



Mayor's Committee for Persons with Disabilities



101 Hall Plaza, Durham, NC

MINUTES

January 11, 2022

The meeting was called to order by the Vice Chair, Gloria Whitehead. After self-introductions were made by members and guests. A quorum of members was met.

A motion was made by Gloria Whitehead and seconded by Jackie Pilgrim that the minutes be approved.

- **Updates:**

Elections: Gloria Whitehead made a motion to delay the election of officers until after the Committee bylaws have been updated.

Francesca Prince explained that the bylaws need to be updated to provide more clarification and specifics, and that all adjustments would need to be approved by the Committee. Ms. Prince asked if any Committee members had questions about the bylaws.

Hillary Ensminger asked that the bylaws be shared and posted in an accessible format on the city website and asked for clarification on how members are elected.

Ms. Prince stated that she would share the bylaws with all Committee members and informed Ms. Ensminger that clarification on election procedures is a primary reason for pursuing an update of the bylaws. She then stated that she would keep the Committee updated on the progress of the bylaws after they have been reviewed by the City Attorney and informed Committee members to reach out to her with questions in the meantime.

Miche Bush and Hillary Ensminger requested that all documents sent to Committee members moving forward be in an accessible (text) format. Ms. Prince agreed.

Ms. Bush requested that PowerPoint presentations moving forward have a dark or black background. Ms. Prince agreed.

Ms. Bush questioned the makeup of the Committee, who has voting rights, and the roles of officers.

Ms. Prince informed her that the board is made up of 25 members, including eight residents who have disabilities or their family members, and clarified that the current motion is to delay the election until after the bylaws are amended, and that specifics on how the bylaws will be amended will be shared with the Committee after they are reviewed by the City Attorney.

A motion to vote on delaying the election was made by Gloria Whitehead and seconded by Jackie Pilgrim.

The vote to delay the election was unanimous.

Ms. Prince stated that she will make sure that everybody gets a copy of the current bylaws, after the meeting. And that she will send out a draft of the revised bylaws after they have been reviewed by the city attorney.

- **Additional Topics for 2022:**

Ms. Prince asked for input for additional topics the Committee would like to discuss for the remainder of 2022, and stated that she had already received input from Gloria Whitehead and Jackie Pilgrim and had shared that input with the rest of the Committee.

Ms. Bush requested adding transportation and homecare for the visually impaired to general agreement

Hillary Ensminger noted that she has repeatedly requested that the City include a plan that addresses barriers for the visually impaired into its budget process and that the City of Durham set aside some of its budget to address accessibility and ADA compliance by the City.

Ms. Prince informed the Committee that Mayor Elaine O'Neal would be joining the next meeting and that these topics could be brought up with her then, and at an additional meeting if necessary.

Ms. Prince informed the Committee that they plan to add the Communications department to the Committee board to help address web-accessibility issues moving forward.

Pearly Yelverton requested that training for first responders on epilepsy response be added to the agenda.

Ms. Prince informed Ms. Yelverton that epilepsy training had been brought up by Ms. Pilgrim already and would be on the agenda this year.

Captain Kimberly Lane of the Durham County Sherriff's Office stated that, while she is pleased to sit in on these meetings, she would love to see a counterpart from the Durham Police Department, which has been absent for some time, because it is not always easy for her to address all of the law enforcement issues on her own.

Ms. Prince responded that she has reached out to the new Police Chief, but had not heard back from her yet. She added that the Community Safety Department will also be joining the Committee. Ms. Prince went on to state that Anise Vance, the assistant Director of the Community Safety Department would be serving as a board member moving forward, but was not able to attend today's meeting because he has the flu, but would introduce himself and the department to the Committee at the next meeting.

David Clarke asked that a discussion of things older people with disabilities can do to their homes in order to stay independent as long as possible be added to the agenda.

Miche Bush requested that information on the availability of community places or living arrangements for the elderly and disabled be added to the agenda.

James Ktsanes added that, regarding accessibility for hard of hearing individuals, Caption Call is a federally funded program offering no cost services for ADA and may be widely distributed to ensure access.

Ms. Prince noted that she had turned on closed captions for the zoom recording and that it should be visible and available to all in the meeting.

Hillary Ensminger stated that there is a new group that's forming in the City called AWD (Aging Well Durham), which is a nonprofit that should probably be included on the Mayor's Committee. They will be addressing and working on the long range plan for the elderly in Durham, which would include these dwellings.

Ms. Bush thanked Ms. Ensminger. Ms. Prince stated that she would reach out to AWD.

Ms. Prince stated that another thing that may be added to the draft of the bylaws, is the ability for other local agencies or organizations to join and become members. These agencies or organizations could attend meetings and then, once a year, the Committee can vote to expand the size of the Committee and add them to the board. Ms. Prince added that she knows that the City is growing and that

we're missing people on this on this Committee who have important input and do important work for persons with disabilities in the city.

