

BOARD OF HEALTH COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
August 25, 2022, 6:00 PM
Conducted Remotely

Commissioners Present: Noel Chavez (Chair), Judy Carter, Suzanne Feeney, Jennifer Fritz, Abigail Silva
Commissioners Excused: Susan Buchanan (Trustee Liaison)
Staff Present: Vanessa de la Mora, Cindy Hansen, Sara Semelka

Call to order. Chair Chavez called the meeting to order at 6:10 pm.

Agenda approval. Commissioner Silva moved to approve the agenda as presented; seconded by Commissioner Carter. All commissioners present voted in favor.

Minutes approval. Commissioner Silva noted two minor errors and moved to approve the minutes of the July 21, 2022 meeting as corrected; seconded by Commissioner Carter. All commissioners present voted in favor.

Public comment. A public comment is attached at the end of these minutes.

Old Business:

IPLAN planning. Ms. Semelka reported that we are towards the end of our IPLAN process, which we do every five years and is required to be a state-certified as a health department. It also serves as a community health plan here in Oak Park and River Forest. We are formulating goals and strategies, which is the last part before we finish the document and move onto the action cycle.

We did our survey to collect data and we've been holding meetings and workgroups to narrow things down into four priority areas—mental health, gun violence, the natural and built environment, and access to care. We are working on a one-pager for each phase that will be on our website.

We are working with our consultant Leading Healthy Futures to develop a list of final recommendations and present that to leadership of all of the core team members, including the Village Board of Trustees. We will present the IPLAN to this commission at our next meeting on September 29. The Commission will then need to submit a letter of approval signed by Chair Chavez.

Staffing update. Ms. Semelka announced that a new animal control officer starts September 12. We are still hiring for an emergency preparedness & response coordinator and a sanitarian.

Open positions on the commission. Chair Chavez reported that Clerk Waters is working to schedule interviews for potential commissioners with the community engagement group. Chair Chavez asked if we have yet received a formal resignation from former commissioner Wynne Lacey. Ms. Hansen confirmed that Clerk Waters has the email that Ms. Lacey had sent to Cindy. Chair Chavez encouraged commissioners to attend the Village thank you reception tomorrow.

COVID and MPV vaccinations and testing. Ms. Semelka reported that our testing coordinator is doing testing for the public on Tuesday evenings at Cheney Mansion, Wednesday mornings at the Firehouse, and Saturdays at the Farmers' Market. Commissioner Silva asked how many people are

getting tested. Ms. Semelka will ask for that data and share it with the commissioners. We think more people are testing at home now and not needing to test in public.

Our COVID-19 vaccination clinics are happening Tuesday evenings at Cheney Mansion. We're vaccinating 75-150 kids each week. Commissioner Feeney asked about monkeypox (MPV). Ms. Semelka said we want eligible people to get the MPV vaccine. We have an emerging communicable diseases page on the [Village website](#) and we are including MPV updates in the weekly Village Manager's report and the weekly E-News to encourage residents to contact the health department and we will screen them for eligibility and get people connected with providers. We're working with Oak Park Area Lesbian and Gay Association (OPALGA) to get the message in their newsletter.

Local schools tobacco policy coalition work. Ms. Semelka introduced Ms. De La Mora who is managing this grant. The IDPH Illinois Tobacco Free Communities Grant covers activities around the Smoke Free Illinois Act enforcement and enhancements we can do around youth tobacco policy in Oak Park schools and having the Catch My Breath curriculum taught in schools. This quarter, Ms. De La Mora will be researching current policies with the schools. If we determine changes should be made, we would assemble a coalition to present to the proposed changes to the school boards. Ms. Semelka will also start working to build a coalition list and key stakeholder list. The next quarter would be meeting with coalition members.

Chair Chavez asked if any outcome is specified. Ms. Semelka responded that if policies are changed, we would submit those to IDPH, though it is not a requirement as policy changes takes time and are determined by school boards. So we would just continue the work the following grant year. Commissioner Silva asked if any tobacco data was included in the IPLAN survey, which Ms. Semelka confirmed that it was and she will follow up with the consultant to pull that data. Commissioner Fritz suggested school nurses as a good resource. Ms. Semelka agreed and is working on a contact list that she will share with the commissioners.

Food insecurity. Ms. Semelka said our IPLAN survey included a question about food insecurity, and there were some responses of people having that concern. We are requesting the farmers' market manager to become a full-time position. If approved, a goal for that position would be to increase food education and accessibility and how to prepare foods at the Market, in addition to the Link program we already offer.

Commissioner Carter said we have to make it interesting and fun and promote plant-based diets, as the resident voiced early as a public comment. There are farmers' who sell animal products at the Market so we would want to be mindful of that.

