

A regular meeting of the Board of Health for the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit was held on Wednesday, February 24, 2021, via teleconference. Audio live streaming of the proceedings was provided for the public.

PRESENT:

Nipissing District:

Central Appointee

Dave Butti

Central Appointee

Nancy Jacko (*Chairperson*)

Central Appointee

Scott Robertson

Central Appointee

Tanya Vrebosch

Eastern Appointee

Dean Backer

Western Appointee

Dan Roveda

Parry Sound District:

North Eastern Appointee

Blair Flowers

Western Appointee

Don Brisbane (*Vice-Chairperson*)

Public Appointees:

Gary Guenther

Mike Poeta

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer

Dr. Chirico

Master of Public Health Student

Dr. Carol Zimbalatti

Public Presenter

Dave Lewington

REGRETS:

Central Appointee – Nipissing District

Stuart Kidd

South Eastern Appointee – Parry Sound District

Marianne Stickland

RECORDER:

Management Administrative Assistant

Sheri Beaulieu

1.0 CALL TO ORDER

In keeping with public health measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board of Health meet electronically. Audio live streaming of the meeting was available to the public through a link provided on the Health Unit's website.

Nancy Jacko called the Board of Health meeting to order at 5:15 p.m.

2.0 APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the February 24, 2021, Board of Health meeting was reviewed and the following motion was read:

Board of Health Resolution #BOH/2021/02/01 *Butti/Guenther

The following was added to the agenda:

- Item 11.2 – Communication with Business; and
- Item 11.3 – Ski Hills

Be It Resolved, that the Board of Health Agenda, dated February 24, 2021, be approved.

The recorded vote was as follows:

Name:	For:	Against:	Abstain:	Name:	For:	Against:	Abstain:
Dean Backer	x			Stuart Kidd			
Don Brisbane	x			Mike Poeta	x		
Dave Butti	x			Scott Robertson	x		
Blair Flowers	x			Dan Roveda	x		
Gary Guenther	x			Marianne Stickland			
Nancy Jacko	x			Tanya Vrebosch	x		

“Carried, as amended”

3.0 PRESENTATION: MR. DAVE LEWINGTON

Mr. Lewington was called and brought into the live-streamed meeting at 5:19 p.m. to provide a verbal presentation to the Board of Health.

The Board Chair welcomed Mr. Lewington and invited Mr. Lewington to proceed with his presentation.

Mr. Lewington read through his presentation that was previously provided to Board members as an attachment to the agenda package.

He indicated that the reason for this presentation was not directed at individuals, but to request accountability from the Board.

Mr. Lewington advised that he was requesting proof of the data and science behind the decisions the Health Unit have made related to public health restrictions that have implications for individuals and small businesses. He concluded his presentation advising that he has collected 3,200 names on a petition asking for the resignation of Dr. Jim Chirico, and the each Board member that refuse to provide Mr. Lewington with the actual order that authorized the previous closures of public skating rinks, tobogganing hills, and OFSC snowmobile trails.

The Chair thanks Mr. Lewington and advised him that the time for his presentation had expired. Mr. Lewington exited the virtual meeting at 5:31 p.m.

Board member, Mike Poeta, thanked Mr. Lewington for his thoughtful presentation, for sharing his concerns, and offered some thoughts in response to Mr. Lewington’s presentation.
(Appendix A)

Board members, Tanya Vrebosch and Scott Robertson additionally thanked Mr. Lewington for taking the time and the care and consideration that went into his presentation. It was further stated that, while they understand the frustration, and the points made, however, as a Board, they support the decisions Dr. Chirico has made to prevent greater hardships to the citizens in the Health Unit district.

The Chair, Nancy Jacko, advised that the points made by this evening's presentation will be taken under consideration, and extended the Board's appreciation for the presentation to the Board.

4.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

5.0 APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

5.1 Board of Health Minutes – January 27, 2021

The minutes from the Board of Health meeting held on January 27, 2021, were reviewed and the following motion was read:

Board of Health Resolution #BOH/2021/02/02 *Kidd/Butti

Be It Resolved, that the minutes from the Board of Health meeting held on January 27, 2021, be approved as presented.

The recorded vote was as follows:

Name:	For:	Against:	Abstain:	Name:	For:	Against:	Abstain:
Dean Backer	x			Stuart Kidd			
Don Brisbane	x			Mike Poeta	x		
Dave Butti	x			Scott Robertson	x		
Blair Flowers	x			Dan Roveda	x		
Gary Guenther	x			Marianne Stickland			
Nancy Jacko	x			Tanya Vrebosch	x		

“Carried”

6.0 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Date: April 28, 2021

Time: To be determined

Place: To be determined

7.0 BUSINESS ARISING

There was nothing under Business Arising.

