



Needham Public Health Division



Board of Health Meeting Minutes DRAFT

Date: March 17, 2023

Location: Rosemary Recreation Complex – Multi-Purpose Room 178 Rosemary Street,
Needham MA 02494 & via Zoom

Members: Edward Cosgrove, PhD, Chair; Kathleen Ward Brown, ScD, Member; Member; Tejal K. Gandhi, MD, MPH, Member; Stephen Epstein, MD, MPP, Member

Staff Present: Timothy Muir McDonald, Director of Health, and Human Services; Ginnie Chacon-Lopez; Hanna Burnett, Diana Acosta; Carol Read; Julie McCarthy; Michael Lethin; Rebecca Hall; Lydia Cunningham; Cindi Melanson; and Karen Shannon.

Welcome & Public Comment Period

Dr. Gandhi called the meeting to order at 9:00AM and initiated a roll call. Present were Dr. Brown – Y, Dr. Gandhi – Y, Dr. Cosgrove - Y, and Dr. Epstein – Y.

According to Chapter 107 of the Acts of 2022, as an act relative to extending certain states of emergency accommodations, as passed by the General Court, and signed into law, Acting Governor Karyn Polito, on July 16 2022, revised Section 20 of Chapter 20, the Acts of 2001. In so doing, provided modifications to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, which allow for flexibility to hold remote only, and hybrid meetings, while preserving public access and, where appropriate, public participation. Currently, that additional flexibility will expire on March 31, 2023, unless additional legislative action occurs. As part of today's hybrid meeting, all votes will occur via a roll call.

Review of Minutes – Dec. 16th, Jan. 17th, and Feb. 16th

The Board agreed to table approval of the February 16, 2023, minutes for further edits.

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Epstein, and seconded by Dr. Cosgrove, it was voted to approve the minutes of December 16, 2023; and January 17, 2023, as amended. Motion passed 4-0.

Staff Reports & COVID Update

Emergency Management



Needham Public Health Division



Michael Lethin stated that invitations were sent out to all associated with the Active Shooter Preparedness exercise at Babson College, taking place at the end of May. Requests for quotes for contractors to write the Emergency Sheltering plan, as well as to facilitate a functional exercise of the Town's Emergency Operations Center have been sent. Those quotes are due back today. In February, there was an extreme cold weather event, and the Town response went fairly well. Three individuals needed sheltering during that time, which the Town was able to provide.

Emergency Preparedness

Mr. McDonald reported on this item. He explained that the group is working on the warming and cooling center plan. It is also using the training survey results to develop trainings for medical reserve volunteers.

Public Health Nursing

Hanna Burnett stated that the group continues to work on the blood pressure clinic to encourage more people. The Matter of Balance classes completed and were well attended. CPR classes are also continuing. There have been two Domestic Abuse Conversations at the Needham Community Council.

Ginnie Chacon-Lopez stated that there have been six confirmed influenza cases. There were also two unrelated Norovirus cases that both ate ready-to-eat meals from two different grocery stores. There was one case of pertussis, but she was unsuccessful in reaching the person, despite multiple attempts and different methods.

Dr. Epstein stated that the pertussis case is concerning, as this is a highly communicable item. He suggested more directed outreach. The Police Department could also do a drive-by to confirm this.

COVID Update

Julie McCarthy stated that the seven-day average is very low and the seven-day average for Massachusetts has also been low and appears to have plateaued. There has been an increase in younger age groups continuing to get booster doses. Hospitalization rates continue to decline. Last week the Healey Administration stated that the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency will end on May 11th. This lines up with the end of the federal public health emergency. It is unclear how this will impact the updates to COVID data.

Mr. McDonald stated that the State has sufficient COVID vaccines to last into the early fall. There is no plan for the federal government to subsidize COVID vaccines beyond this stockpile. The Town should discuss if it would like to order additional vaccines, at \$125/dose. There is a high balance of immunization funds which could be spent toward that.

Dr. Epstein stated that he would like to find a way to link this with influenza vaccines.



Needham Public Health Division



The Board discussed what type of information they would like to still receive through this report.

Epidemiology

Ms. McCarthy stated that the draft of the Community Health Assessment was sent to the Accreditation Steering Committee for review. There is a gap in data for the ages between 18 and 60. The group is discussing ways to pull in that data from the State.

There has not been much interest in COVID testing, but interest has increased a bit since advertising has increased. This has also been advertised to Dover, Medfield, and Sherborn.

Shared Services Grants

Diana Acosta stated that she and Roland Abuntori attended the MHOA Housing Code training which focused on updates in the housing code set to take effect in April 2023. Interviews were conducted by Regina Villa Associates with various Board of Health members, Town Administrators, and public health staff. Interviews continue through the first week of March. The Working Group will begin to meet in March to discuss the capacity assessment and how best to fill gaps to provide extended public health capacity throughout the whole region. The goal is to create an intermunicipal agreement among all four municipalities. Results have been received from the three-phase capacity assessment that the State had conducted. Ms. Acosta noted that engagement with racial equity training is a requirement of the Public Health Excellence grant. The Office of Local Regional Health is offering a training, *Racial Equity 101: Building Foundational Knowledge and Skills to Advance Racial Equity*. She encouraged everyone to participate.

