



WHATCOM COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

JANUARY 5, 2023

Present: Steve Bennett (Chair), Shamika Brooks, Teri Bryant, Barry Buchanan, Sterling Chick, Christine Espina, Therese Horan, Lindsey Karas, Emily O’Connor, Les Seelye, Greg Thompson, Vesla Tonnessen, Leah Wainman

Absent: Christopher Brown, Michael Massanari, Edna Revey

Topic	Discussion/Outcome
Call to order	Steve Bennett presented a land acknowledgement. Roll call of Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) Members.
Approve Minutes	<p>Sterling Chick moved that the minutes from the December PHAB meeting be approved as presented, Barry Buchanan seconded the motion. The board voted and the motion passed. Ayes: 11, Nays: 0, Abstain: 1 (one member arrived after approval of minutes)</p> <p>Steve wanted to honor and express thanks to members who are ending their terms on PHAB – Barry Buchanan (served for nine years) and Les Seelye (served for seven years).</p>
Public Comment	<p>The following people spoke:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Marshall • Natalie Chavez • Name not stated
Health Board/County Council Update	<p>Councilmember Barry Buchanan offered the following Health Board/County Council update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Justice Project is wrapping up the Stakeholder Advisory phase. The draft report is being circulated to members of the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force, as well as the Stakeholder Advisory Committee. Barry also expects it to also come to PHAB members soon. Comments from the public engagement process are being incorporated, with particular outreach done to reach tribal members, people in North county, people of color, people that were formally incarcerated and their families. Recommendations and the report will be presented to Council on February 7. • Yesterday was the formal naming ceremony for the Crisis Stabilization Center which is now known as the Anne Deacon Center for Hope. It was a great event with about fifty people in attendance. Anne was humbled and honored to see this recognition of her work. • Barry is hopeful that attention to things like this will also bring legislative attention to problems we have in the state around competency restoration. There is a workgroup looking at competency restoration and trying to get some equity in that process. • Erika Lautenbach added some additional information about the Anne Deacon Center for Hope for those who may not be familiar with it. The center offers sixteen beds for detox on one side of the building and sixteen beds for people who are in mental health crisis on the other side of the building. It’s been open for almost two years and in that time has consistently been 90% plus occupancy on any given day on both sides of the building. It is a really important asset for our community to divert people from the hospital and the jail who don’t need to be in either of those facilities and just need a short-term therapeutic place to stabilize. The Health Department contracts with Compass Health and Pioneer Human Services to operate the facility. Erika or Perry Mowery are available to talk more about that program for anyone interested.



<p>Health Director/Health Officer Update</p>	<p>Co-Health Officer, Dr. Greg Thompson, presented a brief update, primarily on respiratory infections and healthcare capacity in the county. The slides are appended to these minutes.</p> <p>In response to the report, Sterling noted that some seasons when flu hits early there is a two peak flu season and asked if there was any evidence we would see that during this flu season. Dr. Thompson responded that last time he remembers there being a second significant flu peak was in the 2009-2010 flu season when there were two significantly different strains circulating. That was the year of the H1N1 outbreak. Something like that is certainly possible, but we're not seeing any indication of that thus far. There has been some early data showing a little bit of an uptick in emergency room visits for respiratory diagnoses in the last week or so, but as far as any second peak in flu, it would be just speculative at this point. It is possible, but there is no specific reason to suspect it.</p>
<p>Health Department Budget</p>	<p>Kathleen Roy, Financial Services Manager for the Health Department, gave a brief update on the Health Department budget. We now have a Council approved budget for 2023. The budget is approximately 32 million and we have requested an additional 12 million in additional service requests which were approved as well. The discussion form in the PHAB agenda packet highlights the funding priorities that. The budget that was approved does not yet include the Healthy Children's Fund. That is 9.9 million in new annual revenue and will go to council in March for approval of spending authority for the Health Department.</p> <p>Discussions and questions centered on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barry - How much does the city of Bellingham contribute for response systems? Kathleen would need to check for that figure. Erika added that the city's total contribution to the Health Department budget is about 2.8 million dollars and a majority of that is for response systems, but there are other programs funded from that money as well. • Lindsey - Under the response system, what permanent supportive housing locations would be getting the behavioral health funds? Erika responded that the hope and plan is to provide for behavioral health staff at all permanent supportive housing units that we fund as a Health Department, recognizing that we can't facilitate the kind of therapeutic support services needed without onsite behavioral health staff. • Sterling asked for more information on the children with families shelter project. Kathleen noted that part of the ARPA housing funds have been earmarked for shelter for children and families specifically. Ann Beck can follow up with additional details about that. • Steve asked about the timeline for hiring those four new positions (policy specialist, equity specialist, workforce development specialist, and evaluation specialist), considering that PHAB could really benefit from them as far as partners and resources – particularly policy and equity. Erika is hoping to recruit for the workforce development specialist in the first quarter of this year, evaluation specialist is slated for the second quarter, both policy and equity are slated for third quarter. Those positions will provide support not only to the Health Department, but to all our boards and commissions. Those four positions are all funded by state Foundational Public Health Funds.
<p>Year One Strategic Goals</p>	<p>Before launching into the coming year's goals, Erika wanted to share some of the accomplishments from last year, especially in light of the significant COVID surge that we also faced at the beginning of last year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed the COVID Strategic Plan, outlining how to move forward incorporating COVID work into our regular work instead of being constantly in crisis and response mode, • Completed Health Department Strategic Plan and each of our divisions are pulling together their own strategic plans in alignment with the overarching departmental plan, • Finished our Community Health Improvement Plan, • Provided data and technical assistance to Council members and the stakeholder workgroup that pulled together the healthy children's fund ballot measure, • Expanded the role, scope, and membership of PHAB in partnership with all members of the board, • Convened, led, and wrote a Behavioral Health Gap Analysis as part of the Justice Project,

