

**Portage County Combined General Health District  
Board Meeting Minutes  
January 20, 2026  
6:00 PM**



**I. CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER**

The Portage County Combined General Health District Board of Health met on Tuesday, January 20, 2026, at 999 East Main Street, Ravenna, OH, 44266. The meeting was called to order at 6:04 PM by Board President Ribelin.

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|----------------------------------|---|
| Board Members in Attendance:     | Lucy Ribelin, President<br>Linda Grimm, Member<br>Diana Clarke, Member<br>Dr. Philip Keyser, Member<br>Amy Everett, Member<br>James Bierlair, Vice President  |
| Board Members Not in Attendance: | Chad Delaney, Member<br>Brock Kertoy, Member  |
| Staff in Attendance:             | Becky Lehman, Health Commissioner<br>Sarah Meduri, Administrator & PIO<br>Christina Jewell, Administrative Assistant<br>Branden Burns, Director of Finance<br>Amy Cooper, Director of Community Health<br>Cynthia Hilbish, WIC Supervisor - Ravenna<br>Justin Rechichar, Director of Environmental Health<br>Natalie Menke, Environmental Health Supervisor<br>Mark Arredondo, Medical Director |
| District Advisory Council:       | Bruce Lange, Charlestown Township   |
| Others:                          | None  |
| Media Present:                   | None  |

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

- A. Board of Health Meeting: On January 20, 2026, Board Member Dr. Keyser presented a motion to accept the Board Meetings Minutes for December 9, 2025, seconded by Board Member Grimm.

A vote on the motion is as follows:

Board Member Ribelin	Yes	Board Member Grimm	Yes
Board Member Bierlair	Yes	Board Member Kertoy	Absent
Board Member Delaney	Absent	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes

**III. PORTAGE COUNTY TOWNSHIP ASSOCIATION: (District Advisory Council)**

Mr. Lange reported that the Portage County Township Association meeting is scheduled for February 21 at 6:00 p.m., with Shalersville Township hosting. He also shared that the Winter Conference will take place February 4–6 in Columbus, noting that last year’s conference had record attendance and that even higher attendance is expected this year. Mr. Lange stated that Suffield Township Trustee Mr. Calcei and Paris Township Trustee Ms. Spicer plan to continue serving on the District Advisory Council Board, along with Ravenna Township Trustee, Mr. Gibson, who will also continue to preside over the District Advisory Council meeting in March. He further provided an update on township trustees regarding a proposed amendment to abolish township property taxes, explaining that seminars at the Winter Conference will be used to educate trustees so they can inform the public about potential impacts should the measure pass. Mr. Lange emphasized that simply abolishing township property taxes is not a viable solution.

**IV. PUBLIC COMMENT: N/A**

**V. ACTION ITEMS:**

Expenditure Ratifications:	\$27,248.46
Invoice Batch No. 7946	\$ 10,307.39
Invoice Batch No. 7968	\$ 6,131.53
Invoice Batch No. 7975	\$ 6,077.79
Invoice Batch No. 7995	\$ 4,731.75

Mr. Burns requested approval from the board to ratify the payments from this past month’s expenses. ratifications of payments totaling \$27,248.46.

Board Member Clarke presented a motion to accept the above expenditures and ratify these expenses, seconded by Board Member Everett.

A vote on the motion is as follows:

Board Member Ribelin	Yes	Board Member Grimm	Yes
Board Member Bierlair	Yes	Board Member Kertoy	Absent
Board Member Delaney	Absent	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes

**B. Travel Expenditures**

Mr. Burns requested approval of the travel expenditures presented to the Board.

A motion was presented by Board Member Grimm to approve said travel expenditures, seconded by Board Member Dr. Keyser.

A vote on the motion is as follows:

Board Member Ribelin	Yes	Board Member Grimm	Yes
Board Member Bierlair	Yes	Board Member Kertoy	Absent
Board Member Delaney	Absent	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes

**C. Resolution #26-01** The Portage County Board of Health Acceptance to Enter into a Services Agreement Between the Portage County Combined General Health District and Richardson Animal Hospital for the Purpose of Preparation of Animals for Rabies Testing.