Ms. Pilgrim suggested creating a resource list for the Committee to general agreement.

Ms. Prince stated that she had written down everyone's requests and to contact her if any additional topics for future agendas arise.

Ms. Prince then introduced Elizabeth Stevens, the Deputy Director of the Durham County Health Department, as a new member of the Committee who is here to provide an update on the Corona Virus and the Omicron Variant.

Ms. Stevens provided an update and data on COVID numbers in Durham County:

Ms. Stevens:

So as we know, we are in this Omicron surge, but the prevention strategies that we've been using all along, really still hold true. We just need to keep doubling down on our three W's; our public health measures: wearing a well-fitting and good quality mask over your nose and mouth; social distancing or waiting six feet apart to avoid close contact; and washing our hands or using hand sanitizer. And of course getting vaccinated.

If you're eligible for a booster, please get your booster. Everything that we are seeing related to the higher transmission with Omicron still points to the fact that those who are vaccinated and boosted seem to fare better in terms of symptoms not being as severe and being able to better tolerate becoming infected and staying out of the hospital. So vaccination really is our number one tool that we want to be using right now.

In December, we had an average of about 100, up to about 200, cases a day. Right now, we're having anywhere from 500 to 800 cases a day come in. So I do not want sugarcoat the situation that we are in. In the past seven days, we've had 4,566 cases reported to public health. Our seven day moving average is 652 cases a day. This is an increase of about 19% from last week, and 28% from two weeks ago. All of this information you can see in our Durham County Public Health Corona Virus Data Hub, which is updated every day with case information. Our vaccine information gets updated every week on Tuesdays. So for those of you who have not accessed that site, I would encourage you to do so.

So far in January, we've had 6,479 cases for this month. Our COVID deaths total is at about 270. And we've had about 11 other deaths attributed to causes other than COVID, even though they may have occurred while someone was COVID positive.

Next, we have a breakdown between race and ethnicity. For the month of January, our COVID positive cases are over-represented among our Black and African American community. We know that demographic makes up about 34% of our population, but it makes up 51% of our cases. The White population, on the other hand, has been under-represented throughout the pandemic; for the month of January making up only 30% of all of our cases.

When we look at ethnicity, Durham's Hispanic population is currently just about proportionally represented. We know that that population makes up about 14% of our community. For the month of January, it's made up about 12% of our cases.

For those of you who have been keeping track of what we've been seeing in schools and childcare, it won't come as a surprise to see that quite a few of our cases are occurring among kids 11 and under. We know our 5 to 11 year-olds have just recently become eligible for vaccines, so we are working hard to get that group vaccinated. And then our 20 to 29 year-olds and 30 to 39 year-olds represent the age groups that seem to be the most affected by positive COVID cases at this time.

Another metric that we pay really close attention to is our percent positivity. This means for each week, out of all of the COVID cases that were done and reported electronically in Durham County, how many of these were positive. Back in December, we were sitting right around 5%. As we moved into the end of December, that number started creeping up. And then, so far for the month of January, we've seen quite a steep increase. This morning we received our numbers from last week. From January 2nd to January 10th, 28% of labs tests done and reported in Durham were positive. The week before that, from December 26th to January 1st, about 23% of all labs were positive, so that number is very high right now. This is not unique to Durham; it is being seen across North Carolina and across the country. So again, not anything that I think points to something that we are doing wrong in Durham, but more points to the really high rates of COVID that we're seeing everywhere, related to the high transmissibility of the variant.

Regarding vaccination rates in Durham, I'm proud to say we have really been one of the leading counties across the state when it comes to our vaccination rate. So if you look at the percent of our population, ages five and older—that's all of our population who is eligible for vaccinations right now, we're still awaiting approval of vaccines for kids under the age of five—we've vaccinated 72% of our population, which is really wonderful. Our health director Rod Jenkins has said for a while that we're really aiming for that 80% mark, feeling like that's going to give us some good community-wide coverage from vaccination, that really might help us find

our way out of this. So, at 72% of our eligible population we're certainly getting close to that. As you look at our populations over the age of 12, over the age of 18, and over the age of 65, the percent of the population that's fully vaccinated just goes up, and that's really a testament to all of us who have been working hard in public health to get vaccines out there. We are so thankful to, and have relied on, the partnership of our community-based organizations, community health workers, and community members who have been sharing accurate and factual information about vaccines to help folks feel comfortable getting vaccinated as they've been able to. So, these are some numbers that we continue to feel pretty proud of.

We have a vaccine clinic here at the Health Department. For those of you who may not know, we are open four days a week—Monday through Thursday from 9AM to 4PM. On Tuesday, we stay open until 6PM. On Fridays, we are often out in the community doing outreach and community vaccination events, which is why our clinic is not as fully staffed on Fridays. Currently, like I've mentioned, vaccines for children age five to 11 have been approved, so anyone age five and older is able to come get vaccinated.