- Reorganized and created three new divisions – 1) the new Response Systems Division, 2) Community Health and Human Services merged into one division, and 3) a new Community and Organizational Development Division,
- the Department added 35 staff last year, including both existing positions where we had attrition and new positions,
- Participated in a multi-agency Way Station plan with Unity Care, Opportunity Council, and other partners,
- Relocated staff from State Street to Girard and Civic, clearing out of State Street to make way for the Way Station project,
- Rolled out new data dashboards,
- Refreshed and revised our website,
- Added new programs – ART, Co-Responder, GRACE, LEAD,
- Passed the biennial budget,
- Continue to work on succession planning, burnout prevention and mitigation, learning and development opportunities, and leadership development.

Erika pointed out the list of strategic goals in the agenda packet, noting that the areas with asterisks are areas where she sees a lot of opportunities for PHAB to be involved.

Discussion centered on:

- Barry thanked Erika for the efforts of the Behavioral Health Gap Analysis team that helped the Justice Project. Barry and Perry have been working closely on competency restoration and Barry wanted to thank the department for availability of staff to move these things forward.
- Les wanted to point out that Erika started in March of 2020 and led us through the pandemic. Since that time the department budget has almost doubled and we're reaching out into lots of different areas. He praised her amazing leadership, which will continue to evaluate the best fiduciary responsibility for our citizens while providing care and support to those that need it. He commends the work, foresight, and effort that the whole Health Department makes.
- Steve noted that it's exciting to start talking about the strategic plan and programs, rather than just be focused on emergency response.
- Steve asked if the paid internship program will be up and running by summer. Erika's not sure if it will get off the ground this summer or not, given competing priorities like the Healthy Children's Fund and continuing support for the Justice Project. Beyond being just a paid internship program, the department wants to build a program for interns that will have some consistency regardless of the program area or who is supervising the work – a program that would allow a cohort to learn and grow together and feel connected to all aspects of the Health Department, and provide a curriculum that benefits interns in a more significant way. Steve commented on how important programs like this are to build workforce capacity in light of what has happened with the public health workforce in the last two and a half years. Leah asked if the internship program was going to focus on youth or on a broader range of folks, particularly with regards to programs like AmeriCorps and their efforts to incorporate folks with lived experience into the public health field. Erika answered that we haven't started developing this yet, so we don't know what it will look like, but she thinks it would be great to have opportunities for high school students, undergrads, grad students, PhD students, and other folks who want to gain experience. The department has talked about it broadly, but haven't developed it yet and would want to consult with some of our partners in the higher ed world about what would be most helpful to them and their students to gain good experience. Christine Espina expressed how happy she was that this conversation is happening as significant numbers of nurses are leaving hospitals because of burnout and she has wondered how we can have transition to practice programs for experienced nurses. Typically, in nursing education we think about transition to practice for new graduate nurses, but one thing to consider is how we can recruit more nurses into population health/public health. Cindy Hollinsworth, Communicable

