

**Portage County Combined General Health District
Board Meeting Minutes
July 21, 2026
6:00 PM**



I. CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER

The Portage County Combined General Health District Board of Health met on Tuesday, July 21, 2026, at 999 East Main Street, Ravenna, OH, 44266. The meeting was called to order at 6:03 PM by Board President Ribelin.

Board Members in Attendance:

Lucy Ribelin, President
Diana Clarke, Member
Brock Kertoy, Member
Amy Everett, Member
Linda Grimm, Member
Dr. Philip Keyser, Member

Board Members Not in Attendance:

James Bierlair, Vice President

Staff in Attendance:

Becky Lehman, Health Commissioner
Christina Jewell, Administrative Assistant
Mark Arredondo, Medical Director
Branden Burns, Director of Finance
Amy Cooper, Director of Community Health
Danielle Steighner, Supervisor of WIC Lisbon
Alison Rogalski, Director of Environmental Health
William Duck, Environmental Health Supervisor
Natalie Menke, Environmental Health Supervisor

District Advisory Council:

Bruce Lange, Chair for Charlestown Twp.

Others:

None

Media Present:

None

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

- A. Board of Health Meeting: On July 21, 2026, Board Member Kertoy presented a motion to accept the Board Meetings Minutes for June 16, 2026, 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	Absent	Board Member Kertoy	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes	<i>Vacant</i>	-

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

Mr. Bruce Lange provided the Ohio Township Association report. Mr. Lange reported that he attended the Ohio Township Association officers meeting in Columbus on June 26, 2026. He stated that discussions included the upcoming gubernatorial election and the relationship between state government and Ohio townships. He advised that the Ohio Township Association had attempted to engage both gubernatorial candidates regarding township issues, however, one candidate declined the invitation to speak, while the other indicated that a decision had not yet been made.

Mr. Lange discussed ongoing concerns regarding the future of township government and local government funding. He explained that township officials continue to closely monitor legislative activity that could affect the structure, funding, and authority of local governments. He emphasized the importance of maintaining township government because township officials provide residents with direct access to their locally elected representatives.

Mr. Lange announced that the Portage County Township Association dinner is scheduled for August 15, 2026, at the Elks Club. He also stated that the Township Association is preparing for the Portage County Randolph Fair and hopes to increase public awareness and support the township government. The Board discussed the previously proposed tax-related ballot initiative. Mr. Lange confirmed that the proposal would not appear in the 2026 ballot.

Mr. Lange also reported that accessibility of township websites was a significant topic at the Ohio Township Association meeting. Township governments are preparing for upcoming requirements related to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility for websites and other electronic communications. He stated that Charlestown Township had already contacted a company to assist with bringing its website into compliance. That date of completion is set for 2028.

Mr. Lange further discussed the topic of the growing number of data centers proposed throughout Ohio. He stated that legislature officials are increasingly focusing on

establishing appropriate regulations rather than attempting to prohibit data centers altogether. He explained that regulations should address the infrastructure costs associated with these facilities, including electrical upgrades and significant water usage, so those costs are not ultimately transferred to existing residents and utility customers. A Board member asked about potential water contamination and water consumption associated with data centers. Mr. Lange acknowledged that water usage, electrical demand, infrastructure requirements, and other environmental impacts are among the concerns being evaluated.

Additional discussion occurred regarding the limited number of permanent jobs typically generated by data centers compared with warehouses, factories, or other commercial developments. Mr. Lange noted that traditional commercial or industrial development may provide substantial employment and income-tax benefits, while data centers may provide fewer employment opportunities despite occupying significant property and consuming substantial resources.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT: None

V. ACTION ITEMS:

B. Expenditure Ratifications: \$122,293.61

Invoice Batch No. 0356	\$ 6,176.40
Invoice Batch No. 0379	\$ 6,989.42
Invoice Batch No. 0382	\$ 2,017.09
Invoice Batch No. 0433	\$ 9,382.45
Invoice Batch No. 0467	\$ 1,661.17
Invoice Batch No. 0508	\$ 5,511.94
Invoice Batch No. 0548	\$ 5,081.32
Invoice Batch No. 0662	\$ 4,017.35
Invoice Batch No. 0664	\$ 4,225.09
Invoice Batch No. 0787	\$ 6,961.01
Invoice Batch No. 0809	\$ 71,986.99
Invoice Batch No. 0814	\$ 7,665.83

Mr. Burns explained that the amount was somewhat lower than usual and advised that the following month's expenditures were expected to be higher due to the timing of payments.

