

Van Buren/Cass District Health Department Minutes
11/12/2025

Chairperson Leary called the meeting to order at 3:02pm at the Van Buren/Cass District Health Department, 302 So Front Street, Dowagiac MI in the Community Center on Wednesday, November 12, 2025. Roll call taken.

Board members present: Jeremiah Jones, Tina Leary, Priscilla Gatties, Roseann Marchetti in-person and Robert Linderman virtually

Board members absent: Randall Peat

Employees present: Nancy Desai, George Friday, Lauren Jaramillo, Dr. Andrew Malsbary, Danielle Persky, Jenni Zordan, in-person and Kelly Adkins, Alisha Bartlett, Julie Beeching, Holly Young, Dr. Larry Wile virtually

Others: Don Hanson, Sandy Hanson, Jerry Marchetti, Karen Tan in-person

The meeting started with an appreciation of Don Hanson's tenure on the Van Buren/Cass District Board of Health. Persky honored his legacy as he started public service in 1962. Hanson's environmental health experience and historical knowledge were also highlighted.

October meeting minutes were reviewed. Motioned by Marchetti and second by Jones to approve the meeting minutes as written. All voting yes, motion carried.

Finance Director's Report

Desai and Persky gave the floor to Friday for the proposed environmental health fee increase. Friday started by discussing the last time fees were reviewed in 2019. The goal will be to do so more often from here on out. The board reviewed the comparison page showing the proposed increases do not go above the average environmental health costs. The one highlighted as increasing by the largest amount is the school cafeteria inspection fee. The reason is that the state used to only require one inspection per year, but that has changed to two times a year. Noted is that the first water test is included in the permit, which most other health departments do not provide. The revenue potential is \$94,000. Friday discussed the need to possibly review again next year as other environmental health departments are increasing this year. Linderman asked about the appeals not having an increase. Friday responded that the last one was three to four years ago. It's already a cost deterrent but can be reviewed in the future if issues arise.

Motioned by Jones and second by Marchetti to approve the updated environmental health fee schedule as written. All voting yes, motion carried. Friday thanked the board and stated the increase fees will be executed on January 1, 2026.

Jones commented on the doubling of the fee if a septic or well system is placed without a permit. Friday noted it doesn't happen often, but it is often due to miscommunication between a homeowner and driller.

Expenditures Report

There was no expenditure report for October.

Administrator/Health Officer's Report

Persky began by giving an update on the open board of health member role. She is meeting with Dr. Matt Dommer to discuss interest and provide information on joining. The intent if interested would be to then

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fill out the Van Buren County board application ahead of December, then instate the new board member in January.

The meeting in January 2026 was also reviewed as the previous January board meeting couldn't be held until Van Buren and Cass Counties designate their chairpersons. Jones added that January 8th is the first meeting in Cass County, but the next week is reserved for chairperson selection. Persky noted she is amenable to cancelling the January meeting as it is also slow for the health department.

All directors were present at this meeting, either in-person or virtual. Persky led the directors in introductions to the board. Persky moved to discuss the reduced hour workweek pilot as a follow-up from October. After the board's recommendation to review proposal without closing on Friday's, Persky brought the discussion to an October all staff meeting. All staff participated in a strategy workshop cross divisionally with mutually agreed objectives. This gave administration clarity as to what staff would like to see or not see in the future pilot. The concerns brought about were that staff working alone is a safety hazard and hour reductions. Staff were interested in a better work-life balance that would come with reduced hours and agreed Fridays were quiet. What came of this past month is a final proposal to the board to pilot the hours of Monday to Thursday from 8:00am to 5:00pm and Friday from 8:00am to 12:00pm. Staff would provide consistent feedback through an organized evaluation plan.

Jones asked if this proposal could be reverted if needed. Persky agreed that yes, it could be, which is why the evaluation plan is necessary. Another part of this is to improve the phone system and website tools available to the public. This would look like scheduling appointments online, increasing payment options, etc. Jones agreed it was important to have user-friendly options. Persky added that informing the board of how service is delivered to our communities will be another important part of this pilot. Communication with constituents is done differently in each division, so talking about service delivery will be necessary.

Gatties asked if paid lunch breaks were already in place. Persky answered no; paid lunches will be added as part of this pilot. Gatties cautioned the importance of staff taking their legally required breaks. Gatties asked if remote access to service delivery has been reviewed as potential. There is a USDA grant for rural community healthcare organizations to improve IT infrastructure for the promotion of telehealth. Gatties agreed to send this information to Persky.

