



NEEDHAM PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION



Board of Health Meeting Minutes

Date: November 12, 2020

Location: Remote via Zoom per Governor Charles Baker's COVID-19 Executive Order 3/12/2020

Members: Kathleen Ward Brown, ScD, Chair
Edward Cosgrove, PhD, Member
Stephen Epstein, MD, MPP, Member
Christina S. Mathews, MPH, Member
Robert A. Partridge, MD, MPH, Vice Chair

Staff: Timothy M. McDonald, Director of Needham Department of Health and Human Services; Tara Gurge, Assistant Director of the Public Health Division; Carol Read; Diana Acosta; Tiffany Zike, Assistant Director of the Public Health Division; Taleb Abdelrahim; Zendilli Depina; Karen Shannon; Hanna Burnett, Michael Lethin, Monica DeWinter, Mary Fountaine, Maryanne Dinell, Lynn Schoeff

Dr. Brown called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

The meeting is being conducted remotely using Zoom consistent with Governor Baker's March 12 order regarding to COVID-19. The materials for this meeting were circulated previously and are available on the Town website. All votes will be voice votes by roll call.

Dr. Brown asked for a review of the minutes from the October meeting.

Dr. Cosgrove moved to accept the minutes as amended. Dr. Epstein seconded. The vote to accept the minutes was 5-0.

Staff reports:

Environmental Health – Tara Gurge and Diana Acosta

Ms. Gurge reported that mask complaints are continuing to come in, and staff have developed a consistent message. Other Town departments will refer complaints to the Health Division, and Environmental Health will look for trends to help shape public messaging.

Several establishments have gone out of business, including 7-11 (Chestnut St.), Stacy's Juice Bar, and Three Squares. Ms. Gurge also provided an update on the Farmers Market, which will continue selling fresh whole fruits and vegetables until November 22. The COVID protocols have worked well there.

Needham Pool and Racquet Club is upgrading their wading pool and is working closely with the Building Department and Environmental Health.

Ms. Acosta reported on annual permit renewals. The learning curve for online renewals has been challenging and they are still working out the kinks. She is optimistic that it will be easier going forward.

Ms. Acosta and Ms. Gurge are working on a business plan with Fooda, a company that tried to come into Needham in 2017 with a pop-up business model. They are applying again, this time with a modified pop-up style (rotating local restaurants) in a permanent space at the cafeteria at 140 Kendrick Street.

Traveling Meals – Maryanne Dinell

The number of people receiving meals is higher in October, but Ms. Dinell expects it to dip again as is typical in November. There was one emergency call in October, handled very well by the volunteer with a positive outcome for the client.

Substance Use Prevention – Karen Shannon

The vaping grant program funded by the MetroWest Health Foundation is underway. Angela MacDonnell has been hired part-time as the program coordinator. In October, training provided by UMass Medical School focused on youth vaping cessation. It was attended by twelve school nurses and by Youth & Family Services staff. Also, the MetroWest Health Foundation approved the program's health equity plan.

There were two virtual events for SPAN (Substance Prevention Alliance of Needham). The first was *Insights on a Teen's Life 2020*, a recorded panel which addressed the stressors that affect mental health and substance use among teens and was shared with all Needham High School parents. The second, *Creating Connections that Count*, focused on adolescent development and helping teens make healthy relationships.

The first in-person event, the Medication Take-Back Day, occurred in October as a drive-through. The Town collected approximately 130 pounds of medication that day, for a total of 638 pounds for the year. The event was conducted with the help of six high school students and three police officers.

Public Health Nursing – Tiffany Zike

Ms. Zike introduced Mary Fountaine, the newest member of the nursing team, who will be heading the COVID contact tracing response and orienting the per diem nurses to help with COVID activities.

In communicable diseases, there were:

- One case of amoebiasis, which was lost to follow-up;
- One invasive bacterial infection in an elderly person. The protocol requires follow-up only for children, so there was not follow-up in this case;
- Lyme disease numbers are comparable to 2019;
- EEE (Eastern Equine Encephalitis) is no longer a threat since there has been a frost;

- There were 44 new COVID cases in October, bringing to total to 109 for this fiscal year which began on July 1.