Board Member Dr. Keyser 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	Absent	Board Member Kertoy	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes	<i>Vacant</i>	-

C. Travel Expenditures

Mr. Burns presented approximately five travel requests for staff members to attend conferences and educational opportunities.

A Board member noted that two employees, Natalie and Nicole, were listed as sharing a hotel room and asked whether employees are permitted to obtain separate rooms if desired. Mr. Burns confirmed that employees are permitted to have separate accommodations and that the employees had selected the lodging arrangements reflected in the requests.

A motion was presented by Board Member Clarke 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	Absent	Board Member Kertoy	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes	<i>Vacant</i>	-

D. Resolution #26-37 An Amendment to the 2026 Portage County Combined General Health District Annual Appropriations for Revenue Previously Certified.

Mr. Burns presented a budget amendment. He explained that the amendment contained two primary items. The first involved adding additional appropriations to address utility expenses, which have been higher in 2026 than during the previous year.

The second and more significant amendment involved appropriating up to \$200,000 for replacement of the building roof. Mr. Burns explained that the initial quote for replacement of the flat portion of the roof was slightly less than \$150,000. Mr. Burns subsequently requested pricing to replace the shingled portion of the roof at the same time. Ms. Lehman explained that because the contractor would already be mobilizing specialized equipment and lifts to complete the flat-roof project, it would be more efficient to evaluate replacing the shingled portion simultaneously rather than incur additional mobilization expenses for another project in the near future.

Mr. Burns emphasized that the \$200,000 appropriation is an estimate. The appropriation allows sufficient funds to be placed within the appropriate budget line; however, the final contract and expenditure will still require Board approval before the project proceeds.

A Board member asked about the anticipated useful life of the new roof. Mr. Burns stated that the expected lifespan is approximately 20 to 30 years, depending upon routine maintenance. Ms. Lehman further explained that the building was constructed in the early 1990s, and the existing roof is believed to be original to the building. Roof repairs have become increasingly necessary, particularly during the fall. When the Health District purchased the building, it was anticipated that the roof would require replacement within approximately ten years; therefore, the project has been anticipated as a future capital

expense.

The Board confirmed that the proposed project would constitute a complete roof replacement. Mr. Burns & Ms. Lehman also advised that, due to the building's size, height, and specialized equipment necessary to access the roof, Boak is the only roofing contractor identified in the area willing and able to perform the work.

A motion was presented by Board Member Clarke to approve resolution #26-37, seconded by Board Member Everett.

A vote on the motion is as follows.

Board Member Ribelin	Yes	Board Member Grimm	Yes
Board Member Bierlair	Absent	Board Member Kertoy	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes	<i>Vacant</i>	-

E. Resolution #26-38 A Journal Entry Reversal / Expense Correction for Portage County Combined General Health District.

Mr. Burns presented Resolution No. 2638, explaining that the resolution authorizes an expense correction of \$250 from the General Fund to the appropriate grant-funded project code. The correction ensures that the expenditure is charged to the proper funding source and can be included for grant reimbursement.

A motion was presented by Board Member Dr. Keyser to approve resolution #25-38, seconded by Board Member Everett.

A vote on the motion is as follows:

Board Member Ribelin	Yes	Board Member Grimm	Yes
Board Member Bierlair	Absent	Board Member Kertoy	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes	<i>Vacant</i>	-

F. Resolution #26-39 Resolution #26-39 The Portage County Board of Health Acceptance of the Agreement for Income Qualification Assistance Between the Portage County Combined General Health District and Regional Planning Commission (RPC).

Mr. Duck presented a resolution to the board regarding the WPCLF grant program. He explained that the Health District had been utilizing Neighborhood Development Services (NDS) to perform income qualification determinations for homeowners applying for WPCLF assistance. Following a review of the existing process, Ms. Lehman, Ms. Rogalski, Mr. Burns and Mr. Duck determined that the Portage County Regional Planning Commission could provide a more streamlined qualification process and improved coordination for Portage County residents.