And now, more recently, boosters have been approved for ages as young as 12 years old. And, of course, all of our vaccines are available here at the health department. We have Pfizer, Moderna, J&J, whichever folks might desire.

Next, we see a comparison of mortality related to COVID, between vaccinated and unvaccinated folks. This graph tells us that for people who are vaccinated, their risk of death is about one per 100,000. For unvaccinated people, that chance of death should they catch COVID, goes up almost seven times. So that rate of mortality among unvaccinated people is 7.58 per 100,000. We know that those of us who are vaccinated may still become infected with COVID, but our risk for serious illness or for death is quite a bit lower.

This is another graph that tells us about how likely it is for folks to contract COVID if they are vaccinated versus unvaccinated. From the data that we've been looking at, back through August to the present, unvaccinated individuals are about five times more likely to catch COVID compared to vaccinated individuals. So this is another metric we can point to, to help folks understand the benefit of getting vaccinated, even while we know that that no vaccine is one hundred percent effective.

Lastly, this was some pretty recent data looking at our hospitalization utilization. We are starting to see hospitalizations go up. The health department is in touch with Duke on a daily basis regarding what they're seeing in the hospital. I can say with certainty that, with this Omicron

surge, we have seen that the vast majority of hospitalizations are among those who are not vaccinated, who are experiencing more severe symptoms and the severe illness.

So this gives us a sense of where we are with that. We are seeing high utilization of our hospitals. We continue to stay on top of what's happening in the hospital, to be sure that we've got the staff and space to continue to treat people as they present needing more complex care.

And then lastly I wanted to give a few updates as it relates to testing. I know for any of us who have tried to get tested in the past couple of weeks, it's busy and it can be challenging to get a test just based on the sheer number of people who are experiencing symptoms or have had a close contact. Our website, www.dcopublichealth.org/covidtesting will give you up-to-date lists of testing sites available around Durham County. We've got about 30 or so sites available, including CVS, Walgreens, a few smaller laboratories doing testing. There is also testing that's being offered through our State Partner, OPTUM Serve. They have testing happening every day from 10AM to 6PM at El Centro Hispano parking lot on Chapel Hill Road. This can be through registration, or drive up. They have been very, very busy and really are encouraging people to register beforehand. They also operate a site in our parking lot at the Health Department on East Main Street that's on Saturdays and Sundays from 9AM TO 7PM—again drive through testing with appointments recommended.

You can also go to www.ncdhhs.gov/testingplace and enter your address to be connected to testing sites closest to you. We are also excited about a couple of additional sites we're going to be opening in the next week or so. Many of you may also know that, in partnership with the city, the old Wheels property is going to be utilized as a mass testing site that's due to open up shortly. And we have a couple of other locations that are being finalized, but hope to come online as early as next week. So we'll be sure to keep everything updated on our website and on our social media, and will get the word out as soon as those sites are open.

We also have ordered quite a few home tests and have been trying to seek those out from the State. We have also been working on our own to purchase home tests for public distribution, as well as high grade masks. Like I mentioned earlier, surgical masks, KN95, and N95 are best for those who are in high risk settings of being exposed to COVID. We are working on plans to start distributing those as soon as the inventory is in our building and available. There will be more information about that in the next few days as well.

Ms. Stevens finished her presentation and opened up the floor for questions from the Committee.

Questions and Answers:

- **Q: Ms. Bush:** Is it true that symptoms can be similar to those of the common cold, like a sore throat or runny nose?
- **A: Ms. Stevens:** That is exactly right. The symptoms might be really mild or none at all. I know several people in my own life who have tested positive in the past week who had no symptoms, or had just a little bit of a stomach ache or a little bit of a headache and didn't really think anything of it. So I think it's a really important point to share with our friends and family and communities to pay attention, and to always err on the side of caution if we start to notice anything that might warrant testing or even just going ahead and isolating for a couple of days, and taking good care of ourselves.
- **Q:** Multiple Committee members asked questions about the most effective types of masks
- **A:** Ms. Stevens emphasized the importance of a tight fitting mask, double masking if necessary, and that N95 and KN95 masks are the most effective. Ms. Stevens noted that N95 and KN95 masks are identifiable by the label on the side of the mask.

Ms. Prince thanked Ms. Stevens for her time, noting that healthcare workers do not have a lot of bandwidth at the moment, given the spiking cases across the country. Ms. Stevens provided her contact information in case committee members needed to reach out to her or had further questions.

Committee members then agreed to table further discussion regarding future goals and outreach strategies until the next meeting.

Joyce Briggs from the Durham Housing Authority informed the committee of a free transportation program for seniors living in a number of Durham neighborhoods for getting groceries and doing other errands. Ms. Briggs noted that the busses are clean and have a capacity limit of about 5 people per bus.

Committee members agreed to continue discussing transportation issues and needs at future meetings. Ms. Prince requested that committee members contact her with more information on what topics they would like to cover in the coming year.

The meeting was adjourned by Ms. Gloria Whitehead, Vice-Chair.