



Board of Health Meeting Minutes DRAFT

Date: March 8, 2024

Location: Public Service Administration Building & via Zoom

Members: Tejal K. Gandhi, MD, MPH Chair; Stephen Epstein, MD, MPP, Member; Robert A. Partridge, MD, MPH, Member; Edward Cosgrove, PhD, Member

Staff Present: Timothy Muir McDonald, Director of Health, and Human Services; Tiffany (Zike) Benoit, Assistant Director of Public Health; Sainath Palani; Julie McCarthy; Keleigh Boudreau; Ginnie Chacon-Lopez; Kerry Dunnell; Lydia Cunningham; Rebecca Hall; Lynn Schoeff; Taleb Abdelrahim

Welcome & Public Comment Period

Dr. Gandhi called the meeting to order at 9:00AM and initiated a roll call. Present were Dr. Gandhi – Y, Dr. Cosgrove – Y, Dr. Partridge – 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 by Acting Governor Karyn Polito, on July 16 2022, revised Section 20 of Chapter 20, the Acts of 2021. 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, 2025, unless additional legislative action occurs. As part of today's hybrid meeting, all votes will occur via a roll call.

Review of Minutes: February 9, 2024

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Cosgrove, and seconded by Dr. Partridge, it was voted to approve the meeting minutes of February 9, 2024, as presented. Motion passed: Dr. Gandhi – Y, Dr. Cosgrove – Y, Dr. Partridge – Y.

Emergency Condemnation and Order to Vacate

Dr. Epstein joined the meeting at this time.

Mr. Palani explained that there was an emergency condemnation and orders to vacate of a residence due to conditions that were deemed to immediately endanger health and safety and made the residence uninhabitable. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health Community Sanitation Program recommends that after a residence is condemned using emergency procedures and without a Board of Health hearing prior, that a hearing is held at the next upcoming Board of Health meeting. The conditions on the site have not changed and phone calls to the occupants have not been responded to. The owners could pursue eviction, but it is unclear how this will proceed. It is believed the occupant is currently living in their car or in the common hallways of this building. Social work has been involved. Help has been declined from Aging Services along with an offer of help to local shelters.

Mr. McDonald explained that it is up to the Board to determine if it would like to uphold or overturn the emergency condemnation.

Virgil Barber, Needham Senior Housing at Seabeds Way, stated that there are problems with black mold at the building. Mr. Palani noted that this is a separate issue from the public hearing at hand. Dr. Gandhi allowed for the public comment at this time. Mr. Barber stated that he and his wife have health problems and the conditions of the building have been ongoing for years. He has addressed this with Needham Housing and nothing has been done. Mr. Palani agreed to follow up on this item and schedule an inspection of the property.

An occupant of the property in question explained that he has OCD which has caused some of the issues at the property. He has been working many hours to try to afford his apartment. He has been working to clean up the apartment as quickly as possible and is requesting more time to do so.

Mr. McDonald noted that Needham Housing Authority's process is separate from the Board's process. He suggested that the order be upheld at this time and that staff continue to work with the occupant to clean out the unit. Staff can also engage with the NHA in order to show work toward compliance.

Mr. Palani explained that to rescind the order he would like to see pathways throughout the unit, 3'- 4' wide.

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Cosgrove, and seconded by Dr. Epstein, it was voted to sustain the order, with Health and Human Services and the Housing Authority to work with the occupant regarding access and other services. Motion passed: Dr. Gandhi – Y, Dr. Cosgrove – Y, Dr. Epstein – A, Dr. Partridge – Y.

Train Noise and Quiet Zones

Ms. McCarthy, Mr. Palani, and Ms. Boudreau gave an overview of Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) definitions, facts about the Needham commuter rail line, and a summary of data and literature review regarding potential health impacts of train noise as well as potential dangers of establishing quiet zones. Mr. Palani noted that, in Needham per the FRA reports, there have been a total of four known collisions at grade crossings, all of which were between 1975-1980 and there were no injuries reported.

Lars Unhjem, Town Meeting Member of Precinct F, thanked the Board for considering this topic. He has been working for three years on this item. He noted that 40% of Needham residents live within a half mile of a crossing in Town. He stated that the Quiet Zone Working Group plans to put forward a study of the five public crossings. The Select Board will be discussing this topic and there could be a level of outreach associated with a potential Warrant Article on this topic.

Mr. McDonald suggested that the Board discuss this at its April meeting in order to determine if it would like to take a position on a proposed Warrant Article at that time.

Citizens Petition

Robert Fernandez, Lead Petitioner, and Kathy Riaz, Petitioner, addressed the Board regarding a citizens' petition filed to prohibit single use plastic in Needham. Ms. Riaz stated that some vendors are concerned regarding loss of revenue due to this proposal. A survey will be sent by the Town's Economic Development Officer to all business owners in Town to gather more data. Most retailers in other towns that have similar bans have been able to adjust. There are other containers for water that can be used.

