



Geauga County Health District Advisory Council - March 15, 2023

The HDAC conducted its [statutorily mandated Annual Meeting](#) on March 15, 2023 at 7:00 pm at the County Office Building, 12611 Ravenwood Drive, Room 303B, Chardon, OH 44024. The meeting was streamed by Geauga ADP and a [recording is available](#). At publication, the recording had been viewed 94 times. **Observer Note: Earlier that day at 4 pm, Geauga Public Health District (GPHD) held a special meeting in the same location. The meeting was attended by many HDAC members and was contentious, with GPHD moving forward to approve a cooperative agreement with Lake County despite repeated requests from township and village representatives to delay the vote until a later regular meeting.**

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by President Jonathan Tiber at 7:00 pm and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Seated at the front were members of the selection committee: Chris Alusheff, Mike Brown, Jonathan Tiber, Joyce Peters and William Koons.

Roll Call: Secretary Mike Brown called the roll, noting 18 council members present as noted below. A quorum was declared.

In attendance:

Auburn Twp - PJ Cavanaugh
Bainbridge Twp - Michael Bates
Burton Twp - Dan Whiting
Chardon Twp - Mike Brown
Chester Twp - Kevin Radtke
Claridon Twp - Jon Tiber
Hamden Twp - Keith McClintock
Chardon City - Christopher Grau
Aquila Village - Chris Alusheff

Huntsburg Twp - Jason Sutter
Middlefield Twp - Paul Porter
Munson Twp - Jim McCaskey
Parkman Twp - Joyce Peters
Russell Twp - Jim Mueller
Thompson Twp - Erwin Leffel
Troy Twp - Sharon Simms
Burton Village - Ruth Spanos
S. Russell Village - William Koons

Absent:

County Commissioner - Tim Lennon
Montville Twp - Randy Peterson

Newbury Twp - Bill Skomrock
Middlefield Village - Ben Garlich

GPHD Board members Richard Piraino, Dr. Ashley Jones, Lynn Roman, Carolyn Brakey and Dr. Mark Rood were present in the audience. GPHD staff in attendance included Medical Director Dr. Cameron, Administrator Adam Litke and Environmental Health Director Dan Lark.

Minutes - September 14, 2022 HDAC meeting minutes were approved without edits or comment.

Geauga Public Health District (GPHD) Board Update: Lynn Roman and Carolyn Brakey

Mrs. Roman explained that earlier in the day, the board took action to position GPHD to improve services while cutting thousands of dollars in annual expenses. She introduced Carolyn Brakey.

Mrs. Brakey stated that the board voted unanimously to enter into a cross jurisdictional agreement with Lake County General Health District (LCGHD) to serve as a staffing agency for GPHD. She said the agreement allows GPHD to retain control in a financially responsible manner and asserted the agreement would eventually generate \$350,000 to \$600,000 in cost savings annually. GPHD will maintain its vehicles, offices, website, and identity. Vital records services will remain with GPHD. She opined that Geauga residents will receive the same services and they will go to the same places for those services.

The five year agreement goes into effect April 3, 2023 and may be terminated either unilaterally or by either party with 2 years notice. GPHD will retain control and set policies. Adam Litke will serve as Administrator.

Mrs. Brakey listed the following benefits of the agreement:

- greater access to grant funds
- possible additional programs
- more efficient accreditation process
- access to specialty staff
- better emergency preparedness
- finance and grant writing
- larger pool of employees

Per Mrs. Brakey, GPHD will issue its own permits, maintain its own bank accounts and inspections will be performed under the direction of GPHD.

She stated Lake is ready to provide all necessary services and pointed out that Mr. Litke and Mr. Lark have been providing contract services. She noted Mr. Lake has administered the WIC program for Geauga since 2016.

Mrs. Brakey stated that "...some of the changes this agreement brings are painful" before sharing that seventeen Geauga Health employees will be laid off effective March 31st. They will be informed of severance offers and may apply for employment with LCGHD.

She stated, “we face financial challenges that demand dramatic change,” and went on to share that GPHD had a 2023 shortfall of \$35,000. She asserted future shortfalls would exceed \$500,000.

Observer Note: To date, no financial report or presentation has been provided in public session to support the Board’s financial assertions of a \$35,000 loss in 2023 or projected future losses in excess of \$500,000. In its [Jan 18, 2023 Observer Report](#), LWVG reported that GPHD’s certified available cash on January 1, 2023 totaled \$3,795,710.11.

Mrs. Brakey further stated the board had considered all sources of revenue including levy funds from residents, permits/fees and grants. She stated the board should consider every option before asking for a levy increase.

