



NEEDHAM PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION



Board of Health Meeting Minutes

Date: October 14, 2021

Location: Remote via Zoom per Governor Charles Baker's COVID-19 Executive Order 3/12/2020 and amended as of 6/15/2021

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

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

Call to Order

Dr. Partridge called the meeting to order at 9:02AM and initiated roll call. Present were Dr. Brown-Y, Dr. Cosgrove-Y (arrived late), Ms. Mathews-Y and Dr. Partridge-Y. Absent was Dr. Epstein.

The meeting is being conducted in-person and remotely using Zoom consistent with Governor Baker's March 12th executive order and as amended on June 15, 2021, regarding COVID-19. The materials for this meeting were circulated previously and are available on the Town website. This meeting is being recorded.

Approval of Minutes – September 23, 2021

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Mathews and seconded by Dr. Brown, it was unanimously voted to approve the above minutes as amended. Dr. Brown-Y, Ms. Mathews-Y and Dr. Partridge-Y. Motion passed 3-0.

Staff Reports

Environmental Health – Tara Gurge, Diana Acosta and Monica Pancare

Ms. Gurge reported that the department had hosted a Zoom meeting of the Food Advisory Board on September 20 from 9:30-10:30 a.m. The meeting was attended by stakeholders, including representatives from the Town of Needham, local owners from restaurant and retail owners, and residents.



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Ms. Gurge also reported that the second annual Nutritionally Needham Healthy Eating Week was held the week of October 3-9. A booth was set up at the Needham Business Association's Harvest Fair on Sunday, October 3rd to kick off the week. Colin Boisvert, the new School Food Service Nutrition Director, prepared a healthy salsa made from fresh vegetables and herbs which were donated and purchased from local farms present at the Needham Farmers Market, which was concurrently taking place on the Town Common that day. There was a lot of foot traffic, and Ms. Littlefield prepared informational brochures about healthy eating week as handouts. Ms. Littlefield promoted the event on social media and an article appeared in the Boston Globe about the event ahead of the kickoff.

Ms. Gurge reported an increase in housing concerns, including hoarding and unsanitary housing conditions, at about one every week. Many are rooted in mental health issues and with the loss of a social worker, Ms. Gurge is nevertheless working through the complaints with reduced resources.

Ms. Acosta reported a complaint from a resident in Needham Housing of excessive moisture and mold in their unit. Following an inspection of the unit, Ms. Acosta sent a letter to the Needham Housing Authority (NHA.) A second complaint was filed by a nearby unit but the inspection was cancelled as the complainant had cleaned up the mildew on the walls. Both units were given dehumidifiers by the NHA. Remediating water away from the foundations of the buildings is not being done since the housing was built on slabs without vapor barriers. A resident reported floors sweating and mildew forming. Any furniture on that floor is damaged.

Ms. Acosta noted that the amount of precipitation over the summer has exacerbated the problem. While management claims testing proves nothing wrong, the fault seems to be placed on the residents not properly cleaning. The residents report cleaning walls constantly to ameliorate mildew.

Ms. Acosta noted that getting to the real source of the problem and resolution is challenging. NHA buildings were built a long time ago and federal funding policies have changed. The NHA has limited funds to do even regular maintenance, much less comprehensive refurbishing. The NHA is separate from the Town and requires capital to do upgrades. Ms. Acosta noted that the Boston Housing Authority worked with developers to refurbish units in public housing in exchange for building market rate housing and increasing density. Developing a similar program in Needham would be challenging as public housing was built in the 1950's and 1960's and not close to the center of town.

Discussion ensued on how the Board of Health could advocate for safer housing. Mr. McDonald noted that American Rescue Plan funding could be utilized. He also suggested working with the Select Board and Planning Board to effect zoning changes.

Ms. Acosta reported that a part-time agent had been hired starting on November 1st. In response to Dr. Brown's question, Ms. Acosta will confirm that portable air cleaners are being installed in occupied units at The Kendrick.



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Travelling Meals Program – Maryanne Dinell

Ms. Dinell reported that due to resident vacations, surgeries, rehab placements, doctors' appointments, etc., the number of meals served has decreased. She also reported having received applications for volunteer positions from high school students, but the minimum age for volunteers is eighteen.

Activities and Accomplishments – Lynn Schoeff

Ms. Schoeff reported that she is awaiting the report from the national Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey which will help determine professional development specific to the Public Health Division. Ms. Schoeff also reported that she is continuing to work on revising existing policies in nursing, environmental health and general administrative.

Substance Use Prevention – Karen Shannon

Ms. Shannon reported that the SPAN quarterly Zoom meeting was held on October 5th with 29 participants. The Community Action Team is finalizing a public service video and education slides targeting teens and young adults about driving while using cannabis.

Ms. Shannon also reported that a four-year grant received in April from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), STOPing Underage Access and Use of Alcohol: Codifying Youth Parent and Retailer Education and Compliance in Needham, is underway with TIPS training planned for the alcohol licensees. The Vaping Cessation Program is being actively promoted at the high school. Angi MacDonnell, the program coordinator, provided the school nurses with a new program flyer to have on hand as a resource when meeting with NHS students. The nurses reported seeing upwards of 90 students per week, and they use that opportunity as a touchpoint to have a conversation about vaping.