	<p>Disease and Epidemiology Manager at the Health Department, added that we are always willing to work with nurses coming from many different settings to work at the Health Department. We have a good crew of nurses (fifteen to eighteen folks) and are able to provide good mentoring and training-in-place for people who haven't done this kind of work before. Barry added that the Council is starting an intern program as well, budgeting for a Council internship. They are encouraging other departments to do the same and see it as a wonderful opportunity to build capacity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steve asked for more details on the reestablishment of the mentoring program. Erika noted that her and Cindy worked on this collaboratively in 2018 and 2019. The program included other departments in Whatcom County government (Public Works and Parks). The program matched someone in leadership who had a job every unlike the staff member they mentored (for instance the Superintendent at Public Works mentoring a nurse). The idea was to more generally approach the soft skills and leadership skills that can be applied in any role. It was also a great opportunity to find more connection between departments. Cindy added that the first year was internal to the Health Department, then implemented more broadly. Feedback was really good from both mentors and mentees. There is a good curriculum to use and we use an outside consultant to do some of the leadership development parts. One of the most profound things is how much the mentors got out of their involvement with the program after perhaps having some initial reluctance to participate. Erika noted that the department is hoping to bring this back because we are expecting a wave of retirements and wanting to support staff internally through that – building skills for supervision and leadership.
<p>2023 Elections and Meeting Schedule</p>	<p>Steve opened the floor for nominations for chair and vice chair for 2023. Barry nominated Steve for chair and Leah for vice chair, Sterling seconded the nominations. Steve and Leah accepted the nominations. Ayes: 12, Nays: 0, Abstain: 0 (one member not available during the vote).</p> <p>Steve wanted to open up a discussion about meeting times. The group has had constant conversations about meeting times over the past couple of years and how that relates to access and equity. Meetings have been scheduled for 7 am to allow our volunteer members to participate in meetings before the work day starts, though this does provide challenges with child care and other conflicts. One idea is to move meetings to after work, like 5:30-7 or 6-7:30. Whenever meetings are scheduled, we will have a virtual option. Even though it's great to see people in person, virtual access does allow for increased participation by this really great group of people. Steve sent out short a survey to see where everyone stands on preference for meeting times. Unfortunately, the results were split. Five people voted for early morning, five people voted for evenings, and two people were okay with either. Steve's primary goal is to not make a change that would actually force a loss of members.</p> <p>Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many people would no longer be able to attend if meetings were moved an after work time frame? • Leah – evening would be more challenging for me. Middle of the day works for me. • Steve – has challenges during the work day with conflicts with teaching hours. • Sterling added that many people don't have control over their work schedule. • Barry – while 7 am can be tough, the good thing about it is a lack of conflict with work schedules and other meetings. • Sterling – everyone who has joined knows upfront that our schedule has been meeting at 7 am, which might have excluded some people from volunteering. When my kids were younger, I would have had more trouble juggling dinner time than before school. • Lindsey prefers evenings and feels like it would be easier for her to focus on the meetings at that time, though she can make the 7 am work. • Therese voted for the evening time, though she can make 7 am work as long as we continue to have the virtual option. Some days, she will be working, but can call in between patients. Middle of the day would not be an option for Therese. • Shamika can make either time work, with the virtual option.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steve wanted to thank everyone for the time they take to volunteer, while having to balance family, work, and other responsibilities. • Sterling noted that the combined PHAB and Health Board meetings did present additional challenges for folks, being in the middle of the day. • Steve invited anyone who hasn't already done so to fill out the survey and/or send him your comments on meeting times.
Healthy Children's Fund	<p>Kate Dabe, project manager for the Healthy Children's Fund, gave an update on the fund. The Healthy Children's Fund is a fund dedicated to investing in children and families in Whatcom County. It's expected to invest nearly 100 million dollars over ten years and the Health Department is designated as the fund administrator. As the fund administrator, the Health Department needs to submit an implementation plan to County Council on February 10th. The implementation planning team (with representatives from the Health Department, the County Executive's Office, and other subject matter experts and community organizations) has put together an initial draft to share with advisory groups in January. Those advisory groups include the Child and Family Well Being Task Force (which is mentioned in the ordinance by name), PHAB, and others. Kate will be emailing the plan draft and a form to provide feedback by the end of this week. Once all the feedback is received, the implementation team will analyze the feedback by themes, look at how consistent the feedback is, and how it can be incorporated. Then the revised plan will be submitted to Council. County Council meetings in February and March will provide several opportunities for public comment.</p> <p>Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barry noted that there isn't a Council meeting scheduled for February 10th. Kate clarified that is her goal date to submit to Council to get on the agenda for the following meeting. • Steve confirmed that each PHAB member will be submitting their own feedback in response to the draft implementation plan and Kate agreed.
Meeting evaluation	<p>Steve opened the floor to meeting evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sterling thanked Barry and Les for their wisdom, their experience, and how welcoming they have been to new members. • Barry noted the time and how efficiently the meeting was run. Everyone spoke their mind, as usual. • Les noted how happy he is to see Anne Deacon's name on a building after all her service to the community. He has seen PHAB move from being just an advisory group to a group that takes action and he is proud of where it's going and what it's becoming. Les expressed thanks to everyone and said he appreciated his time in the group. • Barry noted that what Les said is really important because the group has really started focusing on policy in the last several years, advancing the impact PHAB can have on public health. • Steve added another big thank you to Les and Barry for their work on PHAB over the years. He also wanted to wish everyone a happy new year and say how excited he is for the coming year. At the beginning of last year, we only had six members and it's exciting to see the growth, complete our hub and spoke model, and work towards some kind of unified cooperation between boards and commissions.
Adjourn	8:30 am
Next Meeting	Next regular meeting – 3/2/2023