Mr. Duck emphasized that income qualification should continue to be completed by an outside agency to maintain an independent review process.

NDS had been charging approximately \$550 per applicant, regardless of whether the applicant ultimately qualified for assistance. The Regional Planning Commission will provide the service for approximately \$350 per applicant, representing a savings of approximately \$200 per application.

Mr. Duck explained that applicants had reported that the existing qualification process was cumbersome. The Regional Planning Commission uses a more streamlined process that is expected to make applying for assistance easier for homeowners.

The partnership is also expected to improve coordination for homeowners who qualify for only a portion of their sewage-system replacement costs through WPCLF. The Regional Planning Commission administers additional county funding that may assist residents in covering the remaining costs. For example, applicants receiving 50% or 85% assistance through WPCLF may potentially obtain assistance for the remaining balance through programs administered by Regional Planning & the Portage County Engineers office.

Ms. Rogalski and Mr. Duck estimated that approximately half of the Health District's WPCLF applicants receive less than 100% assistance. Consequently, consolidating the income qualification and supplemental funding processes through Regional Planning could significantly simplify the process for these residents. Ms. Rogalski and Mr. Duck are also revising the Health District's WPCLF application so that the information collected corresponds with Regional Planning's requirements. The goal is to develop a more coordinated process in which residents provide substantially the same information once rather than completing multiple duplicative applications.

The Board was also advised that Regional Planning administers a lien-based program for homeowners who may not qualify for WPCLF funding. Under that program, Regional Planning may pay a contractor for an eligible project and place a lien on the property, which the property owner subsequently repays.

Mr. Duck advised that the Health District had formally terminated its recently renewed agreement with NDS and completed the outstanding files. Ms. Lehman emphasized that the termination was not based upon the quality of NDS's work and that the Health District continues to maintain a positive relationship with the organization. The change was made to improve and streamline the process for residents.

A motion was presented by Board Member Kertoy to approve resolution #26-39, 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	Absent	Board Member Kertoy	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes	<i>Vacant</i>	-

G. Variance #26-40 A Variance Request for the Household Sewage Treatment System (HSTS) Variance for OAC 3701-29-03(C)(5) Continuing Education Requirement for the Septic Contractor: Tyler Borlie / Borlie Brothers Contracting, LLC.

Mr. Duck presented a variance concerning a continuing education for a contractor seeking registration. Mr. Duck explained that the applicant did not complete the required continuing education units during the previous registration year. Approval of the variance would permit the individual to register provided all other registration requirements and documentation are satisfied.

The contractor will be required to complete the outstanding continuing education units during the current year in addition to the continuing education necessary for the 2027 registration period.

A motion was presented by Board Member Kertoy to approve variance #26-40, seconded by Board Member Clarke.

A vote on the motion is as follows:

Board Member Ribelin	Yes	Board Member Grimm	Yes
Board Member Bierlair	Absent	Board Member Kertoy	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes	<i>Vacant</i>	-

H. Resolution #26-41 Adoption of the Revised Salary Ranges for the Portage County Combined General Health District.

Ms. Lehman and Ms. Meduri presented the revised salary ranges for Health District positions. Ms. Lehman reminded the Board that salary ranges had previously been discussed in March when the WIC program added the Dietetic Technician/Nutritionist position. Ms. Lehman shared that she was committed to completing a broader review of the district's salary structure. The revised structure reorganizes several positions into comparable groups based upon education, professional credentials, responsibilities, and specialized skills. One of the most significant changes involves the Environmental Health Specialist in Training (EHSIT) classification. Ms. Lehman explained that individuals entering these positions possess four-year degrees, similar to Health Educators. The revised range places EHSIT employees on a more comparable salary level with Health Educators who have not yet obtained the Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) credential.

Ms. Lehman further grouped positions requiring both a four-year degree and professional certification or registration, including Public Health Nurses, Registered Environmental Health Specialists, Registered Dietitians, and Health Educators possessing the CHES credential.

The salary structure also recognizes specialized coordinator and technical positions that require advanced or unique skills, including coordinators, the grants fiscal manager,

Epidemiologist, and Plumbing Inspector. A Board member asked whether the revised salary ranges would make the Health District more competitive in recruiting and retaining employees.