Commissioner Silva suggested we market increasing vegetable intake rather than eliminating meat from your diet. Commissioner Carter suggested Meatless Mondays and Commissioner Silva suggested rainbow plates. Ms. Semelka suggested we do something like the Library did where you get a bead for each book you read. Perhaps you can get a bead from the health department for each meatless meal you eat. Chair Chavez

Adjourn. With no new business, Commissioner Silva moved to adjourn; seconded by Commissioner Fritz. All commissioners present voted to adjourn. Chair Chavez adjourned the meeting at 7:12 pm.

Public comment from Ida Hellander, MD

Dear Oak Park Board of Health Members,

My name is Dr. Ida Hellander. I am a retired physician health policy expert and longtime Oak Park resident. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on a topic I only recently learned about - the enormous negative impact of animal agriculture on global warming. Animal agriculture accounts for more greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (51 percent) than all sources of transportation put together (13 percent), and as much as 87 percent of the total if all the deforestation to create grazing land is included. (Once released, CO2 stays in the atmosphere for thousands of years).

The mission of the Board of Health, according to the Village of Oak Park web site, is "...to make recommendations [to the Department of Public Health and the Board of Trustees] ...as it may deem necessary for the ... improvement of public health and for the prevention...of disease."

In Oak Park we are very fortunate to have our own Department of Public Health, which is in the process of making some long-range plans.

I am here today to urge that the Board of Health recommend that the Department of Public Health prioritize an urgent, comprehensive plan to educate, inspire, and facilitate the adoption of a climate-friendly plant-based diet by the 53,000 residents of our community, and to implement that plan in such a manner that it may be replicated at scale by other communities statewide and nationally, so that we may increase the chance to keep global warming below the 1.5 degree Celsius change beyond which uncontrollable feedback effects will magnify warming.

While the scientific consensus on animal agriculture being a major source of greenhouse gas emissions (especially methane) is abundantly clear, the meat and dairy industry hides their impact on climate in the same way the tobacco industry hid their impact on cancer, through misleading advertising, lobbying, and influence over government agencies like the USDA.

As a result, I only recently learned that animal agriculture is the major source of Greenhouse Gases (GHG) and started to wade through UN IPCC reports (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) to figure out how much impact our small village was having on global warming.

1 - Using the latest data from the UN, I calculated that animal consumption by 53,005 Oak Park residents is responsible for 191,475,262 or 191 million pounds of GHG emissions annually, more than twice the weight of all the steel in the John Hancock Building in downtown Chicago (92 million pounds) each and every year.

2 - As we all know, meat, fish and dairy are not necessary for a healthy diet. Indeed, a plant-based diet is much healthier (Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, documentary "They are trying to kill us" about racial health disparities affecting Blacks in the US). A vitamin B12 supplement is the only nutrient necessary to add to a plant-based diet.

3- The UN estimates that the difference in GHG emissions between a vegan diet that also excludes dairy in the US and a diet that includes animal products is 4,902 less pounds of GHG per person per

year. Using this approach, Oak Park could save 259,844,291 or 260 million pounds of GHG emissions by switching their diet to plant-based foods.

4 - However, the actual impact of eliminating demand for farmed and fished animals would be much, much greater, because it would allow some of the land currently used to grow food for farm animals (12 percent of planet's land) and all the land currently used for grazing animals (31 percent of the planet's land) to be rewilded and reforested, using the power of nature to sequester and draw down CO₂, one of the main GHG, from the atmosphere. Related fact: Did you know that cows are by far the major consumers of fish in the world, and that without action fishing populations in the ocean are expected to collapse by 2048?

5- Since you are not an oil, energy, or automobile company you may not have been aware that you have the ability to reduce your own and start influencing residents to reduce their GHG emissions through your diet.

Adopting a plant-based diet to save the planet (and improve one's own health as a byproduct) is a positive and practical message, one of hopefulness in the face of despair over how rapidly the climate is changing and how fossil fuel emissions will continue to rise even with passage of the Inflation Reduction Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on how – unbeknownst to the public - animal agriculture is the leading cause of climate change.

The government of Sweden is creating an international database of studies on how to influence dietary choices. Oak Park should carefully measure the impact of its program.

Additional staff will be needed at the Department of Public Health to undertake this critically urgent work.

Of course, there will need to be transition options for small farmers and ranchers. The handful of giant agribusiness companies already are heavily invested in plant-based alternatives and know what is ahead and how to profit off it.

When you joined the Board of Health, you perhaps didn't know you were going to be called up to save the planet. But these are the times we live in. Hundreds of millions, perhaps billions of people face drought, famine, wildfire, flooding, and forced migration if we continue with the status quo.

I would be happy to take any questions, and highly recommend the position paper of Stanford systems engineer Sailesh Rao, Ph.D. on the science. He is also an excellent speaker and would be happy to join you at a future date.