

**CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF HEALTH
Thursday, January 12, 2012**

A meeting of the Philadelphia Board of Health was held on Thursday, January 12, 2012, in the Municipal Services Building, 1401 J.F.K. Boulevard, 16th Floor, Room Y.

Board Members Present: Marla J. Gold, MD; Scott McNeal, DO; Donald F. Schwarz, MD, MPH; Robert G. Sharrar, MD, MSc

Attendees: Benjamin Black; Altressa Boatwright; Roberta Cancellier; Nan Feyler; Lisa Gardner; John Kim; Shari Lewis; Giridhar Mallya, MD; Jeff Moran; Palak Raval-Nelson; Donald Sapatkin; Kevin Vaughan; Danette Williams

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Board President Donald F. Schwarz, Health Commissioner, welcomed the Board and guests calling the meeting to order at 5:35 PM. The Commissioner entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of October 20, 2011 as submitted. It was moved and seconded. **Motion passed.**

Dr. Sharrar requested that copies of the attachments referred to in the minutes be provided to the Board.

ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL

Dr. Schwarz reported that responsibility for the City contract for Animal Care and Control Services has been moved from the Department of Public Health to the Office of the Managing Director. In conjunction with this administrative change, the Law Department has requested that the Board of Health rescind a series of regulations promulgated by the Board pertaining to Animal Care and Control. (Attachment A.) Identical regulations will be re-issued by the Managing Director's Office in the form of a Managing Director's Order. Dr. Schwarz said that the Department has reviewed the regulations and determined that they do not have any impact upon public health. He advised the Board to approve the rescinding of the regulations. It was moved and seconded. **Motion passed.**

FOOD SAFETY AND PUBLIC FEEDING

While the City currently supports good will efforts to provide food to hungry people on the streets of Philadelphia, public feeding activities are not regulated to ensure food

safety in preparation and handling. It is proposed that the Board consider the possibility of introducing such regulations at a special meeting on February 9. Draft regulations presented to the Board on February 9 would first require a 30 day period for public comment and then, a subsequent public hearing.

Dr. Schwarz introduced Department of Public Health Director of Environmental Health Services, Dr. Palak Raval-Nelson, to present the Board with background information on the City's Food Protection Program. The program promotes safe food preparation, storage, handling, and distribution. In response to questions from the Board, Dr. Raval-Nelson reported that there have been no outbreaks of food-borne illness reported as a result of public feeding activities. She said that these activities are similar to mobile food vending and special event food service, which are both regulated by the Department. Some churches and volunteer groups that provide food regularly are licensed and inspected.

Dr. Gold asked how regulation would change the food distribution process that currently takes place. Dr. Raval-Nelson said that she envisions an abridged application process that would help facilitate a greater degree of training, plan review, and onsite inspection. Training would be similar to the training offered to family day-care providers. Certification as a result of the training would last for five years.

Dr. Sharrar endorsed an approach that balances the need for regulation to improve food quality with a process that does not impede or diminish the availability of food. Dr. Raval-Nelson concurred that the regulations should promote greater safety not create red tape.

Dr. Schwarz said that the department is also working to identify indoor locations where food is served and toilet facilities are also available. He opened the meeting to concerned members who wished to participate in the discussion.

Craig Stroman, Founder and CEO of We Feed the Homeless Philly submitted written testimony to the Board prior to the meeting. (Attachment B)

Altressa Boatwright of the Chosen 300 Ministries said that her group provides approximately 2,000 meals a week to the homeless at two year-round sites in Philadelphia and along the Parkway in the summertime. She said that her group is aware of food safety guidelines and conducts training sessions for its volunteers, and uses can servers to maintain proper temperature for transportation and storage of hot foods. Boatwright is concerned that complex regulation might make it difficult to maintain the network of 1,500 volunteers that contribute to the effort. Food is prepared at approximately 75 churches that she reports are probably not licensed or inspected. However, the group does not accept 'leftovers' from organizations that are not a part of their network and may not be familiar with the food safety methods the organization employs.

Dr. McNeal asked if, with regulation, training for volunteers would have to be conducted by the City. Dr. Raval-Nelson said that alternatives could be discussed.

Dr. Schwarz asked what happens during the winter months when the group is no longer feeding along the Parkway. Ms. Boatwright said that outdoor feeding in the wintertime would not be consistent with their objective: to encourage people to come indoors in the cold weather. She said that many people are still distrustful and will not come inside.

Dr. Gold asked Ms. Boatwright what kind of regulations could be beneficial. She said that regulations that require groups to conduct some training would be useful, but too much will discourage volunteers. Individuals who provide food on their own and do not work with a group may be difficult to reach in enforcing regulations.

Asked if feeding activities could be confined to particular locations where oversight and support services could be provided, Ms. Boatwright advised that the homeless for the most part will not go to a designated location. Those providing food go to places where homeless people congregate. She said that when groups do not go to these locations to offer food, homeless people look for food in the trash.

Danette Williams of Share Food Ministries, an organization of eight individual members who have been providing home-cooked food for the past four years along the Parkway, said the group currently serves approximately 350 people per week and would like to expand that number. The group, run by a registered nurse, trains its staff in basic food safety and has had no reports of food-borne illnesses connected with their efforts. Ms. Williams agreed with Ms. Boatwright that some form of required training and certification would be useful, and also expressed concern that complicated regulations might discourage volunteers.

Dr. Gold asked if the department has met with or conducted focus groups among those conducting the feedings. Dr. Raval-Nelson said that it has not. In 2005, there were unsuccessful efforts to promote safety through enforcement and ticketing, not training and education.

Dr. Schwarz noted that it has been difficult to engage in dialogue with these groups, with many avoiding contact with public health officials. A flyer was circulated prior to this meeting to solicit input from the groups, and he hopes that the amount of dialogue will grow. He said that the current lack of communication impedes the ability of the Department to conduct food-borne illness investigations. Dr. Raval-Nelson added that it also limits the Department's ability to contact providers with information about product safety recalls.

Dr. Schwarz suggested that if the City had more information about where and when people were coming to eat, these activities could become a bridge to social services.

The Board discussed the benefits of regulatory and non-regulatory approaches.

Altessa Boatwright suggested that the Department form an advisory group of providers to assist in the creation of draft regulations. The Board was amenable to the suggestion.

Dr. Schwarz adjourned the meeting at 6:45 PM.