8.0 REPORT OF THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

The [Report of the Medical Officer of Health](#) dated February 24, 2021, was presented to the Board of Health for information purposes.

An additional verbal update from the Medical Officer of Health was also provided. The update included the following:

- The variants of concern (VOCs) are increasing; given that, along with taking other factors into consideration, Dr. Chirico advised that the recommendation he will make to the Ministry will be for the Health Unit district to remain in shutdown
- Sadly, there have been two deaths to date related to the local COVID-19 outbreak associated to the South African variant
- The VOCs are 50% to 70% more contagious
- The recommendation is aggressive vaccination, and while vaccinations are underway, it will take time to complete them
- Until enough people are immunized, strict public health measures will be needed to avoid a third wave and further shutdowns
- The first dose of long-term care homes, alternate level of care homes, and Elder care homes have been completed
- Not all health care workers and first responders have been immunized yet
- The Province is doing everything in their power to ensure a steady supply of vaccine; however, vaccine supply continues to be a challenge due to a wide-spread shortage
- A steady supply is anticipated by mid-March

Questions from Board members were addressed. Among the questions asked and addressed was the process used by Dr. Chirico in making the recommendation to keep the district in shutdown. It was noted that some of the factors taken into consideration to make these recommendations are evidence, knowledge, and consultation with many colleagues, data from Public Health Ontario and the science tables, and taking into consideration what we have learned from experience.

Further clarification was provided in relation to the request from presentation at the start of the meeting. Dr. Chirico advised that the answer related to the authority that allowed him to impose further restrictions was provided, and that the answer was vetted through legal counsel.

Board members shared their appreciation for everything that Dr. Chirico is doing for the communities he serves, and shared their appreciation for press conference to share information held earlier this day to provide additional communication to the media and public.

Dr. Chirico shared what is happening behind the scene by staff with limited resources. Staff have been hired and other staff have been redeployed to address the needs where they arise.

There has been a considerable amount of collaboration with community partners to manage the largest immunization process in history. The Health Unit has been preparing for this for months. All of this work and collaboration is paying off.

In addition to addressing the needs of the pandemic and mass immunization process, there is still core public health work that is required to be done.

The call centre is working diligently to address the calls in a timely manner and deal with the concerns.

Dr. Chirico thanked the Board for their continued support.

9.0 BOARD COMMITTEE REPORT

9.1 Finance and Property Committee

A Finance and Property Committee meeting was held immediately prior to the Board of Health meeting. There was nothing to bring forward to the Board of Health.

10.0 CORRESPONDENCE

Board of Health correspondence listed for the February 24, 2021, meeting is made available for review by Board members in the Board of Health online portal.

11.0 NEW BUSINESS

11.1 Board of Health Support for COVID-19 Measures

In support of the decisions made by the Medical Officer of Health related to public health measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic, Board members brought forward the following motion:

Board of Health Resolution #BOH/2021/02/03 *Roveda/Robertson

Whereas, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to challenge public health with ever-changing situations and issues requiring timely response.

Now Therefore Be It Resolved, that the Board of Health for the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit unanimously supports Dr. Jim Chirico, Medical Officer of Health, and the Health Unit

staff in the measures being taken to control and mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus, and subsequent variants of concern in the district; and

Furthermore Be It Resolved, that the Board of Health authorize allocating the necessary resources for communication support, vaccination rollout, contact tracing, and other vital actions, as required.

The recorded vote was as follows:

Name:	For:	Against:	Abstain:	Name:	For:	Against:	Abstain:
Dean Backer	X			Stuart Kidd			
Don Brisbane	x			Mike Poeta	x		
Dave Butti	x			Scott Robertson	x		
Blair Flowers	x			Dan Roveda	x		
Gary Guenther	x			Marianne Stickland			
Nancy Jacko	x			Tanya Vrebosch	x		

“Carried”

11.2 Communication with Business

Tanya Vrebosch brought forward concerns, from a council perspective, with last-minute communications from the Health Unit related to the districts position in the Provincial framework, particularly for businesses.

Dr. Chirico thanked Tanya for the feedback, and agreed that we can always do better. It was explained that, while he has the ability to make his recommendation to the Province for where the district should be in the framework, ultimately, it is the decision of the Province, which is then communicated to us after the Friday cabinet session. This is last-minute information for the Health Unit as well, and it is shared through a press release as soon as we are aware.

11.3 Ski Hills

The status of the two ski hills in the district was brought forward for clarification as to why they have remained closed.