At the October 3, 2020 flu clinic, over 500 shots were administered. This brought the flu vaccine number up to almost 1200 so far this year, with a couple of clinics still planned.

Regional Substance Abuse and Prevention Program – Carol Read

A new procurement cluster agreement was formed to apply for the “Mass Call 3” youth substance use prevention grant. Needham is the lead agency in partnership with Dedham, Walpole, and Westwood. The Mass Call 3 grant will be funded with federal money. The current five-year Substance Use Prevention Collaborative grant period is ending in June 2021. The Norfolk County 8 (NC8) communities will continue to share alcohol access strategies.

Ms. Depina described the successful PhotoVoice outdoor galleries in Needham and Dedham.

Emergency Management – Michael Lethin and Taleb Abdelrahim

Mr. Lethin reported that the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was set up last month to support the COVID response. Through the EOC, Needham was able to submit three resource requests to MEMA. Also, in the last month FEMA has given provisional approval for the Town’s Hazard Mitigation Plan. MEMA has also given Needham a notice to proceed with its Emergency Management Performance grant. This will be used to hire a contractor to lead ongoing improvement planning for the COVID response and will free up Town staff so they can continue to focus on the response. And, the Massachusetts Emergency Response Commission has fully certified Needham’s Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) for the next five years.

Mr. Abdelrahim reported that the emergency response trailer developed a leak during the snowstorm but there was no permanent damage. He is working on re-supplying for possible COVID vaccination clinics, basing the restocking on recent experience with flu clinics. The Division is also changing over to a new data base that will better coordinate with the MA Department of Public Health through a system called MA Responds.

COVID-19 update

Ms. Zike showed a slide presentation to report on COVID daily confirmed case count.

- The highest peak was in May followed by a lull;
- Numbers began increasing in mid-October and are expected to continue increasing in November.
- There was an increase in cases in children in October coinciding with outbreaks in sports leagues which led to many quarantines;
- As of the 24th of October, 34 cases were part of clusters; 6 in sports, 9 in congregate care, and 19 in businesses.
- Olin College is doing a great job. There have been no cases among the student population.

Ms. Zike provided an update about the Community Tracing Collaborative (CTC) work with Needham. The Division will not necessarily be able to follow all Needham cases. If the CTC is following a

Needham contact, they can continue to follow that contact. MDPH is doing MAVEN data dumps twice a day.

Ms. Zike said that most transmissions are occurring within households and some in congregate care. So far, Ms. Zike has not seen transmission in-school thanks to effective social distancing.

During the period from October 25th to November 7th, there were 43 new cases, bringing Needham's average daily case rate to 10.47 per 100,000 population. Needham will move to the yellow category.

Dr. Epstein shared data showing Needham and surrounding communities trending up and said that recent changes in the way positive cases are reported may make local statistics look better than they have before. There followed a discussion about the need for (and challenges of) creating effective public information to prevent wide-spread transmission. Mr. McDonald and Board members discussed the benefits (more accurate data) and pitfalls (lack of resources, false sense of security) of surveillance testing.

The discussion then turned to communication planning, the upcoming holidays, and anticipated indoor gatherings. The conversation included determining more effective mechanisms and conduits of communication, and which messengers might have greater impact with subsets of the community. Mr. McDonald talked about his recent efforts to promote social distancing through local media. On Thursday, November 19, the Board of Health, Finance Committee, School Committee, and Select Board will meet to discuss the COVID-19 situation and to reinforce messages regarding stopping the spread. Mr. McDonald will ask Cynthia Roy Gonzalez, the Town's Public Information Officer, to assist with public messaging. Dr. Epstein will post the trend graphs on the Needham Facebook page.

Other items

Social distancing success

Mr. McDonald reported about collaborative preparation, which led to the success of recent Town Meeting and elections. The Town Clerk, Town Manager's Office, and others departments worked with the Public Health Division to ensure smooth running of safe events.

Face covering emergency order

Mr. McDonald reviewed the changes Governor Baker made to the method of determining community risk levels. The Governor also changed allowable capacity for businesses (although this does not affect Needham) and mandated face coverings when people are outdoors and in the public domain. The new mask mandate is helpful in removing ambiguity about when to wear masks outdoors, but it has led to increased complaints about lack of enforcement. There was a discussion about strategies to encourage compliance with the mask mandate.