Ms. Shannon also reported that the SALSA program had its first general meeting of the school year with 75 students in attendance. Students signed up for action teams which cover a range of topics including vaping awareness, distracted driving, social media development and mental health awareness. 60% of students indicated an interest in vaping awareness, indicating that vaping remains a strong area of concern among young people.

Ms. Read reported that the Select Board voted to make in-person attendance mandatory for TIPS training for alcohol enforcement. Follow-up with licensees at the time of license renewal is needed to ensure appropriate completion of training. Ms. Shannon said that Jazmine Hurley and Monica DeWinter will work together with Carol Read in administering TIPS training and certification.

Ms. Shannon noted that while the Community Action Team is focusing its impaired driving campaign on cannabis use, the public service announcement also mentions that the use of alcohol or other substances, including prescribed medications, can impair one's ability to drive. While previous impaired driving campaigns have focused on drinking and driving, most students are unaware that cannabis use affects motor coordination which can result in impaired driving. Ms. Shannon suggested working with SALSA students in sending a combined message on all substances that may impair driving.



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Public Health Nursing – Tiffany Zike, Hanna Burnett and Mary Fountaine

Ms. Zike reported that the first flu clinic was held on September 30th and the nurses have begun preparing for COVID booster clinics. Follow-up is needed for more information on one bacterial infection as well as the Lyme disease trend for this and the last few years.

Ms. Burnett reported that she is working on A Matter of Balance, a program to assist elders to be less afraid of falling, enabling them to stay in their homes safely and maintain an active lifestyle.

Ms. Zike reported that the full-time epidemiologist will start on November 15th. Ms. Zike is continuing to recruit contact tracers.

Ms. Burnett then reviewed the illegal operation of this past summer's camp at St. Sebastian's School. The initial application was submitted in May to run a camp for August. However, the camp ran in July without appropriate permitting from the Health Department. Ms. Burnett described the timeline of submission of paperwork, email exchanges, and attempted follow-ups. Ms. Zike noted that the Town has never had a situation of a camp operating without the appropriate permit.

Discussion ensued on the Town's responsibility to follow all State regulations regarding camps, and the assessment of fines for violations. It was the consensus of the Board not to exercise the latter, but to send a letter to the Director of the Camp as well as the Head of the School and Board of Trustees of St. Sebastian. The letter should state that their actions put children at risk and was in violation of camp regulations promulgated by the State and enforced by the Town, and there will be repercussions if the rules are not followed in the future. Ms. Zike will promptly draft and mail the letter reflecting the Board's opinion.

Emergency Management Support – Taleb Abdelrahim and Michael Lethin

Mr. Abdelrahim reported he is applying for a grant for training for public health emergencies. He is seeking to develop three key trainings on how to use social media to correct misinformation circulating on internet websites.

He also reported that September is National Preparedness Month to promote personal and family emergency preparedness as well as safety tips about tropical storms. He is coordinating with the Brookline Police Department to share a training series for houses of worship on how to maintain security, assess and address active threats, crisis intervention and de-escalation.

Mr. Abdelrahim also reported that he is working with public health nurses in setting up vaccination clinics and recruiting non-medical volunteer staff.

Mr. Lethin reported that he has begun planning with the Needham Police and MEMA to develop Commodity Point of Distribution plans. The Newman School was chosen as one ideal location. These sites could be used for such things as distributing water to residents in the event of a disruption in the water supply.



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Mr. Lethin also reported that work is ongoing to restructure the Town's Emergency Operations Center and update associated plans and standard operating procedures. He is also pursuing a grant on Emergency Management Performance to fund a Hazard and Vulnerability Assessment (HVA), as the last HVA was performed in 2017.

Covid-19 Update – Timothy McDonald

Mr. McDonald reviewed the data from September about Covid-19, including case prevalence, positive testing rate, demographics, as well as information about vaccination levels. See attached PowerPoint presentation for detailed information.

Covid-19 incidence

Incidence and percent positivity

August cases

Rolling 7-day average case count

Covid-19 confirmed cases by age

Cases in children under 12

School contacts

Vaccine uptake

Vaccine uptake among youth

Massachusetts hospitalizations

Massachusetts hospitalizations among children and teenagers

Percentage of hospitalizations

Mr. McDonald reported that the Joint Health and Safety Committee is looking at the mask policy at the high school and may continue requiring masks for the entire school year. He also noted that, with the emergency approval of vaccination for the age 5-11 group near at hand, plans need to be made for vaccination clinics to be held during regular school hours.

Discussion ensued on the logistics of a school vaccination plan, including ensuring that students are comfortable receiving the shot without parental presence (bring your favorite stuffed animal), and dealing proactively with social-emotional issues that may arise and be upsetting to other students. Also discussed was how best to deal with the 15-minute waiting period so as to minimize disruption of classroom time. The draft schedule may begin the first week in November. Ms. Zike will ensure that adequate supplies of vaccine are obtained from local and state sources.

