**Porter County Board of Health**

Tuesday July 9, 2020

Commissioners Chambers

**In Attendance:** Health Officer Dr. Maria Stamp, Attorney Dave Hollenbeck, Suzanne Phelps, Kathy Lemmon, Dr. Patrick Fleming , Dr. Derek Gasper, Donna Werner, Elizabeth Forbes and Administrator Letty Zepeda.

**Not in Attendance:** Chairman Martin Moeller

Elizabeth Forbes called the meeting to order and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

A motion to accept the minutes of the June 2, 2020 meeting was made by Suzanne Phelps and seconded by Kathy Lemmon. All were in favor. Motion carried.

**Announcements:**

Next meeting is scheduled for August 4, 2020.

**New business:**

**Septic Appeal –** involved a lot inBeverly Shores. In attendance are John McQuestion, soil scientist and Jordan Snittjer, Architect working with the project. Concern is about an incorporated lot that needs 10,000 square feet with a water indicator of at least 60 inches. Total acreages is 27,007 square feet. The useable septic is 5,705 square feet, which is less than the 10,000 square feet required. Mr. Snittjer who is representing the owner, Susan Thomas, is applying for a lot size variance for the property. There are no wetlands on the property. The design plan is for a one-bedroom home. There is a 600 square foot minimum requirement for septic systems. The system will be oversized for the size of the home. There is an area available for a move over septic, should the system fail. Borings were done on the move over area and the ground is filled with muck. There is an issue with the contour of the property. The dune sand can be regraded, if there is no water indicator. When grading the soil down, it would bring the system closer to the water table. Additional water borings would be required when they replace the system. Site plan shows where there is room for a primary septic field and a secondary field. System recommended is a Presby system. The system will still be 600 square feet of area. Dan Boyd of the Health Department, expressed some reservations. He stated that this is half of what we normally allow, and that the move over area is questionable. He stated that dune areas are complicated to work with. He stated that the system itself is okay, but that there are concerns about where the secondary field would go. Dan stated that soil bearings #4, #5 & #6 look good. He said that it will take roughly 3 ½ feet of soil from area to grade. Board of Health member Donna Werner expressed concern with the drainage. She stated that in the past, the Board of Health turned down a builder with a similar issue. She stated that we need to be consistent as much as possible and not set precedence for smaller lot sizes. This would not need a perimeter drain given the water indicators and the depth. The Board of Health felt that we do not have enough data to make a decision. Mr. McQuestion asked if deeper borings were done and still no water table, would the Board feel more comfortable about making a decision. John further stated that he can do deeper water borings, if this is will aide in making a decision. The concern is if there are wetlands close to the property that may be affected. Lot will also need a variance from Beverly Shores. Jordan provided the board with the property plans. Motion from Donna Werner to table the motion was made, seconded by Suzanne Phelps. All in favor. Motion carried.

**COVID-19 update**: Dr. Stamp provided an update, stating that since our last board meeting we have added 265 COVID cases. The county went from 570 to 755. Our numbers have climbed significantly over the past month. The numbers are climbing at about the same rate as the two months prior however, our numbers that were going down in the beginning of June are no longer going down. Dr. Stamp looked at our numbers today with Jess our lead Epi nurse. Over the past week, half of our new cases have been in the 20 to 30 age group. Dr. Stamp stated that young people are now becoming infected. She further stated that the State of Indiana’s reopening plan was put on pause, due to the increase in cases. Dr. Stamp sent a letter to Dr. Box, State of Indiana Health Commissioner and the Governor, stating her recommendations on bars, that they not be allowed to open. Dr. Stamps stated that we do not need to have gatherings any bigger than they are. Dr. Box stated that she had heard her concerns, and completely understood. Dr. Stamp stated that our numbers have been down but may be due to testing not having been done the past couple of days. However, testing was being done over the Fourth of July weekend, so our numbers should go back up by the end of this week. State Department of Health launched a #maskuphoosiers initiative in which you can hold a sign and wear a mask, take a picture then post to the website in support of the initiative. She encouraged all to get involved. Dr. Stamp also stated that some counties have made ordinances mandating mask wearing when in public. Dr. Stamp has made the decision for the time being not to do that, as it is difficult to enforce and it does not allow for grace for those who cannot tolerate a mask. She stated that she is not taking this off the table at this time. The closest counties to us that have implemented this mandate are St. Joseph and Elkhart. Dr. Stamp stated that we have not had a death in Porter County since June 20, 2020 and are still at 37 deaths. We have had two admissions into the hospital in the last two weeks. There are currently 4 Porter County residents that are hospitalized and 1 is in the ICU. The Health Department is looking into the younger people to see where they were/are being infected. Would like to piece together where the risk was the greatest. Concern is that the young people getting infected are now bringing it home to their families and to work.