Substance Use Prevention

Karen Shannon stated that the group is planning a lot of future initiatives. The annual progress report to has been submitted to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the grant officer anticipates no issues with it. It is expected that the continuation award will be issued imminently. The upcoming schedule of compliance checks with the Police Department is being reviewed and there will be a TIPS alcohol service training in May. The SALSA (Students Advocating for Life without Substance Abuse) students have been very robust in their advocacy work, contributing 122 hours during the month.

Substance Use Prevention - MassCALL3 Grant

Lydia Cunningham stated that a virtual site visit was carried out in February. This is a requirement of the grant. A strategic planning meeting is now being prepared. There will be a hybrid community forum in April.

Carol Read stated that the regional prevention funding has shown that there can be collaboration across towns. Partnering can occur based on evidence-informed and evidence-based strategies.



Needham Public Health Division



The group is highly focused on alcohol strategies at this time, although strategies cannot be implemented until the strategic plan is finalized. April is Alcohol Awareness month. There needs to be a more proactive community education approach to alcohol access. It is hoped that everyone will attend the forum on April 13th. There is a lot of work to be done, and she expressed appreciation to this Board for its advocacy.

Traveling Meals Program

Rebecca Hall stated that 764 meals were delivered in February. No 911 calls were initiated. There were five new clients during the month, and six cancelled the program. In February, FRIENDS included boxed chocolates with a Valentine's message for each client.

Environmental Health

Mr. McDonald stated that there have been two rounds of interviews for a full-time Environmental Health Agent. An offer will hopefully be made soon, with a person in place by mid-April. Tobacco compliance checks were completed on January 31st with Tara Gurge, Ally Littlefield, Officer Schlittler, and an underage volunteer. Out of the six tobacco compliance checks, the Needham Shell Gas Station at 875 Highland Ave. sold to a minor. There are still a number of housing issues pending, one of which is very time consuming. The group is currently drafting an outdoor seating policy for food establishments, as an expansion of its pest control work. There will be discussions regarding the fees for this and certain parameters.

The Rice Barn Food Permit Discussion

Mr. McDonald explained that it has been almost a year since the Rice Barn's food permit was suspended by the Board. The owner has indicated an interest in reopening. An initial walkthrough of the restaurant found some large concerns, such as evidence of pests and lack of a regular pest service agreement. The Board has wide discretion regarding allowing reopening of this restaurant. Unless there are fairly large improvements made, staff will not be recommending the reopening of this restaurant. He will continue to update the Board on this item.

Charles River Public Health District – Capacity Assessment Resource Toolkit (CART) Report & Public Health Excellence Shared Services Working Group

Ms. Acosta explained that the toolkit uses all the data that was collected in the State's capacity assessment. It was developed to assist shared services arrangements and to inform the development of work plans. She encouraged the Board to review the data collected because corrections can be submitted to ensure the data is accurate and the results are reflected correctly. The toolkit will be used as the basis to determine funding for the next fiscal year. The mechanism to allow for additional funding is currently being discussed. The capacity assessment found that the region is achieving approximately 84% of the standards. There is still room for improvement, such as in the areas of environmental health and tobacco use prevention. Some areas require a bit more training or additional staffing. The working group will take this data and



Needham Public Health Division



consider ways to improve these numbers. This data will be used by the working group to inform an intermunicipal agreement.

Accreditation

Cindi Melanson gave a brief update on accreditation.

Discuss Alcohol Compliance and Select Board Regulations

Dr. Epstein noted that two Select Board members commented on this item. One was supportive of in person training prior to a server with a violation returning to serve again. Dr. Brown stated that she believes the Select Board was open to the viewpoint presented by the Board of Health. A retailer spoke at the meeting, supporting the Board of Health's suggestion to reduce the business hours.

Dr. Gandhi noted that there will be a League of Women Voters forum on March 20th at 4:30pm with a focus on the 2023 ballot items. This could be an opportunity to share the Board's letter regarding these regulations. Dr. Epstein suggested sharing the data regarding the MetroWest survey, showing that there is a problem in Needham, and data showing that increased access to alcohol leads to increased drinking and potential injury. The Board believes the Town is not currently doing a good job in terms of compliance with underage drinking laws and given that, the Board cannot support increased access to alcohol in the Town at this time.

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Cosgrove, and seconded by Dr. Epstein, it was voted to submit a document to the League of Women Voters for their meeting on Monday night, listing the Board of Health's statement and explanation regarding why it is opposed to the proposed change in liquor regulations. Motion passed 4-0.

BOARD OF HEALTH – PUBLIC HEARING

Revise Article 11: Biosafety Regulations in Needham

Dr. Brown recused herself from this item.