Jones asked about the evaluation plan if this pilot is found not working. Persky answered that the intention is to bring the board quarterly reports from the evaluation plan. The pilot can be stopped at any time.

Linderman brought his concern about the original proposal of closing fully on Fridays, especially when considering being open to constituents during emergencies. Jones answered that there are already contingency plans in place for emergencies. Zordan agreed that plans are already in place as emergencies occur outside of business hours. This is already an operational piece of work in emergency preparedness and public health nursing. Linderman asked if a phone operator would manage the phone outside of these proposed pilot hours. Persky responded that all staff would be on the same schedule. Outside of business hours, the phone system is set to go through a dispatching system that can send those calling the non-emergency or emergency lines as needed. Hospital staff with positive communicable disease results already know this process with our clinical team being prepared to respond as needed.

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Zordan added that the phone system and website have been identified as priorities. Linderman asked for updates from IT on future work and a current update on staffing shortages affecting a person being at the front desk and answering phones. Persky responded that clinical reception and administrative balances are being reviewed through several exercises.

Gatties asked if a phone answering service has ever been considered. The one their clinic is being utilized is a local service. Persky appreciated the feedback and would like to review this option. It's important to be creative during staff shortages. Leary asked what the entrance of the building is like for visitors without a staff person at the front desk. Persky responded that signage is put at the front desk, and administrative staff in Environmental Health and Administrative Services are available to answer questions as needed.

Motioned by Jones and second by Gatties to approve the reduced hour workweek pilot. All voting yes, motion carried.

Leary reiterated that an answering service might elevate some of these concerns. Leary noted the incorporation of community feedback through customer surveys as a portion of the evaluation process.

Nursing and Medical Director Report

Beeching shared information on the ByHeart infant formula recall due to botulism cases. This information is posted to the health department's social media and website.

Dr. Wile highlighted his experience at the Michigan Premier Public Health Conference with strengthening of contacts. He added that he has always had great experiences with the Board of Health member-at-large candidate, Dr. Dommer. He would be a great addition and fit well on the board.

Dental Report

Persky walked through a dental outreach staff report on behalf of Emily Flowers. A portable dental unit is being requested for purchase. The SEAL MI! program provided funding for this specific unit with \$12,291 granted for this purchase.

Motioned by Jones and second by Gatties to approve up to \$12,000 funding for the portable dental unit. All voting yes, motion carried.

Environmental Health Report

Updates are discussed in the written report.

Health Promotions Report

Zordan announced the awarding of the firearm safety grant to the health department for \$123,813. This will include two large media campaigns, education, and community outreach. Jones confirmed that the goal is not to be divisive with political messaging around firearms. Zordan confirmed that the goal of this project is education for gun safety. Persky added that this is a collaborative effort with partnership organizations such as county sheriffs, state police, and mental health authorities. Leary noted the highlights of safety and the vast number of hunters in this region.

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Zordan reported that health promotions are preparing for SNAP benefit delays. Resources have been posted on our website and social media. Details are still going back and forth, so it's important to keep the community informed.

There was no other business.

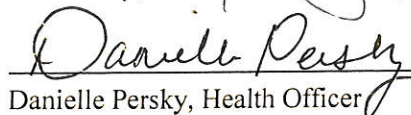
For public comment, Tan asked if the community and partnering organizations such as the sheriff will sign off on the firearm safety media campaign. Zordan responded that the sheriff provided a letter of support for the grant based on the grant submission and is a participating partner, but they will not directly sign off. It is a multi-coordinated campaign. Tan asked if the language in this campaign will have input from the public ahead of time. Zordan responded that it most likely will be after creation. The health department will provide input on the language as the health department is spearheading the project. Persky added that the committee created between the partner organizations will determine the strategy and media design. Tan requested improved language, which Jones agreed with.

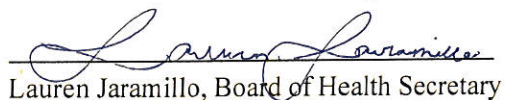
Tan asked if the 40-hour work week change will include a paid lunch. Persky responded yes.

Tan commented on Alana's Foundation, which was highlighted in the board report. She noted the need to be balanced with vaccination consent information for parents to make informed decisions.

Motion to adjourn at 3:55pm by Jones, second by Marchetti. The next regular District Board of Health meeting is scheduled for December 10 at 3:00pm in the Van Buren ISD Conference Center at 490 So Paw Paw Street, Lawrence, MI.


Tina Leary, Board of Health Chairperson


Danielle Persky, Health Officer


Lauren Jaramillo, Board of Health Secretary