The Board then discussed possible rescission or modifications to the Needham face covering emergency order, to reflect the change on the state level. Mr. McDonald submitted a version with potential edits that included extending the date to March 2021. Mr. McDonald will seek opinions on the revised order from Town Counsel or Cheryl Sbarra from the Massachusetts Association of Health Boards.

Dr. Cosgrove motioned to keep the Board of Health order until March 31, and to include a note that the order will remain in effect unless superseded by a statewide order. Dr. Partridge seconded the motion. The vote in favor was unanimous.

Public Health Division restructure

In response to the growth within the Division over the last few years, as well as the additional demands presented by the pandemic, Mr. McDonald has restructured the Public Health staff. Ms. Gurge, as Assistant Director, has been responsible for Environmental Health and Traveling Meals and will now take on administration and some other community health efforts as well. Ms. Zike has been promoted to Assistant Director and will be responsible for Public Health Nursing and all behavioral health, including Substance Use Prevention.

Mr. McDonald also spoke about how busy the Department of Health and Human Services has been in response to the pandemic: Youth & Family Services, in addition to providing all clinical work remotely, has seen increased requests for counseling services; Aging Services has created virtual programming, is now delivering lunch and groceries, and is providing tablets to seniors who have not had a way to connect remotely; Public Health, in addition to the day-to-day management of the pandemic response, is supporting the efforts of the other divisions and Town departments, is responding to complaints and questions from residents and businesses.

Budget submission

Mr. McDonald reported that, given the current financial challenges for the Town, he is essentially asking for level funding. He has, however, included three DSR5 special financial warrant articles. These are for the cost of a mass COVID-19 vaccination campaign; to retain scientific experts to help with utility permit assessments; and to support progress toward Public Health Accreditation and the application fee. This coming Tuesday, Mr. McDonald, Ms. Gurge, and Ms. Zike, along with the directors of the other divisions, will defend the budget request to the Town Manager and two Finance Committee liaisons (Tom Jacob and Barry Kaufman). The Finance Committee hearing will be held in mid-January.

Board of Health goals

Mr. McDonald reviewed the proposed Board of Health goals for calendar 2021 and 2022 and identified cross cutting themes that will be guiding factors for all goals: equity; mental health and behavioral health; health in all policies; and pandemic impact. Dr. Epstein would like to add healthy living and health promotion in the community health section. Board members will send comments to Mr. McDonald, he will revise the goal document, and the Board will aim to vote on it in December.

Oak Street subdivision

Ms. Gurge reported that she found no problems on a site visit with the owners and abutters.

Dr. Cosgrove made a motion to release the \$7,000 off-street drainage bond. Dr. Partridge seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Tobacco vendor permits and fines

Ms. Gurge reported that the 7-Eleven on Chestnut Street went out of business and it is not yet known what kind of establishment will go into that location and whether they will want a tobacco permit. Additionally, Sudbury Farms and Roche Brothers will no longer sell tobacco as of November 19, 2020. There is also an unassigned permit from the Dunkin Donuts Mini Mart. This means that, of the ten current tobacco permits, four are now unassigned. The Board then discussed whether to retire all those permits, or retire just the Sudbury Farms and Roche Bros, leaving the others available for another convenience store. Mr. McDonald described a process for moving forward beginning with the Board discussion today, editing the tobacco regulation, posting a legal notice inviting the public to a hearing next month, and a vote by the Board.

Ms. Acosta then reported on the fine schedule. The state fines are stricter and higher than those in Needham. Considering the Massachusetts rules, Dr. Partridge suggested striking item D on page 13. In response to a question from Dr. Epstein, Mr. McDonald will check with Town Counsel about whether an establishment can be fined by both the state and the town.

The Board will look at the revised tobacco regulation for next month and will consider retiring four tobacco permits.

Other

Ms. Matthews asked for an update on the discussion about the Board of Health providing input to the Select Board about the 40B housing issue. Mr. McDonald indicated he will work to provide a draft response to the Board of Health this weekend.

Ms. Mathews made a motion to adjourn and was seconded by Dr. Partridge. The Board voted to adjourn at 11:00.

Next meetings:

Thursday, December 10, 2020.	9:00-11:00 AM
Thursday, January 14, 2021	9:00-11:00 AM