Ms. Meduri explained that administration reviewed salary information from similarly situated health departments of comparable size. Although the district cannot necessarily compete with substantially larger organizations or private healthcare employers, the proposed ranges improve the district's competitiveness among comparable public health agencies.

Ms. Meduri reported that the district had already experienced approximately 11 employee departures during 2026, with several departing employees identifying compensation as one of the factors influencing their decisions. Employee feedback, including feedback from Environmental Health staff, was also considered when developing the revisions. Ms. Lehman explained that a salary structure has now been developed for individual positions based upon years of relevant service and experience, ranging from entry level through approximately 30 years of experience. This provides greater consistency when determining appropriate starting salaries and reduces subjectivity during the hiring process.

A Board member asked whether administration believed the ranges were sufficiently competitive. Ms. Lehman stated that while higher salaries would always be desirable, she was comfortable with the proposed ranges after considering the Health District's budget, the upcoming levy, comparisons with other county agencies, and the district's overall financial position.

Ms. Meduri explained that the district is attempting to provide professional growth through coordinator positions, specialized assignments, leadership development, and other professional opportunities. As examples, staff members Emily Speck and Olivia Artman are expected to participate in Leadership Portage.

The Board thanked administration for the extensive work involved in developing the revised salary structure.

A motion was presented by Board Member Dr. Keyser to approve resolution #26-41, seconded by Board Member Kertoy.

A vote on the motion is as follows:

Board Member Ribelin	Yes	Board Member Grimm	Yes
Board Member Bierlair	Absent	Board Member Kertoy	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes	<i>Vacant</i>	-

I. Resolution #26-42 The Portage County Board of Health Acceptance of Adoption of the Revised Cybersecurity Policy.

Ms. Meduri presented revisions to the Health District's cybersecurity policy. She explained that employees currently complete annual cybersecurity training through an online cybersecurity portal, which also provides shorter training modules throughout the year. The district has also implemented simulated phishing emails to test employees' awareness of cybersecurity threats.

Following a recent cybersecurity incident, Ms. Meduri consulted with Information Technology personnel regarding additional measures the Health District could implement to demonstrate appropriate due diligence and strengthen cybersecurity practices. Under the revised policy, employees will be required to maintain a minimum cybersecurity training score within the district's cybersecurity platform. Employees receive monthly simulated phishing emails. Clicking suspicious links or entering credentials during a simulated phishing exercise negatively affects an employee's score and may trigger additional required training. Ms. Meduri receives monthly reports identifying employee cybersecurity performance and simulated phishing results so that concerns can be addressed promptly.

Ms. Meduri explained that the policy formalizes practices already being implemented and reinforces that cybersecurity awareness must be ongoing rather than limited to a single annual training.

A motion was presented by Board Member Kertoy to approve resolution #26-42, seconded by Board Member Everett.

A vote on the motion is as follows:

Board Member Ribelin	Yes	Board Member Grimm	Yes
Board Member Bierlair	Absent	Board Member Kertoy	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes	<i>Vacant</i>	-

J. Resolution #26-43 The Portage County Board of Health Acceptance of Adoption of the Revised Bereavement Leave Policy.

Ms. Meduri presented revisions to the Health District's Bereavement Leave Policy. The revised policy extends bereavement leave benefits to eligible part-time employees and provides additional flexibility to assist employees experiencing the death of a family member. Ms. Meduri explained that the definition of immediate family had previously been expanded; however, certain circumstances continued to be limited to one day of bereavement leave. The revised policy authorizes the Health Commissioner to approve up to three days under qualifying or extenuating circumstances. Ms. Meduri explained that situations involving significant travel or employees with limited accrued leave may justify additional flexibility. The revised policy also allows approved bereavement leave to be used at a later date when, for example, a funeral occurs immediately following the death, but a celebration of life or other memorial service is scheduled for a later date.

President Ribelin commented that benefits such as bereavement leave may not appear as direct monetary compensation but are nevertheless valuable employee benefits. She expressed appreciation that administration had reviewed the policy and identified opportunities to better support employees.

Ms. Meduri noted that several employees had unfortunately needed bereavement leave recently, which prompted additional discussion regarding ways to improve the policy.