Observer Comment: Two assessment options are available to the Geauga Public Health District. Apportionments may be assessed to townships and municipalities composing the District through [ORC 3709.28](#) and levy funds from residents may be assessed through [ORC 3709.29](#).

Mrs. Brakey asserted, “Assessing already cash-strapped cities, townships and villages for the increased costs did not appear to be a viable and responsible decision.” She went on to say fees are set by statute but grant revenues appear promising under the agreement.

Observer Comment: It is unclear how the Board determined whether a township/municipality assessment under [ORC 3709.28](#) was viable.

Mrs. Brakey explained the board did their homework and pursued several other partners before settling on Lake County. She stated the Ohio Department of Health fully supports a regional approach to public health services, then asserted they are taking “a unique approach that retains all of regionalism’s benefits with none of its trappings.”

HDAC Questions for Board:

Dan Whiting of Burton Twp inquired about the downside of merging.

- Mrs. Brakey clarified this is not a merger and stated the disadvantage was needing to lay off nearly all of GPHD’s employees.

Jim Mueller of Russell Twp stated that Geauga is among the most wealthy counties in Ohio and all of sudden we’re told we can’t have our own health department.

- Mrs. Brakey stated that GPHD is just staffing differently than before and asserted the average person won't notice a difference. She shared her belief that assessing the townships should only be done as a last resort.

Ruth Spanos of Burton Village asked whether GPHD gave any consideration to protecting the employees in some way. She asked whether they will retain seniority and inquired whether GPHD considered waiting and first asking townships, villages and residents if they prioritized cost savings over Geauga residents losing their jobs?

- Mrs. Brakey responded that Lake County will be at GPHD tomorrow with applications and that she doesn't know about seniority. She stated further that GPHD had no statutory obligation to consult with HDAC.

PJ Cavanaugh of Auburn Twp stated that many of the expenses of GPHD are geared toward the Amish community and inquired how Lake County will address those needs.

- Mrs. Brakey responded, "That's not something I was aware of," and indicated she would get back to Mr. Cavanaugh.

Keith McClintock of Hambden Twp inquired whether the board surveyed any of the 90,000 plus Geauga residents to gauge how the Board decision to layoff GPH staff might impact their willingness to support a future levy.

- Mrs. Brakey responded, "We have not...(chuckling) I would just say as a personal Geauga resident, I see how many of the levies go on the ballot and I see, you know, road levies that fail. If you're parks, I think it's going to pass...but I certainly wouldn't bet on it."

Craig Richter of Chester Twp inquired whether they would staff GPHD at the same levels.

- Mrs. Brakey responded that there will be a reduction and that higher level positions will be shared between Lake and Geauga.

Jim Mueller of Russell Twp said 2 days' notice was not enough time to evaluate the agreement and noted that even though trustees/council people asked during the earlier meeting for them to wait, they "rammed it through."

- Mrs. Brakey stated the contract was still being negotiated over the weekend and that she wanted to give 24 hours notice.

Ruth Spanos of Burton Village inquired who negotiated.

- Per Mrs. Brakey, outside counsel and the Geauga Prosecutor's Office

PJ Cavanaugh of Auburn Twp inquired where they anticipated staffing cuts would be made.

- Mrs. Brakey stated she did not have the organization chart and stated there would be shared positions.

Geauga Public Health District (GPHD) Administrator Update: Adam Litke - Mr. Litke stated that the budget he was presenting did not reflect the board decision to enter into staffing agreement with LCGHD and would have to be reworked and presented to the Budget Commission. Because it is not an accurate representation, we are not sharing the information here.

Mr. Litke shared an update about Parkman wells that are being drilled as a result of purported salt contamination by ODOT.

Election of 2023/2024 HDAC Officers - the council voted unanimously to elect Mr. Alusheff as President and Mr. Brown as Secretary.

Candidate Presentations - Mr. Tiber explained that Dr. Hendrickson, Mr. Piraino and Mr. Gliha would make 3 minute presentations, each of which would be followed by questions from council members.

DR. HENDRICKSON

Dr. Hendrickson shared that he is a retired surgeon who previously worked with the Cleveland Clinic. He referred to the decision made earlier in the day to enter into a cooperative agreement with Lake County and stated that these will be challenging times. He has reviewed annual reports and is struck by the hard work people are doing. He would like to work with Auburn Career Center to create a program to help staff Environmental Health positions. Also noted that cancer is the #1 cause of death in Geauga and he feels there is much the health department can do to help the community on that front. He would approach this role as he approached surgery, with careful planning and good problem solving to ensure the right outcome.

