

**NORTHEAST TEXAS PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES
February 26, 2026**

A regular meeting of the Northeast Texas Public Health District Board of Directors was held on February 26, 2026, at 5:00 p.m., 315 North Broadway, Genecov Room, Tyler, Texas with the following present:

Board Members: Laura Newsome, Chair
 Jessica Bowen, MSN, R.N. absent
 Kent Boozer, D.D.S., Sec.
 Jeremy Butler absent
 Cynthia Ball, D.O.
 Scott Williams
 Nancy Rangel
 Pam Cunningham
 Mike McCrady

 Chief Executive Officer: George T. Roberts, Jr.
Smith County Health Authority: Jose Serpa Alvarez, M.D.
 Chief Financial Officer: Lawanda Owens
Public Health Emergency Preparedness Director: Dusty Gonzalez
Immunizations/TB Program Director: Sylvia Warren absent
Environmental Health Director: Ginger Points
Community Outreach Director: Terrence Ates
 Vital Statistics Director: Rosie Meza
 Human Resources Director: Dawn Strickland
Interim Laboratory Director: Amanda Catlin absent
 WIC Director: Tecora Smith absent
 Legal: Gary Landers absent
Recorder: Janie Jolly

Guests: Liz Villalobos, MD
 Fariba Yazdanp, MD
 Jason Phung, MD
 Srishti Goal, MD
 Kharl Wright, MD

The meeting was called to order by Laura Newsome, Chair, at 5:07 p.m.

INVOCATION- PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited, and the invocation was given by George Roberts.

VISION/MISSION

The Vision and Mission of the Northeast Texas Public Health District was recited by all in attendance.

HEALTH AUTHORITY REPORT by JOSE SERPA, MD

Dr. Serpa gave the Health Authority Report to the Board. He began by informing the Board of the NET Health Disease Surveillance Report that is generated monthly. The January 2026 report showed 17 cases of Campylobacter, 10 cases of Hepatitis C, and 9 cases of Streptococcus. Dr. Serpa stated that most hospital visits for respiratory illness were for Influenza.

Dr. Serpa shared the CDC Outbreaks List which shows an outbreak of Salmonella. In December 2025 raw oysters were found to carry Salmonella, in January 2026 Super Greens Supplement Powder, and February 2026 Morning Leaf Powder all having Salmonella. There has been a recall of the powders nationwide and internationally. Symptoms of Salmonella are diarrhea, stomach pains or cramps, fever, nausea and vomiting, and headache.

Dr. Serpa informed the Board of a DSHS News Release which states that health officials are reminding the public to stay vigilant as travel-related cases of measles are announced in West Texas. In January 2026, DSHS confirmed three cases of measles in non-Texas residents who spent time in Reeves and Ward counties. At present, Texas has confirmed 7 cases of Measles. In Texas, the MMR vaccine coverage for kindergarteners by school year 2024-2025 was 90-94.9%.

The Public Health Topic was given by Dr. Liz Villalobos on Kratom and Serious Illnesses Associated with 7-OH use. DSHS released a public health warning for people not to use 7-OH products. Kratom refers to a compound found in the *Mitragyna speciosa* tree, which originates in Southeast Asia. It has been used for hundreds of years as an herbal remedy for conditions including pain, fatigue, and psychiatric disorders. It is typically consumed as tea or powder, and it produces both stimulant and opioid-like effects in the brain. With the increase in prevalence of Kratom use in the U.S., there is also increasing concern for possible dependence, addiction, and toxicity. 7-OH, is a chemical found in the Kratom plant. 7-OH, is engineered to be addictive. The Opioid Epidemic is evolving with 7-OH. In 2025 the concentration of opioid epidemic consisted of Heroin and Fentanyl. 2026 will show an increase in 7-OH use. This opioid is not prescribed or purchased on the street, it is sold like candy at retail stores and online. It is in the form of chewable tablets and gummies and liquid shots. A clinical presentation shows nausea and vomiting, agitation, confusion, sweating, rapid heart rate, high blood pressure, trouble

breathing, sleepiness or loss of consciousness, seizures, and respiratory depression. DSHS reported that 11 out of 19 patients exposed to concentrated 7-OH products had severe symptoms requiring treatment at a healthcare facility. Dr. Villalobos stated that Poison Control is sounding the alarm on 7-OH, and American families are reporting side effects such as dependency, withdrawals, overdose and even death. Dr. Villalobos stated recommendations for the public are to avoid all products containing 7-OH, examine the packaging, keep Kratom and 7-OH products away from children and pets, talk to children and teens about the dangers of 7-OH and Kratom products. The Board thanked Dr. Serpa and Dr. Villalobos for the report.

MINUTES

Motion made by Cynthia Ball to approve the minutes of the January 29, 2026, regular meeting; seconded by Nancy Rangel; motion carried; approved as presented.

MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT

For the month of January 2026, we had revenues of \$1,003,141 which was \$41,354 over budget. Expenses were \$1,018,042 which was \$19,878 over budget. Our net income for the month of January 2026 was (\$14,901) which was \$21,476 over budget.

For FY 2026, we have revenues of \$4,779,886 which was \$207,889 over budget. Expenses were \$4,508,969 which was \$129,455 over budget. Our net income for the first 4 months of FY 2026 was \$270,917, which was \$78,434 over budget.

Motion by Kent Boozer to approve the January 2026 financial report; seconded by Scott Williams; motion carried; approved as presented.

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE NORTHEAST TEXAS PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT

The Leadership Team is working to develop in earnest the strategic plan utilizing the feedback obtained at the August Board Meeting. For each of the 5 Strategic Directions, there were Team Leads and Partners assigned to fully develop the details within each strategy.