A motion was presented by Board Member Kertoy to approve resolution #26-43, 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	Absent	Board Member Kertoy	Yes
Board Member Everett	Yes	Board Member Clarke	Yes
Board Member Dr. Keyser	Yes	<i>Vacant</i>	-

K. Resolution #26-44 The Portage County Board of Health Acceptance of Adoption of the Remote Work Policy.

Ms. Meduri presented a resolution adopting a remote work policy. She explained that remote work has been discussed extensively within the organization. The Health District previously maintained a remote work policy that was subsequently discontinued. Since that time, employees have continued to identify limited remote work opportunities as a desirable benefit for productivity, recruitment, and retention. Recent employee pulse survey results again identified remote work as an issue important to employees. Ms. Meduri therefore developed a new policy with specific eligibility standards rather than making remote work universally available. Eligibility varies based upon an employee's position and length of service. Directors may become eligible after three months, supervisors after six months, and other eligible employees following successful completion of the applicable probationary evaluation. Employees whose evaluations indicate performance requiring improvement will not automatically qualify and must wait until a subsequent review period.

Ms. Meduri explained that the policy also allows flexibility for circumstances such as employees attending all-day virtual conferences or training programs that can appropriately be completed from home. The recurring remote-work option is generally limited to one day per week for eligible employees who otherwise work five days per week in the office. Employees working an alternative schedule, such as four 10-hour days, may not combine that schedule with a recurring remote-work day.

Ms. Meduri emphasized that operational needs remain the priority. The Health Commissioner retains authority to suspend, modify, or revoke remote-work arrangements when necessary for operational reasons.

Ms. Meduri stated that the purpose of reinstating a carefully structured remote-work option is to provide an additional employee benefit and improve the Health District's competitiveness in recruitment and retention.

A vote on the motion is as follows:

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

VII. DISCUSSIONS:

Administration:

Ms. Meduri reported that the previous week had been particularly busy while Ms. Lehman was on vacation. During that period, the Health District addressed several public health issues simultaneously, including excessive heat, air-quality concerns associated with wildfire smoke, the ongoing Cyclospora outbreak, and other unusual environmental health matters.

Ms. Meduri thanked Health District staff for their assistance and willingness to respond to questions and emerging situations while she served in the Interim Health Commissioner role.

Ms. Meduri announced that Patrice Ortiz had been selected as the Health District's new Director of Nursing. She explained that filling the position had been challenging and involved multiple rounds of interviews. Ms. Ortiz participated in interviews with the leadership team, Medical Director, and nursing staff.

Ms. Ortiz is a Nurse Practitioner with more than ten years of experience. Her professional background includes family care, occupational health, employee health, vaccination programs, clinical operations, wellness initiatives, and community-based care. She previously volunteered with the Health District's Medical Reserve Corps during the COVID-19 vaccination response.

Ms. Meduri stated that Ms. Ortiz demonstrated collaborative leadership, professionalism, humility, and a strong commitment to preventive care and community health throughout the interview process. Ms. Ortiz most recently worked with Optum Health and is scheduled to begin employment with the Health District on August 24, 2026. Her background check and drug screening had already been completed.

Ms. Meduri also reported the resignation of Public Health Nurse Kirsten Orr. Ms. Orr accepted a position with Akron Children's Hospital that provides full-time remote work and a significant increase in compensation. Ms. Meduri acknowledged that healthcare recruitment continues to be challenging for public health agencies and stated that the district will continue recruiting qualified nursing personnel.

Finance:

Mr. Burns presented the cash basis report and stated that the district's finances continue to track closely with projections.

He explained that the Health District generally receives its property-tax distribution during late summer; however, because property-tax bills have been delayed, the district's distribution may also be received later than usual, potentially in September or October.

Mr. Burns stated that once the property-tax distribution is received, he anticipates the district will remain consistent with its projected financial position. He reported that there had been no significant financial surprises.

Environmental Health:

Ms. Rogalski reported that wildfire smoke from Canada affected air quality throughout the region during the past week. Staff monitored conditions closely while the Health Commissioner was away and responded to numerous inquiries from residents regarding the safety of outdoor activities. Callers were advised to monitor the Air Quality Index (AQI) and follow public health recommendations based on current air quality advisories, similar to guidance issued during extreme heat or cold events.