Jim Mueller of Russell Twp stated that earlier, HDAC members asked the GPHD Board to delay voting on the proposed agreement with Lake. He inquired whether Dr. Hendrickson would have delayed.

- Dr. Hendrickson responded yes, and pointed out that under the agreement, only Geauga employees were terminated.

Mike Brown of Chardon Twp asked to hear more about a collaboration with Auburn Career Center.

- Dr. Hendrickson noted there is a shortage of septic inspectors and thought it prudent to inquire if they have a program or would be willing to develop a program to help address this staffing need. Regarding the septic and well programs, Dr. Hendrickson likened them to surgery, saying you have to do things properly. He pointed to the GPHD motto of Prevent, Promote, Protect as guiding principles.

MR. PIRAINO

Richard Piraino said he was disappointed the council felt their concerns about the cooperative agreement were not considered. He talked about how hard the GPHD Board has been working. He stated that wells and septic systems are paramount in Geauga and that 80-90% of the work is in those areas. He said that Population Health is not that important in Geauga. He emphasized that the needs of the Amish community must be met and went on to question whether the board needed another MD vs. someone who understands environmental health programs.

Jim Mueller of Russell Twp brought up the Board's refusal to delay the cooperative agreement vote and stated, "I am going to hold you accountable for that."

- Mr. Piraino said the decision had to be made and that waiting only placed more stress on the staff.

PJ Cavanaugh of Auburn Twp pointed out that historically, as a levy expires, the GPHD Board would reach out to the townships and request input about potential levy increases. He asked why that did not happen this time.

- Mr. Piraino stated they likely will have that conversation soon but said they don't ask townships about amounts. They examine their financials and consult with the Auditor. He noted the Health levy is one of the lowest in the county and seemed taken aback that trustees might be open to an increased levy. He stated, "I'm really surprised. I would think that Trustees understand...is it really easy for you guys to pass road levies and fire levies and police levies?" Mike Brown of Chardon Twp interjected, stating, "county levies almost always pass, Rich."

Jason Sutter of Huntsburg Twp stated that they recently passed a road levy and asserted, "your employees sell your levies." He encouraged the health district to "take a lesson from Huntsburg Twp."

- Mr. Piraino noted that five years ago a health levy passed overwhelmingly but stated the GPHD Board wants to be fiscally responsible and not spend money unnecessarily. He

emphasized they are not losing control and stated that the only thing they are transitioning is the employees.

Mr. Sutter asked why voters shouldn't be the ones deciding whether to have their own people, in their own county, employed by their own county.

- Mr. Piraino said they had to make a decision that served the needs of the entire county and he pointed out that the Board vote was unanimous.

Keith McClintock of Hambden Twp inquired whether Mr. Piraino had personally read the entire contract and reviewed it with legal counsel.

- Mr. Piraino stated the board was kept informed by legal counsel and had only recently received the contract. He stated he had read the contract.

Dan Whiting of Burton Twp noted that under the agreement, GPHD is saving a lot of money and he wants to know how much more they will request through a levy.

- Mr. Piraino noted they will be saving \$300,000 to \$600,000 annually and then spoke about the value of collaboration. Mr. Tiber clarified that the health board has a renewal levy coming up and Mr. Piraino stated they will have to examine the financials and determine if the renewal alone will be sufficient. Heard from the audience, "it better be."

MR. GLIHA

Frank Gliha stated he believes he can add value. He stated he was disheartened by the earlier GPHD meeting and said he would have voted against the cooperative agreement with Lake County because he doesn't feel the Board should "sell-out." He asserted we need the employees here and we need the health department here. He feels the GPHD Board should have delayed the vote and met with the township/village reps to figure out what could be done to make this a better transition.

Jim McCaskey of Munson Twp asked what strength he would bring.

- Mr. Gliha stated he was both a trustee and the auditor and he understands what is going on. He pointed to his past experience as a Township Trustee (13 years), Auditor (9 years) and his former service on HDAC as both Chair and Secretary.

Jim Mueller of Russell Twp asked how he would have voted on the cooperative agreement.

- Mr. Gliha stated the response of trustees during that meeting sent a clear signal. He stated in his presentation that he would have voted no.

Public Comment: Mr. Tiber explained that any member of the public or HDAC could take up to one minute to express support for a candidate.

- A resident from Troy Twp expressed his opinion that not bringing the cooperative agreement to the council was a “gross miscarriage of trust.” He expressed support for Mr. Gliha.
- Mr. Richter of Chester Twp read a letter from fellow Trustee Ken Radtke expressing support for Mr. Piraino.
- A Geauga resident and former Claridon Twp Trustee expressed support for Mr. Gliha.
- A Claridon Twp resident expressed her support for Mr. Piraino.
- A Chester Twp resident expressed his support for Mr. Piraino.

