doing a wonderful job along with the teams. His main concern was getting information for his constituents.

State Senator Moore thanked everyone for allowing her to address the Committee. She said that this was not a criticism of those who were working as hard as possible. However, she had told them that they do not know what they do not know when they do not have a Public Health background.

She said that when they are bringing out the message, but it was critical to have a Master's or Doctorate in Public Health. She said that while the State requires a MPH, it does not say what happens if one does not have a degree. She will be drafting legislation about this. There should be a plan, but neither the State nor the City were prepared. She said that she had not stopped working on this issue. After speaking with Mr. Appleby and Ms. Papa, she was very concerned about what is happening in Bridgeport. It seems like people have turned their backs on Bridgeport. Her letter to the Health Commissioner will be published in the Connecticut Post, and also on her Facebook page.

Senator Moore said that she was concerned about the fact that Dr. Didi who was aligned with Yale was actually involved in the problem since their network includes Greenwich and other communities. Their testing was flawed and incorrect.

Senator Moore said that Bridgeport which is 70% black, Puerto Rican, Latino or other people of color should be first, not last. These populations illustrate the health care inequalities since many of the people of color have co-morbidities.

She said that Council Member Newton would have to apologize to her because she has been working very hard on this. When talking to the State Health Commissioner, she told him that they were trying to kill the Bridgeport residents.

Council Member Brown asked if any member of the delegation had reached out to them regarding whether this was an effective roll out. Ms. Papa said that they had spoken

Council Member Brown said that the State statute requires the Director of Health should have an MPH, but Ms. Papa is the Deputy Director of Health. He said that they need to do a national search and the candidate should be willing to move to Bridgeport. This will take time. He said that Ms. Papa had been doing a great job managing this.

Senator Moore said that this was not an attack against Ms. Papa. She said that Mr. Appleby had mentioned the applications were going out. She felt that Bridgeport was not the only city without a Health Director.

Council Member Newton said that it was not right to say that the urban areas were not doing the job properly and ignore the fact they did not have the tools. While they do need a Health Director, they can't wait for that lengthy process because people are sick and dying. If Bridgeport got the doses that they needed, the City would have done their job. However, the State is running the show and did not tell Bridgeport that the vaccines were open for whoever gets an appointment rather than just Bridgeport residents. He said that he appreciates what Senator Moore has done, but the blame belongs to the State not doing their job.

Council Member McBride-Lee that there was no doubt in her mind that Ms. Papa, who works with the children every day, was working hard. She pointed out that her question was to Mr. Appleby about where the Health Director process was. When the public is being given information, it should be from someone with medical degrees.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that it is important for the Council to know what the State delegation was doing because they simply don't know. All the delegation members should be at the meeting to share the information with the Committee.

Ms. Papa said that Mr. Appleby's comment was about the City was reviewing Health Consultants, not a Health Director. This will be helping to support the staff.

Council Member Cruz said that he was not happy with this issue because it means that they would delay the Health Director. He said that the Contracts Committee would be discussing this. He reminded everyone that this was about getting information for their constituents.

Council Member Pereira stated that Ms. Papa was never approved as a Health Director. They only have 60 days to fill the position, and right now there are only 45 days left.

Senator Moore said that she would recommend doing robo-calls from Bridgeport Hospital. She is concerned about those who were not living in congregant settings and suggested that they use the mail because people will not open the door to those they don't know. They can use the CARES dollars to contact those in Bridgeport.

Council Member Herron said that she heard that they were looking for a Health Consultant. She suggested that they call Tina Baptista, who worked for the City and was part of COVID-1. Council Member Pereira agreed.

Council Member Taylor-Moye said that there were good questions and comments and was happy to hear Senator Moore's comments about reaching out to those who are not living in congregant housing. However, it is about everyone –we all – get the information to everyone, not just their constituents. People need to wear masks because there will be no way to tell others who has been vaccinated or who has not. It is time to work together.

Council Member Herron said that there was a lot of information given and she would like to have the emails for the talks. Mr. Appleby and Ms. Papa and their teams have been doing a fantastic job regardless of what the administration has or has not done. Council Member Herron has been at the Central site and seen how smoothly the system was running.

Council Member Herron said that her mother was at risk and lives with her. Council Member Herron said that she was the one who brought up the issue of a mobile unit for those who were house bound. She reiterated that Mr. Appleby and Ms. Papa and their teams have been doing a fantastic job.

Council Member Cruz said that the seniors get worried and they should continue to work on the disparity that exists right now. He asked for information about where the mobile units would be.

Council Member Pereira said that she would like the lists of senior housing that were not responding to the outreach. Council Member Cruz said that they do want numbers of those who had been vaccinated.

Council Member Taylor-Moye asked about the Johnson and Johnson vaccine that was expected to be released. Ms. Papa said that they do not know yet and it was up to the State to decide when they receive it.

Council Member Herron said she had Ms. Papa if they could get a demographic chart including gender and ethnicity if possible. Mr. Appleby said that when they are using the EOC system, they can do it, but the Federal program has not been very reliable. Ms. Papa said that they were trying to get the information and will only be able to give them information that has been released.

Senator Moore said that she could only email those who wished to receive her email newsletter. They can go to her website to sign up. The delegation has not met with the Council to discuss this. There is no one who is a liaison between the delegation and the Council. She encouraged Ms. Papa to keep doing what she was doing to help the residents of Bridgeport.

Council Member Cruz thanked Mr. Appleby and Ms. Papa for their time.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER PEREIRA MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services

City of Bridgeport
Education and Social Services
Regular Meeting
February 10, 2021