She explained that approximately 850 wildfires remained active in Canada, with roughly 100 considered uncontrolled. Prevailing weather patterns carried smoke south through the Midwest into Ohio and beyond. The discussion included an overview of particulate matter, noting that wildfire smoke primarily consists of PM2.5 particles, which are small enough to penetrate deep into the lungs. These fine particles present the greatest health concern for individuals with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and other respiratory conditions. Staff indicated they remained mindful of these health risks and communicated appropriate precautions to both employees and the public.

Ms. Rogalski also provided an update on the transition from the legacy Health District Information System (HDIS) to the HealthSpace Cloud platform. She reported that Portage County has been placed in the implementation queue and is currently preparing for migration by cleaning existing HDIS data to ensure smooth transfer. The HealthSpace Cloud system will provide a modern, cloud-based platform with regular software updates and enhanced technical support, replacing the aging HDIS system, which is no longer actively developed. She noted that many Ohio health districts are making the same transition, allowing Portage County to utilize forms and workflows already developed by other agencies, which should simplify implementation and improve long-term efficiency.

Mr. Duck stated that the water quality program reported that June represented its busiest month of the year. During the month, the division issued 56 sewage and water permits, bringing the annual total to 187 permits. Inspection activity also increased significantly, rising approximately 63 percent from the previous month, reflecting the typical seasonal increase in workload.

Mr. Duck highlighted educational activities conducted during the agency's Open House, including an interactive "Poop Plinko" game created by Safe Communities Coordinator Kylie McCracken. The educational display reinforced proper flushing practices through the "Three Ps" message—Poop, Paper, and Pee—while providing participants with reusable educational tokens. Due to the

program's success, staff plan to adapt the activity with additional educational questions for use during the Portage County Fair.

An organizational update was also provided for the Water Quality Program. Mr. Duck announced that he has transitioned from managing an inspection territory to focusing on training newly hired inspectors and supervising the four established inspection territories. Ms. Emily Speck has similarly stepped away from routine inspection duties to concentrate on her responsibilities as GIS Coordinator and Stormwater Coordinator, while remaining available as a backup inspector when needed. Mr. Duck reported that the transition has progressed well and will strengthen training efforts while allowing greater emphasis on specialized GIS and stormwater initiatives.

Ms. Menke shared several additional accomplishments and upcoming activities with the board. Photographs from the recent Open House, including a handwashing demonstration conducted by an Environmental Health Clerk, as well as photographs documenting a two-day on-site visit by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), during which FDA Retail Food Specialists worked alongside Portage County food inspectors were shown in the board packet.

Ms. Menke reported that she and Emily Speck attended the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) Annual Conference, where the Portage County Combined General Health District received the Promising Practice Award for its "Mapping the Menu" initiative. The award recognizes the integration of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology into the mobile food inspection program to improve inspection planning and public health operations.

She shared that planning has also begun for the upcoming Portage County Fair. Staff reported that temporary food operation applications are already being submitted and preparations are underway to support fair food safety operations.

The division announced that the Health District will host a Certified Pool Operator (CPO) training course this fall. The course will be available to pool operators and others interested in learning proper pool operation and safety practices. Local pool operators are being encouraged to participate through targeted outreach and promotional materials.

Ms. Menke also reported that the Ohio Department of Agriculture has removed the Portage County Combined General Health District from provisional status for its food protection program, returning the agency to the approved list of local health districts administering the retail food inspection program.

Lastly, Ms. Menke announced that mosquito trapping activities have begun for the season. Mosquito surveillance specimens are being collected and submitted for state testing, with surveillance data expected to become available as testing results are received.

Community Health:

Dr. Arredondo provided an update regarding the ongoing Cyclospora outbreak affecting multiple states, including Ohio. He reported that more than 1,600 confirmed cases had been identified nationally, with approximately 540 hospitalizations, primarily among individuals with

compromised immune systems. Within Ohio, more than 1,200 cases were reported compared to only 152 cases during the previous year, illustrating the significant increase in infections.

Dr. Arredondo explained that the investigation remains ongoing. Although an earlier laboratory result involving bagged lettuce proved to be a false positive, public health officials continue to suspect leafy green vegetables as the likely source of the outbreak. He emphasized the importance of thoroughly washing all fruits and vegetables before consumption as a preventive measure.