The Board agreed to further discuss this item at its April meeting.

FY25 Fee Schedule Proposal

Mr. McDonald reviewed the proposed FY25 fee schedule. This will be presented to the Board for a potential vote at its April meeting.

FY25 Budget Update

Mr. McDonald explained that Health & Humans Services got 3.5 positions, as recommended by the Town Manager. The Finance Committee cut the proposed Scientific Expertise Warrant Article, explaining that this could be completed using a reserve fund transfer if needed. Dr. Epstein noted that the Finance Committee does not have the authority to pull this Article but could express disapproval of it. Mr. McDonald stated that he would look into this.

Staff Updates

Shared Services

Ms. Dunnell stated that the intermunicipal agreement continues to move forward. This should be delivered shortly to the other three communities. Secondly, the Regional Health Inspector has submitted a resignation letter. This position will be posted for.

Environmental Health

Mr. Palani explained that he and Ms. Gurge attended the Massachusetts Environmental Health Association (MEHA) annual Title Five Septic Seminar in Taunton, MA. They also attended the recent virtual MassCALL3 Connections monthly meeting regarding potentially flavored nicotine products. There has also been a state-wide initiative regarding hemp-derived edible CBD and THC products. He has spoken to numerous businesses in Town regarding removing those products from the shelves. Staff also worked on a number of nuisance complaints received.

There was discussion regarding lowering the standards for the new routine food establishment inspection scoring system. Mr. Palani explained that scoring was adjusted as it was determined that the initial scores set for Priority, Priority Foundation, and Core items were set a bit too high in point values. The intention was to adjust those values down to accurately show a more realistic score which would allow a greater chance for the restaurant owners and managers to be able to achieve a certificate, or a score of 91 or above. Dr. Epstein expressed concern regarding lowering the standards for economic development. Dr. Gandhi stated that it is important to show people how to achieve a good score. Mr. McDonald stated that staff would bring back more information for a future meeting.

Nursing

Ms. Chacon-Lopez stated that 11 entries were submitted for AED the scavenger hunt. Staff will work to revamp this moving forward. There was an RSV cluster in one of the nursing facilities likely due to some being unvaccinated. The facility took the necessary infection control measures.

Epidemiology

Ms. McCarthy stated that a Biosafety Committee meeting was held on February 27th to review a Biosafety Permit application for Invicro. The application was recommended for approval.

Substance Use Prevention MassCALL3 grant

Ms. Cunningham stated that the group's work is funded through the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services and approval was recently given to the group's regional strategic plan. A meeting to review the plan has been set for April 25th. Four primary strategies will be implemented across the communities.

Emergency Management

Mr. Abdelrahim stated that the group submitted the Needham Storm Ready application for review by the National Weather Service Storm Ready certification. Someone may come review the Emergency Center plans.

Substance Use Prevention

Ms. Shannon noted that many SPAN projects and events will be occurring in the coming months. The group will submit an application to be accepted into the Alcohol Policy Academy. A training was offered through the STOP Grant last month.

Accreditation Team

Ms. Schoeff stated that the group continues to make progress. Steps have been taken toward identifying the action plan to meet goals and objectives for a strategic plan. There is a slightly modified logo for the Needham Public Health Division which came from a branding strategy.

Traveling Meals

Ms. Hall stated that 930 meals were delivered in February. On average, each volunteer delivers to approximately eight clients at five locations per day.

There are currently 57 clients. Looking at data to help explain the recent increasing trend in meal numbers, we saw that there were net -1 new clients to the program between December 2022 and January 2023. There were net +11 new clients between December 2023 and January 2024. It appears that COVID-19 had a bit of an impact on numbers. The five-year average was mostly impacted by FY19.

In response to a question from Dr. Gandhi, Ms. Hall explained that she checks in with the volunteers often and resources are provided in case they encounter stressful situations while visiting clients.

Other Items

- Designation of Board of Health Agents Letter

This item was not addressed at this time.

- Board of Health Charge to Educate and Inform Letter

This item was not addressed at this time.

- MAHB Certificate Program BOH Member Registrations

Dr Gandhi notes that the MAHB Certificate Program dates and times were sent out to Board members.

The Board discussed starting its next meeting at 8:30 am to allow for additional discussion. Mr. McDonald stated that the Board would have a presentation on the Norfolk County Mosquito Control District. The Board will also reorganize at this meeting.

Upcoming BOH Meetings

- **Friday, April 12th from 8:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.**

Adjournment

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Epstein, and seconded by Dr. Cosgrove, it was voted to adjourn the meeting Motion passed: Dr. Gandhi – Y, Dr. Cosgrove – Y, Dr. Epstein – Y, Dr. Partridge – Y.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:55AM.

Attachment:

March 8, 2024 meeting packet