Ms. Cooper shared that this is the annual renewal for the rabies testing contract. The prices include an increase of 10% from the previous year's contract.

A motion was presented by Board Member Bierlair to Approve Resolution #26-01, seconded by Board Member Grimm.

A vote on the motion is as follows:

Board Member Ribelin	Yes	Board Member Grimm	Yes
Board Member Bierlair	Yes	Board Member Kertoy	Absent
Board Member Delaney	Absent	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes

**D. Resolution #26-02** Declaring a Public Nuisance, Ordering Abatement of that Nuisance. Located at 642 Albert Horning Road, Randolph Township and Approving the Civil Prosecution for Violation(s) of Ohio Revised Code (ORC) Chapter 3718 and Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) Chapter 3701-29 Sewage Treatment Systems.

Mr. Rechichar stated that the location was originally evaluated as part of a point-of-sale inspection. A dye test was conducted in the leach lines, and the dye surfaced, resulting in the determination of a violation. He further reported that the homeowner has failed to comply with required notifications and is requesting approval to proceed with civil prosecution.

A motion was presented by Board Member Clarke to Adopt and Approve Resolution #26-02, seconded by Board Member Dr. Keyser.

A vote on the motion is as follows:

Board Member Ribelin	Yes	Board Member Grimm	Yes
Board Member Bierlair	Yes	Board Member Kertoy	Absent
Board Member Delaney	Absent	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes

- E. Variance #26-03** A Variance Request for OAC 3701-29-06(G)(3)(a) for the Installation of the Sewage Treatment System Within the Required Isolation Distance of the Hardscape, Located at 1212 Martin Road, Suffield Township.

Mr. Rechichar stated that the project involves replacing a dry well with leaching wells and transitioning to an NPDES system in the northern area of the property. He requested approval of a variance to allow a reduction to three feet. He explained that the variance includes specific terms and conditions due to associated risks, of which the homeowners have been advised and acknowledge. He further stated that, should the property be sold, the variance must be fully disclosed. Mr. Duck and Mr. Meyer both conducted site visits and indicated their support for the request. Mr. Rechichar noted that the standard requirement is a ten-foot setback from the property line, whereas the homeowner is requesting a three-foot setback in this instance.

A motion was presented by Board Member Bierlair to Approve Variance #26-03, seconded by Board Member Dr. Keyser.

A vote on the motion is as follows:

Board Member Ribelin	Yes	Board Member Grimm	Yes
Board Member Bierlair	Yes	Board Member Kertoy	Absent
Board Member Delaney	Absent	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes

**VI. DISCUSSIONS:**

**Administration:**

Ms. Meduri shared her administration report, noting ongoing and intermittent Wi-Fi outages that

have impacted overall services. Contingency plans have been implemented, including the use of cloud-based systems and mobile hotspots. Due to the disruptions, WIC clinic appointments were rescheduled. Quality IP was on site throughout the weekend, as well as yesterday and today; however, the system had gone down multiple times despite efforts to resolve the issue. Ms. Meduri explained that while the network had been patched for some time, a new technical account manager identified additional issues. As systems are being cleaned up, reconfigured, and tested independently, new issues continue to arise. Updates regarding service disruptions have been communicated through social media and OPHCS alerts. She also reported an HVAC issue caused by a burned VAV unit following an electrical odor, which is being addressed. The intermittent Wi-Fi has also affected the electronic access system, resulting in doors locking and unlocking unexpectedly and requiring manual adjustments and system updates.

Ms. Meduri provided agency updates, including staffing matters. An offer for an Environmental Health Specialist position was accepted on January 16th and rescinded on January 18th; the department plans to move forward with another candidate. Interviews for a Marketing Coordinator position are scheduled for January 21st. WIC staffing is pausing hiring due to a potential retirement, with plans to refocus staffing needs once that transition is clarified. Ms. Meduri also noted ongoing annual training, evaluations, and preparation of required reports. Leadership training with Matt Deevers has been rescheduled for April due to Wi-Fi issues, a leadership workshop is scheduled for February 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> at NEOMED, and Matt Deevers will be providing a follow up for the DISC assessment and communication training for our on-site staff meeting, which will be held on January 22<sup>nd</sup>. She also noted an increase in flu activity and released a press release which was shared with the Record Courier.

