



EAST CHICAGO HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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ANTHONY COPELAND, MAYOR

Dr. Paula Benchik Abrinko, Health Officer

Diana Garcia-Burns, Health Director

**Health Board Special Meeting
September 13, 2022 at 5:00 pm
Health Department Lobby Conference Room
100 W. Chicago Ave
East Chicago, IN 46312**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85380069031?pwd=VGswaHR3TFNXT1J1dnc2dFdKRXVQZz09>

Meeting ID: 853 8006 9031

Passcode: 733421

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312-626-6799

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Natalie Adams called the meeting to order at 5:03pm.

II. ROLL CALL:

Roll call was taken and in attendance were Natalie Adams (in-person), Loretta Parker (in-person), Dr. Sabrina Reed (virtual) and Brenda Walker (in-person). Also in attendance were Dr. Paula Benchik-Abrinko (in-person), Diana Garcia-Burns (in-person), and Attorney Jewell Harris (in-person). Arrival after roll call was taken was Dr. Matthew Libiran (in-person). Absent was Dr. Rev. James Wade.

III. NEW BUSINESS:

- Review Resolution 090722-1HD Regarding Permissible Use of Grant Funding
- Review Resolution 090722-2HD Regarding Policy for Grant Approval and Fund Appropriation

Natalie Adams requested Attorney Harris speak first to give his updates and comments before discussion of the resolutions. Attorney Harris stated he took the time since the previous regular scheduled board meeting held on September 7, 2022 to have some additional conversations with the city regarding the language in the resolutions and in particular the language in the memo. The memo is intended to address the process for dealing with the grant funding and, ultimately, if all sides were on the same page in terms of what all the issues are with the process, it would turn into a standard checklist form to pursue grants. Attorney Harris had conversations with the Law Department in particular about what is pending before the board and received a little more background as to what some of the issues or concerns might be on the city side as far as the grants go. It is the position generally of the city to steer away from grant funding because of the issues, red tape, and additional expenses outside the grant for the specific activity that are associated with it. That is the reason the city would like to generally steer away from the grants, not 100% across the board, but just in general. If there is an activity that we want conducted within the department, then we should look at how to fund that and do it if it is a service that we think is appropriate for the department, and it should be the exception rather than the rule to pursue grant funding. When and if that pursuit happens, then that would be done as we outline here by first bringing that to the attention of the city stating that we would like to apply for a particular grant and getting that authorization to move forward with the next steps.

One of the additional concerns about grants also is that it could be a challenge to find a one-size fits all approach to handle these grants when they are not all necessarily the same. Every grant can be slightly different in what is required from the Controller's Office or for accounting purposes. An example of that is the reimbursement funds is not the same as actual grant funds so it might not fit into our checklist. The conversations went beyond that, but the understanding from these discussions is that if the board and the department are agreeable that if the city states they are going to step up to fund these activities as opposed to seeking grant funding how we are going to handle the grants then may not be such an issue if we are not pursuing as many grants. With that being said, if we are going to pursue grant funding in a case-by-case scenario then in seeking their approval the city would then provide some representation as to how the grant is going to be handled and they are taking responsibility of how we will handle the grant.

Natalie then updated the board in regards to the conversations she has had since the last meeting as well. She stated she spoke with Attorney Allegretti also. She stated she received a little different take as far as the board's fiduciary responsibility. He stated that the board has no fiduciary responsibility; the city has the fiduciary responsibility if they accept these grants. If someone would get sued, it would be city's responsibility. Natalie stated that when she brought up that someone was sued once before in the past from the board, he stated that was because the board did something out of order, but if the board follows the process of a board meeting and does everything right then the city takes responsibility for the lawsuit. Attorney Harris interjected to clarify that you cannot really control who is named in a suit, but as long as the board does do everything right he would be able to get you dismissed from the suit if the board did everything right. Natalie stated the other thing Attorney Allegretti needs the health board to understand is that this is not a health department issue, but an issue across the board with departments with regards to grant funding. A lot of these grants are reimbursement grants which means the city needs to fund them first and then get reimbursed. The city is tightening up their budgets with the new tax shifts that happening with the funds we are receiving. The city cannot afford to fund all of these grants and moving forward will be reviewing which grants are absolutely necessary and then move forward from that point.

Natalie stated she called Kim in the Controller's Office and asked her if she had a chance to look over her emails, but she was on vacation the previous week and had not had a chance to do so. Natalie stated she brought Kim up to speed on where we were at as of the last board meeting, the check list we are trying to create, and what the issue is that we are hearing as a board. Natalie discussed with the board the frustration in the Controller's Office with all the departments that have grant funding including the Health Department after numerous conversations explaining the documentation that they need to have and not being able to get from the department. One of the challenges is when the departments have these grants the city funds the programs and the department spends those funds and when the grant reimbursement comes in the department perceives it as new money, but the Controller's Office needs to reconcile those monies already spent to pay the city back and then they can move forward with releasing any balance from the grant. Alicia has been asking for documentation and no one is providing it. She states the grant fund process for some can take up to 2 years and they need the departments to go back to when they first received the grant and provide documentation of everything that has already been spent from it. That is why some of the grant dollars are still sitting there - if they cannot reconcile the grant funds to what is already spent, then they cannot give you any money out of it. Kim will review the resolution grant process document and asked if it can be sent in an editable version for her to make any necessary changes to it. Further discussion as to ensuring all grant funding has been satisfied before any funds can be released was had. Natalie stated Kim knew nothing about any conversations of the Mayor not allowing grant funding to be used; it is the Controller's Office who stopped the appropriation of any funds until they receive all documentation and reconcile all the other grant funds to make sure they are satisfied. Then if the Health Department has money left, they can release those funds to the department. Natalie stated a meeting with Kim, Alicia, Jasmine, Diana and Natalie needs to happen. Natalie also stated that the Controller's Office recently had the State Board of Accounts visit and there was a recommendation to have more checks and balances in place and that is how the money kind of was stopped from being used.

Attorney Harris then recommended that when meeting with the Controller's Office the resolution should help to guide the conversation you are going to have. Hopefully, then it can be pared down and a little more user friendly to the people who are going to be using it on both sides. The other resolution in regards to permissible use of the grant funding should also be modified so it reflects the efforts that are being made collaboratively on both sides to come up with a process, because as it stands right now it only demonstrates what the board is concerned about and we want to make record that we have this concern.

Dr. Libiran expressed his want to move forward with the resolution to voice the board's concerns. Dr. Reed stated her first impression when reading the resolution was the wording was somewhat inflammatory and does not want it to represent that we are putting administration in a bad light and give the connotation of any type of misuse of funds which sounds like from these conversations is not what happened and is more a misunderstanding. She feels the board should be very careful about how they word this resolution and how it says what we want to say if there was no ill intent on the part of the city.

Natalie Adams made a motion to table both resolutions at this time. Brenda Walker second the motion. Dr. Benchik asked if Attorney Harris believes the board members are at risk of having to pay back any of the grant money. Attorney Harris stated he does not believe there is any risk of the board members having to pay any money back. He stated if the resolutions are tabled at this time, he will write a legal opinion to the board as a whole describing what he believes the board's exposure is or is not in regards to any liability. In light of the feedback we received from the city, he also stated he believes the board can change the tone of the resolutions if the board decides that is the path forward.

With no other questions or concerns, roll call vote was taken:

Adams ó Yes Libiran ó Yes Parker ó Yes Reed ó Yes Walker ó Yes ó the motion carries

IV. ADJOURNMENT:

With no further business, Natalie Adams made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Loretta Parker second the motion. The meeting adjourned at 5:38pm.