It is advised that Cyclospora infections are typically treated with antibiotics, most commonly trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole (Bactrim). Alternative antibiotics, including ciprofloxacin, may be considered for individuals with sulfa allergies. Dr. Arredondo noted that symptoms generally develop approximately one week after exposure but may occur up to two weeks later. In some individuals, symptoms may persist or recur for several weeks, making treatment important to reduce the likelihood of relapses.

Dr. Arredondo also provided updates on other emerging public health concerns. He reported that more than 2,200 confirmed measles cases had been identified nationally during 2026 and encouraged vaccination as the most effective prevention strategy. He further advised that Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (H5N1) continues to circulate among poultry and dairy cattle without evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission. Additionally, he updated the Board on the continued monitoring of the New World screwworm, noting that no human cases have been identified, although infections continue to occur in cattle and isolated cases involving dogs have been reported in Texas and New Mexico.

Board members briefly discussed mosquito control efforts, including the use of sterile mosquito release programs to reduce mosquito populations. Dr. Arredondo explained that sterile mosquitoes have been utilized in certain mosquito control programs to decrease reproduction and suppress future mosquito populations.

Ms. Cooper reported that communicable disease investigators had experienced an exceptionally busy week responding to the Cyclospora outbreak. As of 12:30 p.m. on the day of the meeting, 77 confirmed cases had been identified in Portage County, representing a dramatic increase compared to only one reported case during each of the previous two years. Investigators had completed 64 case interviews, while several additional investigations remained pending due to difficulties contacting patients or awaiting laboratory confirmation from the Ohio Department of Health. Staff noted that laboratory reporting delays have resulted in patients often receiving positive test results from their healthcare providers before official notification reaches the local health department. Preliminary epidemiologic interviews indicated that 82.8 percent of interviewed cases reported consuming lettuce or leafy greens during the exposure period, while 70.3 percent reported eating at Taco Bell. Staff emphasized that the investigation remains ongoing and that these findings represent common exposures rather than confirmed sources of infection.

Board members discussed the disease's incubation period, noting that symptoms generally appear approximately one week after exposure but may take as long as two weeks to develop. They expressed hope that identification of the contaminated food source would result in a decline in new cases over the coming weeks.

The Board also discussed Ohio's communicable disease reporting requirements and confirmed that *Cyclospora* remains a Class B reportable disease, allowing prompt notification and response by local public health officials.

Ms. Cooper stated that the WIC Program reported that the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program transitioned to a digital benefit distribution system during 2026, resulting in delayed implementation compared to previous years. Ms. Steighner shared that in Columbiana County, the program will host a one-day event featuring an on-site local farmer. Rather than operating on a first-come, first-served basis, participants reserved appointment times through a text messaging system due to the limited number of available benefits. Ms. Steighner reported that all available appointments were filled within approximately two hours. Ms. Cooper shared that Portage County participants will receive their benefits during scheduled August events held in Garrettsville and at the Health District.

Ms. Steighner also announced plans for National Breastfeeding Awareness Month in August. In Columbiana County, WIC has partnered with Healthy Grads to host a community event featuring approximately twenty community organizations. Educational presentations will include breastfeeding support, breast pump education, safe infant sleep practices, and infant CPR. Portage County will recognize Breastfeeding Awareness Month through community raffles and promotional activities.

Ms. Cooper reported that the annual Sports Physical Clinic served 35 participants during June. The agency's Open House attracted more than 250 community members, making it one of the Health District's most successful public outreach events. Staff thanked the Board members who attended and noted that favorable weather contributed to the event's success. The Community Health Division also received a positive on-site review of its Integrated Harm Reduction (Project DAWN/Naloxone Distribution) grant. During the site visit, consultants reviewed program operations, met with community distribution partners, and commended the Health District's broad distribution network, including Naloxone vending machines, lock boxes, and partnerships with local agencies. Staff reported receiving valuable recommendations to further strengthen the program while awaiting the next grant funding cycle. The division continues to explore locations for a third Naloxone vending machine within Portage County. Potential locations have included Goodwill stores, laundromats, Hiram College, and areas near Brimfield hotels to improve community access outside the Kent area.