Ms. Meduri further reported on a recent lockdown event involving an individual inside the building who was also associated with United Way. The building was placed on a lockdown as part of PHAB preparedness practices, and the individual was safely escorted off-site after coordination between United Way staff. As a result, United Way will be required to participate in future safety training courses, and additional security measures will be implemented and addressed through a lease addendum. A question was raised regarding why the individual was not arrested despite a restraining order, and Ms. Meduri indicated that follow-up would be conducted. She concluded by reporting that Pop-Up Pantry utilization increased significantly in 2025, serving 2,968 individuals compared to fewer in 2024, demonstrating continued community need.

### **Finance:**

Mr. Burns presented the cash basis report, reporting a year-end balance of \$3.174 million. He noted that the Ohio Department of Health failed to deliver a fourth-quarter payment of approximately \$80,000, which would have resulted in a year-end balance of approximately \$3.55 million. Mr. Burns referenced the cash basis report for additional detail. He further reported that interest allocation totaled \$277,000, with \$156,000 applied toward the mortgage, which is projected to be paid off in 2026. Mr. Burns noted that MAC funding is performing significantly better with 2025 revenues.

Ms. Lehman explained that staff time is coded appropriately, with Ms. Miley allocating time to MAC and drawing down grant funding. She clarified that while some have questioned whether

this constitutes double dipping, it does not. Programs such as Jobs & Family Services (JFS) and services to underserved populations code time accordingly, and Environmental Health contributes through MAC-supported food programs. The MAC funding program is permitted by the state, and the department utilizes it as allowed. Mr. Burns emphasized that staff-generated revenue supports organizational sustainability, including conferences and long-term planning. He also recognized Ms. Barreca and her team for their work with the CMH program, noting that \$99,012 was generated in 2025 compared to \$24,200 in 2024, and that the CMH program was renamed to include individuals up to 26 years of age.

Mr. Burns reported that the audit was released on January 6, 2026, and that Ms. Lehman facilitated the release of required materials. He also shared the audit results, noting no findings in 2023 and 2024, with one area identified for review under GAAP but not considered a formal finding. Financial issues identified in 2021 and 2022 were corrected, including prior noncompliance with purchase orders. Audit information is available on the State Auditor’s website. Mr. Burns concluded by commending the Finance Division for its strong performance throughout the audit process.

The section below provides a summary of the cash basis report, showing year-end comparisons across prior years to reflect the agency’s financial progress.

Advances		Start of 2025	2025	2024	2023	2022
			Year over Year Change in Funds			
General Fund Unassigned	\$1,864,601.85	\$1,790,867.23				
General Fund Assigned	\$831,313.51	\$615,321.78				
General Fund Advances Out	\$270,000.00	\$340,000.00				
<b>Total General Fund</b>	<b>\$2,965,915.36</b>	<b>\$2,746,189.01</b>				
Special Revenue Funds	\$775,699.70	\$810,114.39				
General Fund Advances In	-\$270,000.00	-\$340,000.00				
<b>Total Special Revenue Funds</b>	<b>\$505,699.70</b>	<b>\$470,114.39</b>				
<b>Total Funds</b>	<b>\$3,471,615.06</b>	<b>\$3,216,303.40</b>	<b>\$255,311.66</b>	<b>\$98,394.86</b>	<b>-\$136,046.54</b>	<b>-\$645,147.13</b>
<b>Net Change in Funds</b>	<b>(\$242,487.80)</b>					

**Environmental Health:**

Ms. Menke reported that the food program is nearing the conclusion of its annual cycle, which runs from March through February, and currently encompasses two and one-half pages of documented inspection activity. She further noted that the Mosquito Control grant application has been submitted to Ohio EPA with assistance from Mr. Nolte. Preparations are also underway for the NEHA Retail Flexible Funding Model grants, which support the Food Safety Advisory Council and mentorship activities, including required travel for training. Ms. Menke indicated that next month’s report will include updated statistics with expanded historical comparisons, as well as additional information pertaining to water quality. Lastly, staff will begin additional cross-training to ensure a broader understanding of all program areas. This will include increased exposure to water quality activities and other operational functions, allowing team members to gain clearer insight into each other’s responsibilities.