Screening Committee Recommendation - given what had transpired since the committee met on March 8th, the screening committee stepped to the side of the room to briefly confer about their recommendation.

HDAC Deliberation: Mr Tiber opened the floor to deliberation by HDAC members and encouraged them to ask questions of the Screening Committee.

Keith McClintock of Hambden Twp inquired whether the committee’s recommendation was unanimous. A bit later he asked who they originally recommended.

- Mr. Tiber stated there was a 3-way split, with two supporting Gliha, two supporting Hendrickson and one supporting Piraino. Later, he stated the committee previously all supported Mr. Piraino.
- Mr. Brown expressed shock at the way the current Board handled the cooperative agreement. He stated Geauga residents value their sovereignty and said the Board should have come to the trustees or explored a levy first. He opined that the cooperative agreement should have been the last option and disagreed with the Board’s decision to “do something of this magnitude, in a single meeting without public discourse.”

Erwin Leffel of Thompson Twp inquired if the Screening Committee knew about the cooperative agreement before the interviews.

- Mr. Tiber and Mr. Brown both responded no and Mr. Alusheff can be seen shaking his head no.
- Mr. Brown further stated that they asked Mr. Piraino something along the lines about a cooperative agreement and Mr. Piraino said he wasn’t aware of anything.

Jim McCaskey asked each committee member to state their recommendation.

- Mike Brown of Chardon Twp stated that what happened tonight illustrates the difference between an elected official and an appointed official. He asserted he would be voted out if he did what the GPHD Board did.
- Jonathan Tiber of Claridon Twp opined that Mr. Piraino and Dr. Hendrickson answered their questions specifically and Mr. Gliha was vague in his responses.
- William Koons of South Russell Village expressed sympathy for the Geauga Public Health employees impacted by the decision and stated they will have an opportunity to remove someone next year if this doesn't work out. He supports giving Mr. Piraino a year to make it work.
- Chris Alusheff of Aquilla Village noted that he has been following Geauga Public Health since 2021 and took a day off work to review the contract. He believes it says something, that on this issue he is in agreement with people he normally vehemently disagrees with. He acknowledged that the Board is not beholden to HDAC but stated HDAC members are beholden to Geauga residents. Residents indicated they want transparency as well as autonomy to the extent feasible. He criticized the current board members' failure to see the fault of their actions and is recommending Dr. Hendrickson.
- Joyce Peters of Parkman Twp expressed disappointment that the current GPHD Board did not engage stakeholders before passing their cooperative agreement. She supports Mr. Gliha.
- Mr. Brown said that after the health meeting he changed his support from Mr. Piraino to Mr. Gliha. He hopes the agreement lasts no more than 2-3 years and feels they need to regain control of the health department. He recommends Mr. Gliha.
- Mr. Tiber stated that he is concerned that the problems were not foreseen two years ago and questions further why a levy was not presented? He is supporting Mr. Hendrickson. He stated further that Mr. Gliha was found guilty of dereliction of duty at the Auditor's office and barred from running for office. Mr. Gliha responded that he had supervised a large department and had trusted people.

Jim McCaskey of Munson Twp inquired what would happen if a tie resulted. Various scenarios were discussed but the group ultimately decided to move forward with the vote.

Roll Call Vote - Mr. Brown called the roll and he and Mr. Litke recorded responses. 18 votes were cast as follows:

- 11 votes for Dr. Hendrickson - supported by Mr. Cavanaugh, Mr. Bates, Mr. Whiting, Mr. Tiber, Mr. McClintock, Mr. Sutter, Mr. Porter, Mr. Leffel, Ms. Simms, Mr. Alusheff and Mrs. Spanos.

- 5 votes for Mr. Gliha - supported by Mr. Brown, Mr. McCaskey, Ms. Peters, Mr. Mueller and Mr. Grau.
- 2 votes for Mr. Piraino - supported by Mr. Richter and Mr. Koons.

Appointment - Mr. Tiber announced Dr. Hendrickson's selection by the HDAC as the 2023 Geauga Public Health Board appointee. The appointment is effective immediately following adjournment of this meeting.

Closing Remarks: President-elect Alusheff encouraged HDAC members to attend GPHD meetings and stated he will be closely monitoring implementation of the agreement with Lake County. He reminded his colleagues that HDAC has statutory authority to call special meetings, recommend policies to the GPHD Board and remove board members.

Adjournment - The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Observer: Shelly Lewis

Editor: Anne Ondrey

Reviewer: Gail Roussey

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