Mr. McDonald explained that the Board received one public comment since it last continued this hearing. There are also a couple of members of the public who wish to speak on this item.

Barry Pollack, 15 Pandolf Lane, stated that he believes the existing biohazard regulations are primarily registration oriented. There is currently a proposed increase of regulatory or licensing efforts underway, in terms of incoming biohazards into Town. He suggested that the Board require that registrants who receive approval to engage in certain types of the more complex biohazard work represent that they have an effective compliance program. There are seven elements to an effective compliance program, including implementing written policies and procedures for standards of conduct and ethics; designating a compliance officer and compliance



Needham Public Health Division



committee; conducting effective training and education, including compliance training; developing effective lines of communication with a promise not to retaliate against employees who would report wrongdoing; conducting internal monitoring and auditing; enforcing standards through well publicized disciplinary guidelines; and responding promptly to detected problems and undertaking corrective action. He also suggested looking into the current zoning regulations in Town. He would like these regulations to capture and perhaps encourage collaboration between the Board of Health and the Planning Board. Lastly, he commended the Board of Health on its proactive role regarding alcohol compliance issues in Town. He suggested an additional committee to monitor these items.

Betsy Gilman Duane, representing Environmental Health and Engineering of Newton, stated that she appreciates the revised draft of the regulations and seeing that it incorporated many of her comments and suggestions.

Mr. McDonald noted that Ms. Gilman Duane submitted a letter on March 14th regarding Section 11.5.1. which did not make it into the Board's packet. He asked her to summarize that letter. Ms. Gilman Duane stated that this dealt with new construction or renovation. In many cases tenants have not yet been identified, making it very difficult to have the landlord go through the registration process. The suggestion is that, if there is new construction or renovation without a known tenant, the developer would provide written notification of the construction without yet having to obtain registration. The Board agreed with this item.

Mr. McDonald noted that there was a suggestion from Town Counsel regarding what can be considered private disclosure under public record law. The Board agreed that this suggestion was reasonable.

The Board agreed to close the hearing this evening and schedule a vote on the item in April. The Board can still accept public comments at any time, prior to the vote.

The Board formally closed the public hearing regarding Article 11: Biosafety Regulations in Needham.

Brief Updates

- **Accessory Dwelling Units**

Mr. McDonald explained that a proposed zoning bylaw has been submitted for Town Meeting regarding accessory dwelling units (ADUs). He asked whether the Board wants to issue a policy position or a letter supporting the proposed changes.

Dr. Cosgrove stated that the changes seem to reflect the mood of many in Town at this time regarding ADUs.



Needham Public Health Division



Upon motion duly made by Dr. Brown, and seconded by Dr. Cosgrove, it was voted to submit a letter in support of the ADU changes as proposed. Dr. Brown – Y, Dr. Gandhi – Y, Dr. Cosgrove – Y, and Dr. Epstein – Y. Motion passed 4-0.

- **Claxton Field**

Mr. McDonald stated that test results are still not back for Claxton Field.

- **Needham Housing Authority (NHA) Preservation and Redevelopment Initiatives**

Mr. McDonald explained that the NHA would like to come before the Board to present on its Preservation and Redevelopment Initiatives.

- **Opioid Trust Fund, Town Meeting Warrant Article**

Mr. McDonald stated that a financial warrant article has been submitted for the Opioid Trust Fund. The Town is considering placing these funds into a stabilization account. Placing these funds into a stabilization account means that they would remain as appropriation and not move back into free cash at the end of the year. A stakeholder group will be convened to potentially create a five-year spending plan. An attempt will be made to gather significant community input, including from the Board of Health, on how the funding could and should be spent. The stabilization fund creation will be subject to a vote at Town Meeting.

The Board reviewed its previous votes for a roll call.

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Cosgrove, and seconded by Dr. Epstein, it was voted to submit a document to the League of Women Voters for their meeting on Monday night, listing the Board of Health's statement and explanation regarding why it is opposed to the proposed change in liquor regulations. Dr. Brown – Y, Dr. Gandhi – Y, Dr. Cosgrove – Y, and Dr. Epstein – Y. Motion passed 4-0.

Other Items

- **Public Health Division Staff Bios**

This item was not addressed at this time.

Upcoming BOH Meetings

- **April 14th from 9:00 – 11:00 a.m. at Public Services Administration Building (PSAB)**
- **May 12th from 9:00 – 11:00 a.m. at TBD**
- **June 9th from 9:00 – 11:00 a.m. at TBD**

Adjournment



Needham Public Health Division



Upon motion duly made by Dr. Epstein, and seconded by Dr. Cosgrove, it was voted to approve the minutes of December 16, 2023; and January 17, 2023, as amended, and to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Brown – Y, Dr. Gandhi – Y, Dr. Cosgrove - Y, and Dr. Epstein – Y. Motion passed 4-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:01AM.

Attachment:

March 17, 2023 meeting packet