Mr. Rechichar stated that Environmental Health Division reported two updates.

First, with assistance from Ms. Jewell, staff have been reviewing WPCLF procedures. During this review, it became evident that the program has historically applied income-qualification thresholds too rigidly. For example, if a homeowner qualified at 85% but exceeded the next benchmark by a small amount—approximately \$2,000—the department would previously deny advancement to the higher funding tier. Recently, however, two cases referred by NDS were reevaluated, and funding allocations were adjusted appropriately by applying greater flexibility within allowable guidelines.

One outstanding case involved a WPCLF project, previously approved by the Board. The homeowner had not returned required documentation for nearly a month, including their 15% cost share (approximately \$2,300). After multiple attempts to reach the homeowner through various contacts, staff learned that the individual had been dealing with significant personal hardships, including a carbon monoxide issue that displaced them to temporary housing and a family medical emergency. Based on these circumstances, the department reassessed their eligibility and approved them at the 100% income-qualification level. Staff noted that this experience served as a reminder of the human element within regulatory work and the impact that flexibility can have on residents facing hardship.

Second, the department will meet this week with the AOHC Environmental Representative, Chad Brown, and ODH to discuss issues related to food program surveys. Historically, food surveys involved inspectors documenting every potential violation, sometimes turning a two-hour inspection into an eight-hour process with hundreds of line items. Through the Ohio Environmental Health Association, efforts were made to transition this process to a standardized test and exam format to promote consistency and provide more meaningful educational feedback to operators.

However, due to the way ODH and ODA legal teams have interpreted the rules, the revised format has become more burdensome and, in practice, reverted to the previous model. Furthermore, sanitarians across the state—including FDA-certified inspectors—have failed the exam without receiving any feedback on which questions were missed or why. Staff will be initiating discussions with ODH leadership in hopes of improving exam transparency, identifying invalid or poorly written questions, and restoring the intended purpose of the revised survey process.

A board member inquired whether the income-qualification guidelines referenced earlier were established by the department or mandated by the state. Mr. Rechichar clarified that while the department typically applies a 200% threshold, there is no requirement within EPA contracts or guidance that obligates the department to strictly adhere to that figure. Accordingly, moving forward, the department will apply these guidelines with greater flexibility to ensure fair and appropriate support for eligible homeowners.

### **Community Health:**

Dr. Arredondo, Medical Director, noted that seasonal influenza activity remains high, as does the incidence of COVID-19. Residents are encouraged to stay up to date on vaccinations, practice good hand hygiene, and take general preventive health measures.

Board member Dr. Keyser inquired on the rabies vaccination duration, the Medical Director reported that current research supports immunity for approximately three years following vaccination. Long-term data are limited; however, available studies indicate that roughly 60% of individuals may retain measurable immunity up to ten years post-vaccination. Despite this, booster doses are recommended to ensure continued protection. The exact duration of immunity beyond that timeframe remains uncertain. When asked about local rabies cases, the Medical Director stated that specific numbers were not immediately available. Ms. Menke noted that Portage County lies along a regional wildlife vaccination corridor intended to prevent rabies spread from neighboring counties.

### **WIC and Community Programs Report**

Ms. Hilbish reported that the annual holiday event was highly successful. Forty-three families participated—the same number as the previous year—and feedback remained positive. The event provides an opportunity for staff to interact with entire families, including older siblings who may no longer be enrolled in WIC.

Ms. Cooper shared that despite snowy, cold weather, turnout was strong, and several partner agencies were onsite to connect families with additional services. December was a quieter operational month due to the holidays, but routine programs continued. Fall-prevention education sessions were still conducted, and she submitted a supplemental grant application to support potential expansion of pop-up safety education initiatives. The department also received up to \$20,000 to support expansion of the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) initiative in 2026. Plans include building into the previous photo-voice activities and conducting a walkability assessment in a designated area of Ravenna.