It was explained that ski hills fall outside of where we are currently sitting in the provincial framework. It was further explained that a medical officer of health has the ability to enforce stricter measurements under the framework, but has no authority to decrease provincially-mandated directives.

12.0 IN CAMERA

There was no in camera session.

13.0 ADJOURNMENT

The Chair offered a few words related to the pandemic prior to the close of the meeting.
(Appendix B)

Having no further business, the Board of Health Chairperson adjourned the Board of Health meeting at 6:34 p.m.

Original Signed by Nancy Jacko

2021/04/28

Chairperson/Vice-Chairperson

Date (yyyy/mm/dd)

Original Signed by Sheri Beaulieu

2021/04/28

Sheri Beaulieu, Recorder

Date (yyyy/mm/dd)

Response to Mr. Lewington's Presentation by Mike Poeta, Board of Health Member

I thank Mr. Lewington for his letter and for so eloquently presenting his concerns. I'm sure I speak for the other board members when I say we welcome input from the people we serve. It helps to let us know how we are doing. So once again, I thank him for taking the time to express his opinions and concerns.

I realize snowmobiling and other outdoor activities are a cherished part of our social fabric here in the North and are being missed by many this year. So the question is, why close down the trails and who has the authority to do so? Let's start with my take on the why this was done. As most are aware, many of the COVID-19 cases here in our region were brought in from outside – from people traveling in from the south and international travelers. The virus was transmitted when the travelers gathered with others, so one can logically assume that travel and subsequent gathering with others are significant factors in spreading this potentially deadly virus. We are fortunate to be a prime location for snowmobiling with excellent trails and supporting facilities. Unfortunately, this encourages travel into our district and gatherings of individuals - the very things we are attempting to discourage. Sure, if everyone on the trails practiced the recommended precautions we might be OK but our best evidence indicated this was not happening. Maybe it would help to limit the trails to local users only but implementation and monitoring such an action would take time and resources that we don't currently have.

I'm not sure what transpired between Mr. Lewington and the Health Unit regarding his request, although I've always found our staff to be courteous and professional. What I find hard to believe, no matter how frustrated one might be, is that the potential benefit of these precautions are not self-evident to everyone, no matter who authorizes them.

Sure, once this is over, we will most likely look back and see we could have done things differently but this is uncharted territory for all of us and we are attempting to do our best with the resources we have.

Needless to say, I agree with Dr. Chirico's decisions to date and sincerely thank him for doing his best in a very difficult time.

Mike Poeta

Closing Remarks by Nancy Jacko, Board of Health Chairperson

I hope you will indulge me to close with a few Chair's comments. I have jotted them down as I feel sad and do not wish for my emotions to cause me to miss some of my thoughts.

This pandemic has pushed us all beyond what we ever wish to experience again. Health, livelihoods, relationships, loneliness, loss, and mental health in general are the themes of our lives. No one has been spared some impact, but some have certainly been impacted more than others. Those who have lost loved ones, or a business, or had urgent surgery or medical care postponed, or have lived isolated due to institutional restrictions or family unable to visit, it has been catastrophic. Our hearts go out to you.

A crisis tests our humanity. We have seen how it has brought out the best in people - our essential workers, health care staff, teachers, our neighbours, businesses, strangers, physicians who have come out of retirement in our town to ensure surgeries delayed by COVID are caught up, Dr. Chirico who ensured our schools stayed open in the North for the health and safety of our children, unlike other areas of the province, and retired nurses who have also stepped forward to help vaccinate and trace contacts. Scientists, researchers, and physicians have collaborated all over the world to share information regarding treatment of COVID-19 and to develop a vaccine at record speed.

On the other hand, it has also brought out the worst in us. Fear, anger, helplessness, frustration have led to lashing out as a coping strategy. Public figures, specifically Public Health officials, have been targeted all over the world. Although the COVID-19 virus is the cause, these Public Health officials are seen as the perpetrators of the restrictions that have affected our lives as we helplessly wait for it to all end.

It is fitting that today is Pink T-shirt Day to symbolize we do not tolerate bullying and our children have been encouraged to wear pink to mark the day and to think about what it means. I hope the residents of this district spend time to think about it too and how unkind and hurtful threats and angry personal comments are. I am speaking specifically at those directed toward Dr. Chirico and the staff of the Health Unit who are working to keep us safe.

Comments, questions, opinions, suggestions are our right to make and some will open our minds to other ways to approach an issue. These can all be made without the inclusion of hurtful personal slurs.

So today, I ask all of you to please stop the bullying of Dr. Chirico, our Medical Officer of Health, and our Health Unit staff. We need them and we applaud them.

Thank you.