Health educators continued extensive summer outreach through the Safe Kids Coalition, focusing on injury prevention during what is commonly referred to as the "100 Deadliest Days" for children.

Educational programming included poison prevention presentations at Safety Town, summer camps, the Portage Metropolitan Housing Authority, Skeels Community Center, King Kennedy Community Center, and other youth programs.

Community Health also expanded bicycle safety education through interactive demonstrations illustrating the importance of helmet use. Educational activities used watermelons, cantaloupes, and water balloons placed inside bicycle helmets to visually demonstrate the protection helmets provide during bicycle and scooter crashes.

The Environmental Health Enviroscape educational model has also been incorporated into youth programming and will continue to be featured during the Portage County Fair.

The Community Health Division reported that its Bike Rodeo, held in conjunction with the Farmers Market on June 30, was highly successful. More than 20 bicycle helmets were distributed and professionally fitted for children. Participants completed an obstacle course while Kent Cycle provided bicycle safety inspections and minor tune-ups. A sprinkler station also helped participants cool off during the event's extreme summer heat.

Ms. Cooper reported that the Health District's Farmers Market opened with strong participation from nine to ten vendors during the first several weeks. Attendance later declined somewhat because of extreme heat and concerns regarding severe weather; however, staff remain optimistic that participation will increase during August, which was the market's busiest month the previous year.

Ms. Cooper also announced that Portage County Job and Family Services (JFS) awarded the Health District \$25,000 to expand nutrition education and provide produce vouchers for recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Staff noted that the additional funding aligns directly with the Farmers Market's mission of improving access to healthy foods. Planning meetings are underway, with efforts focused on recruiting additional produce vendors to meet anticipated demand.

Lastly, Ms. Cooper shared that the official kickoff event for the Life Jacket Loaner Station at West Branch State Park had been rescheduled twice because of weather but is expected to proceed later in the week. The loaner station is already operational, and although a small number of life jackets have not been returned, overall participation has been positive. Additional donated life jackets have been received, allowing staff to replenish inventory as needed. The Board expressed support for the initiative, noting that even limited participation has the potential to prevent drowning and save lives.

Health Commissioner:

Ms. Lehman provided an update regarding the Health District's efforts to comply with upcoming Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) digital accessibility requirements, which must be fully implemented by April 2027.

Ms. Lehman explained that every form of communication produced by the Health District must meet ADA accessibility standards by the compliance deadline. This includes the agency's website, social media platforms, YouTube videos, printed publications, flyers, electronic documents, and fillable forms.

She advised the Board that an upcoming contract amendment with the Health District's website vendor, Sanctuary, will be presented for Board approval. The vendor is conducting a comprehensive accessibility assessment of the agency's website to identify areas requiring modification. Necessary improvements will include items such as appropriate color contrast,

readable font sizes, alternative text descriptions for images, and other accessibility features required to ensure information is available to individuals with disabilities.

Ms. Lehman noted that while the Health District's physical facility is already ADA compliant, the current initiative focuses on ensuring digital communications are equally accessible.

The Health District has already begun implementing accessibility improvements. Marketing Coordinator Sarah Power is incorporating ADA-compliant design standards into newly created and revised publications. In addition, YouTube videos are now being produced with closed captioning, and accessibility enhancements are being incorporated into other communication materials as they are updated.

Ms. Lehman reported that the Health District's website and electronic fillable forms will require the most extensive modifications. She noted that Maria Gill, who serves as the agency's website coordinator, will oversee much of the internal implementation process in coordination with the website vendor.

The Board acknowledged the scope of the project and discussed the importance of proactively addressing accessibility requirements before the April 2027 compliance deadline.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS: None

IX. NEW BUSINESS:

- a. Accept the Hiring of Patrice Ortiz, Director of Nursing. Onboarding August 24, 2026.

Motion made by Board Member Everett
Motion seconded by Board Member Dr. Keyser

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

- b. Accept the Resignation of Kirsten Orr, RN, Public Health Nurse. Effective July 16, 2026.

Motion made by Board Member Everett
Motion seconded by Board Member Kertoy

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

X. ADJOURNMENT:

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Board Member Clarke at 7:22 PM and seconded by Board Member Dr. Keyser.

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


Rebecca Lehman, MPH, MPA, CHES
Health Commissioner