Dr. Stamp stated that there are 6 weeks until back to school. State Health Department has released guidelines along with the Department of Education. Each district has to do what is best for their system and each school. Schools are all different and each student is a little bit different. That is why there are guidelines and not mandates. The wearing masks are recommended by both the state plan, and the CDC. Dr. Gasper expressed concern about the schools opening. He expressed concern and stated that the health department should allow them to make those decisions. He stated that they do not understand viruses and timeline. Mandating masks is difficult, it increases confrontation, but it does help save lives. Dr. Stamp stated that she and the Health Department staff have met with the school superintendents. The health department has implemented two groups, one that concentrates on contact tracing for both citizens and county employees, and the 2nd group works on “school openings and school events”, guiding the superintendents by providing guidance from the CDC, ISDH and Department of Education as well as events. Each group consists of 4 nurses. Dr. Stamp stated that there are 34 pages of guidance and it is complicated. She also stated that there are also 30 pages of guidance for long-term care facilities. We divided our nurses into two areas long-term facilities and schools. We spoke to all Superintendents about having similar guidelines. They spoke about mask wear, if students all facing forward working quietly at their desks, not on a test, the risk of spreading COVID is very small. Masks are hard to wear for 8 hours . The students need breaks. As soon as collaborative work or the teacher comes around the masks go on. If they have to move from class to class, masks would be required. They are working out lunch plans, whether to eat in the classroom and have food delivered to students. Dr. Stamp stated that the superintendents have put a lot of thought into their plans. She mentioned that when using Lab tables for problem based learning, four people working together on a project cannot be done, unless plexi glass is used to separate the students and they also wear masks. They are working hard to minimize the risk without making life particularly uncomfortable for the kids, without increasing the risk. After the meeting, Dr. Stamp was pulled aside by the principal of the SELF school who stated that she cannot mandate masks for those students. Some of the kids need extra assistance. Unfortunately, some might not be able to return to school due to the risk involved. Dr. Stamp informed the Board that PPE status at the hospital and at the health department is good. She further stated that a lot of clinics are now able to get PPE from their vendors again. John Pisowicz, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator has been encouraging the various facilities to reach out to their vendors and start securing extra supplies, while it is available. John also provided them with information on washable gowns and reusable masks. Schools are encouraging the students to bring their own masks, but if they forget, one will be provided by the school. Board Member Suzanne Phelps and Dr. Gasper expressed concern and stated that they would feel more comfortable if masks were required for all students and that adults including principals and teachers need to wear masks and set the example for the kids. They asked, “What can we do to strongly encourage mask wearing without mandating it?”

Dr. Stamp further stated that she and Connie visited Kouts Clinic, due to a concern from a number of different businesses that received antibody tests and were given unclear or conflicting advice on results. Over half of tests were positive. It was stated that a police officer tested positive and the rest of the employees went and the majority also tested positive. They were then retested at a different test site and all were negative. We provided information to give to patients so they have a clear understanding of the test options. Some patients want the rapid tests, so we gave information about the antibody tests. Since than Kathy from the Kouts Clinic has only been doing nasal swabs. She is looking at rapid PCR tests. Dr. Stamp stated that we will have to look at these more closely if she decides to use them. Antibody tests are included with our positive test results in Indiana.