For Strategic Direction 1, **Strengthen, Identity, Visibility, & Trust** Terrence Ates served as the Lead and provided the Board with details. He stated that this strategic goal is important to insure that the public, community partners, and local elected officials clearly understand NET Health's role, value, and impact. The strategic approaches will be to clarify and simplify core messaging, increase visibility, build marketing capacity, and partner with higher education for social media and date story telling. Mr. Scott Williams commented that we should also emphasize working with high schools as part of this strategic direction.

For Strategic Direction 2, **Focus on Priority Health Challenges** Dusty Gonzalez serves as a Team Partner and provided the Board with details. She stated that this strategic goal is important to prioritize chronic disease prevention, maternal/child health issues, and age-related health

needs. She discussed programs, partnerships, and resources that should be directed to the most pressing healthcare needs over the next three years. Mr. Williams suggested that AI be utilized to help in any way possible in these areas.

For Strategic Direction 3, **Build Workforce Resilience & Leadership Succession** George Roberts serves as the Lead and provided the Board with details. He stated that this is important to ensure continuity of leadership and organizational stability through intentional succession planning and workforce development. He discussed several of the details involved in this direction. The Board suggested that they receive updates on the Strategic Plan progress two times per year.

For Strategic Direction 4 **Secure Financial Sustainability** Terrence Ates provided the Board with details on this direction. He stated that the goal of this direction is to diversify and stabilize funding to match growing community needs and reduce reliance on any single revenue source. He mentioned some of the strategic approaches which included developing county level funding strategies and increasing engagement with elected officials.

For Strategic Direction 5 **Expand Partnerships & Embrace Innovation** Ginger Points provided the Board with details on this direction. She stated that the goal of this direction is to build strategic alliances and responsibly leverage innovation to prepare for future public health challenges. The key strategic approaches include strengthening relationships, increasing NET Health's presence in government discussions, and piloting and evaluating responsible AI usage.

Dawn Franks, who assisted the Board and Leadership throughout this Strategic Planning process, thanked the Board and Leadership for the opportunity to work with us, and challenged the organization to provide updates on strategic plan accomplishments two times per year. Mrs. Newsome requested that a progress update be given at the September board meeting.

Motion made by Scott Williams to approve the Strategic Plan for the Northeast Texas Public Health District; seconded by Kent Boozer; motion carried; approved as presented.

LEGAL COUNSEL FOR THE NORTHEAST TEXAS PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT

Sharon Roberts resigned as Legal Counsel for the Northeast Texas Public Health District, effective January 23, 2026.

Upon Mrs. Roberts' resignation, Mr. Roberts reached out to Mr. Gary Landers who previously served as the Tyler City Attorney for many years. Mr. Landers was the Tyler City Attorney when the then Smith County Public Health District was formed in 1994. Mr. Landers is very familiar with our organization, and Mr. Roberts is confident that Mr. Landers will provide outstanding legal counsel.

It is proposed that NET Health contract with Mr. Landers for a monthly retainer of \$500 per month, which would provide us with 2 ½ hours of legal services. For additional hours, he will bill at a rate of \$200 per hour.

Motion made by Cynthia Ball to approve the contract with Gary Landers to provide legal services for the Northeast Texas Public Health District; seconded by Scott Williams; motion carried; approved as presented.

SPECIAL SUPPORT LEGAL COUNSEL IF NEEDED FOR THE NORTHEAST TEXAS PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT

Mr. Gary Landers has recommended that the Northeast Texas Public Health District establish a relationship with the Bojorquez Law Firm of Austin, Texas. The nature of the representation would be to serve in the role of Special Counsel for issues in which Mr. Landers may require additional assistance.

Mr. Landers has a long history with the Bojorquez Law Firm and is confident that they can provide the support that both he and the Northeast Texas Public Health District might require in the future.

Motion made by Pam Cunningham to approve the Bojorquez Law Firm as Special Support Legal Counsel if needed for the Northeast Texas Public Health District; seconded by Kent Boozer; motion carried; approved as presented.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER REPORT

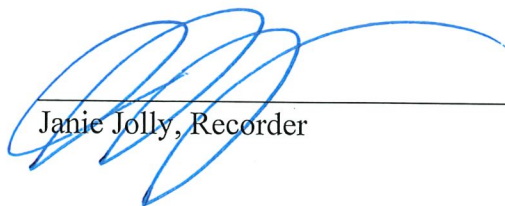
Mr. Roberts gave his report to the Board. He mentioned the following:

1. Mr. Scott Williams and Mr. Bob Westbrook recently invited him to attend a local dinner with members of the East Texas Restaurant Association and the executive leadership of the Texas Restaurant Association. Mr. Roberts mentioned how valuable this meeting was in helping to establish a relationship between the Texas Restaurant Association and NET Health as well as other Public Health leaders in Texas.
2. He mentioned that he moderated an American College of Healthcare Executives webinar where much of the discussion focused on the preparations for the World Cup which will be in the DFW area this June and July.
3. The Fit City Tyler Health & Wellness Expo will be held at the Tyler Rose Garden on Tuesday, April 7, from 4-7pm. He encouraged the Board to attend.
4. We will be celebrating National Public Health Week April 6-11 with a variety of activities.
5. He mentioned the recent Smith County Local Emergency Planning Committee meeting where Dusty Gonzalez and her Public Health Preparedness Team facilitated a game session which focused on how our community might respond to a need to develop points of dispensing for medications in a time of emergency.


ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:47 pm.

THE NEXT NET HEALTH BOARD MEETING IS WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2026.



Janie Jolly, Recorder



Kent Boozer, Secretary
NET Health Board of Directors
Scott Williams
For Kent Boozer