### **Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)**

The final workgroup sessions for the upcoming three-year Community Health Improvement Plan were held the previous Monday, with strong attendance. Staff have been conducting extensive outreach to engage community partners, particularly those who have experienced staffing turnover. One partner unable to attend the group session met individually with staff later in the week. The CHIP is expected to be finalized by February.

The identified priority areas for the new plan remain:

- Chronic disease
- Population health and safety
- Mental health and substance misuse

The agency will continue advancing activities aligned with these priorities.

### **Health Commissioner:**

## Accreditation (PHAB) Site Visit

Ms. Lehman reported that the PHAB accreditation site visit took place virtually on Wednesday and Thursday of the previous week. Despite unexpected internet outages during the visit, the review proceeded without interruption. The visit team included two site evaluators and the PHAB representative, Carrie.

The first day of the visit focused heavily on documentation submitted by the Health District. Staff responsible for each document area were present and prepared to address reviewer questions. Of the approximately 230 documents submitted, reviewers initially anticipated reopening seven items related to the Health Commissioner's portfolio and four related to Ms. Cooper's. Ultimately, only four documents were reopened.

Staff were commended for their professionalism and preparation. Reviewers noted that all submitted documentation was clearly the Health District's original work. During the Board portion of the visit, Board member, Ms. Everett, and Board member, Ms. Clarke represented the Board. They responded to questions regarding the value of accreditation for a governing board, as well as perceived strengths and opportunities within the Health District. Their institutional knowledge and collaborative responses reflected positively on the organization. Twelve staff members were interviewed without leadership present. Reviewers again provided strong feedback, stating that the staff interviews went very well.

Preliminary strengths identified by reviewers included:

- The high quality and commitment of Health District staff and strong, well-maintained partnerships with community organizations

Opportunities identified included:

- Continued advancement of succession planning
- Further integration of the agency's strategic plan into day-to-day staff awareness, including alignment with the 10 Essential Public Health Services

The PHUN Committee is developing an educational activity for April to help staff better understand how their daily responsibilities align with the 10 Essential Public Health Services.

The PHAB Board meets quarterly, with upcoming meetings scheduled for February and May. While the Health District hopes to be included on the February agenda, May remains a possibility. Staff expressed confidence in the anticipated outcome of the accreditation review.

The Health Commissioner also reported participating in an on-site interview for Kent State University's College of Public Health "Public Health in Action" initiative. A full camera crew recorded the segment, which is expected to highlight the Portage County Health District.

Finally, the Commissioner announced that the Finance Work Group will meet at 5:30 p.m. prior to next month's Board meeting. Diana, James, and Lucy will represent the group, and reminders will be sent in advance.

The Board expressed appreciation for staff's extensive work and recognized that the accreditation visit reaffirmed the high level of collaboration and quality within the Health District.

**VII. OLD BUSINESS: N/A**

**VIII. NEW BUSINESS:**

- a. Accept the Retirement of Debbie Wine, EH Clerk. Effective April 30, 2026.

Motion made with regrets, by Board Member Bierlair.

Seconded by Board Member Dr. Keyser.

An "aye" vote was cast by all; a motion was carried.

Ms. Meduri shared that Ms. Wine, Environmental Health Clerk, will be retiring effective April 30. Ms. Wine has served the Portage County Health District for 11 years, with 32 years of total service in her career. The department expressed that while her retirement is well-deserved and they are happy for her, she will be greatly missed. Mr. Rechichar and his team are currently evaluating how best to fill the position and are reviewing options with an eye toward long-term planning, including anticipated organizational needs through 2027. An internal proposal regarding the position structure and staffing approach is expected to be prepared and presented before the next board meeting.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT:**

A motion was moved to adjourn the meeting by Board Member Bierlair at 6:53PM and seconded by Board Member Grimm.

An "aye" vote was cast by all; a motion was carried.



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Rebecca Lehman, MPH, MPA, CHES  
Health Commissioner