The State the Department of Health reached out to all the counties regarding community testing. The state had contracted with Optum to do the testing and they have been at the Valparaiso Armory. The testing is on a “month to month” contract. The State would like to change the testing from Optum to the local health departments. If the health department does not want to take this on, they will reach out to other clinics (North Shore and Healthlink). Dr. Stamp stated that due to the size of our county, we would be eligible for two test sites. The State will provide training, test kits, PPE, carrier service and the labs, as well as computer interface and the test result reporting. The health department in return will commit to provide testing for all from September through June of 2021. The State requires that we run each clinic for 5 days per week and offer weekend and evening hours. Some money does come with that - $50,000 per test site. The health department needs to respond by July 10 if we want to pursue the task. The state asks that we provide a plan on how that is to be accomplished by July 23, 2020. At this time, we are asking for the board’s approval to respond. The health department will need to identify testing sites. There will not be any additional revenue for this. Tests will be done free of charge. We are not sure if they will bill insurance. They are hoping to encourage local health departments to do other programs with this, such as immunizations, that the PCHD is already doing. One of the advantages of testing would be that we would be ready when and if a second wave comes, or if we have a surge in numbers we will have a plan in place. Dr. Stamp also stated that one of the issues with the Armory is that they have not been able to test when the temperatures are high due to the heat. COVID tests can also be done at the hospital with a doctor’s order. A motion to approve that the PCHD respond to the state that they are willing to take on the task of testing was made by Dr. Fleming and seconded by Dr. Gasper. All in favor. Motion carries.

Attorney Hollenbeck and Dan will be working on current septic system approval process. Dan stated that he would like to implement an operation and maintenance permit, something we have not been doing, but La Porte County is already doing. Dan explained that some systems need to be monitored periodically, which is an issue that came up with a property in Ogden Dunes. Septic systems need to be 200 feet from the high water mark of Lake Michigan. If it cannot be over 200 feet you would have to put in an aerobic treatment unit, which is a standalone tank that goes in after the septic tank. The property owner needs to have a yearly operation and maintenance agreement with a contractor that will inspect that the blower and aerator are working properly. The property with the treatment unit can be 50 feet from high water mark. An operation and maintenance permit needs to be developed. There would be a fee associated with this every time it renews, depending on the system it may be every 3 or 5 years. La Porte County used to do the permits for only septics with this component and now do it on all systems.

We are also looking at requiring a point of sale inspection. La Porte did an ordinance a few years ago. If you have a septic system, you are required to have IOWPA certified inspector inspect the system before the point of sale. Right now, we don’t have an ordinance for this. We do recommend that you get an inspection at point of sale and recommend that they are IOWPA certified. State is also looking at doing an ordinance. There are some realtors that work with both La Porte and Porter County, and because of this, we starting to get more inspection requests. This would help home buyers when purchasing the home since the septic system isn’t always checked. This will reduce the chances of having to replace the septic system unexpectedly a few months after purchasing the home. We would require that when there is a sale of property that the systems be inspected. We will bring this back to the Board for approval, once we have the ordinances and the inspection forms completed. The cost for the inspections would be a few hundred dollars. An exact price is not known at this time.

A motion was made to accept the May claims by Dr. Fleming and seconded by Kathy Lemmon. All were in favor. Motion carried.

Administrator Zepeda welcomed and thanked County Council members Sylvia Graham and Gregory Simms for attending the Board of Health meeting. She informed them that they are welcomed any time. She then asked them if they had questions and/or concerns about what was discussed at the meeting at which time Council Member Sylvia Graham stated that she was there to hear more about the testing that was being proposed. She wanted to know how this was being funded, and whether the PCHD was planning on asking the Council for financial assistance. Attorney Hollenbeck stated that what the Health Department may need from them is approval to hire outside staff to run the operation, if they are unable to use current health department staff. Council man Greg Sims wanted clarification on what the Health Department does, which is why he was there, to better understand so that when issues arise in the future, he is better informed on how to respond. He stated that we all want to do the right thing, which is to keep the residents of the county healthy and safe!

A motion to adjourn made by Dr. Patrick Fleming and seconded by Suzanne Phelps. All were in favor. Motion carried.