Dr. Cosgrove joined the meeting.

Discussion of Tobacco Free Generation Policy – Timothy McDonald and Stephen Epstein

Mr. McDonald reported that the Attorney General's Office approved the Town of Brookline Fall 2020 Town Meeting's Article 14 which revised the ordinance impacting tobacco sales. The ordinance prohibits the sale of tobacco products to anyone born after January 1, 2000 under the Tobacco Free Generation concept.



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In the absence of Dr. Epstein, Mr. McDonald led the discussion on the pros and cons of such an adoption by the Town of Needham. The enforceability of such an adoption, given the current statistics on tobacco use by high schoolers, would be challenging. It was noted that an alternative to “forever” would be to raise the age to 25. It was decided to continue the matter for next meeting and Dr. Epstein’s input.

Continued Discussion re: Sira Naturals Request – Timothy McDonald and Tara Gurge

This is a continuation of the discussion from last month on Sira Natural’s request for modifications to its operating permit and the underlying regulations which govern that permit.

With regard to the request to change customer access to the building, Mr. McDonald stated that that provision is contained within the Planning Board’s special permit and not within the Board’s purview. For CORI background checks, Mr. McDonald will work with Human Resources in using a third-party vendor for processing and quicker turnaround time.

Discussion ensued on the pharmaceutical nature of the business. Comparing it to other pharmacies like CVS, where discounts are not given on prescriptions. The Board supports giving economic need discounts and senior discounts, but not general discounts or free samples.

Discussion also ensued on the request to use a logo for labeling, signage, and other materials but which will not contain medical symbols, images or marijuana paraphernalia, etc. It was noted that cannabis use among adolescents and pre-adolescents is of significant concern, and logo use may contribute to the normalization of cannabis use.

Discussion ensued on the present regulations of the Cannabis Control Commission. It was agreed that Ms. Shannon will assist Ms. Zike in an analysis of its regulations. The Board will then review and consider revision of its medical regulations in areas in which it is comfortable, if appropriate.

Update on Priorities for American Rescue Plan Act Spending – Timothy McDonald

Mr. McDonald reported that the Select Board approved requests for a full-time public health nurse and epidemiologist and two part-time contact tracers. No action was taken on the request for investments to respond to mental health impacts from Covid-19 especially among youth, or investments to respond to the pandemic’s disruption in the lives of seniors, particularly isolation. Mr. McDonald noted that many housing complaints have a mental health component, especially regarding hoarding. There are currently three vacancies in Youth and Family Services and interviews continue. Mr. McDonald noted that the Select Board seeks a more inclusive process in determining fund allocation with public discussion and input.

Mental Health in the Community – Carol Read

Ms. Read reported that she, Ms. Zike and Ms. Shannon had met with Jennifer Pinto, a licensed mental health counselor who was hired by BID Needham to focus on community outreach and education. Additionally, BID Emergency Department hired a social worker who is collaborating with the Needham Police on community health needs.



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Pesticide Reduction PSA and Brochure Drafts – Ally Littlefield and Tara Gurge

Ms. Littlefield reviewed the changes made to the brochure “Healthy Lawns and Landscapes” in accordance with feedback received at the last Board meeting. Mr. McDonald added that all sources of health claims and general information were verified. Both Ms. Littlefield and Ms. Gurge had worked with Parks and Forestry and other Town Departments and local non-profit organizations, in developing the materials. While state law does not apply to the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) process in Town areas, it is state law for public school areas, and this is enforced by the Superintendent of Parks and Forestry.

Discussion ensued on the role of the Board of Health in informing the public of the health risks of pesticide use, especially to children. Mr. McDonald noted that the Town takes an ecologically friendly approach to raising resident awareness and offering alternative lawn care suggestions, and collaboration with Town departments is helpful in effecting change. Additionally, researching data from expert scientific groups is key to being properly informed and sharing that information with the public.

Mr. McDonald noted that the brochure will be inserted with the resident water bill, and he will pursue with the Town Manager’s office inclusion of the brochure in the welcome packet. The information will also be posted on the Town website.

Accessory Dwelling Units and Affordable Housing – Timothy McDonald

Mr. McDonald reported that he had spoken with Oscar Mertz, one of two residents submitting a citizen’s petition for the Fall Special Town Meeting to amend the current Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) bylaw.

Mr. McDonald then summarized the Needham Public Health Division’s previous work encouraging the adoption of an Accessory Dwelling Unit zoning bylaw as one means of increasing affordable housing and allowing older residents to remain in the community. There is no need for the Board to adopt another policy position.

Update on FY2023 Town Budget Process – Timothy McDonald

Mr. McDonald summarized next year’s budget requests. A level budget was proposed with the addition of capital requests for phones and laptops, accreditation application fee, and a study of the Center at the Heights kitchen, deck and fitness room.

There has been an influx of American Rescue Plan Act monies and regional grants. Two grants were approved at 50% of the request with Needham as the lead with Medfield to share Covid-19 resources and environmental health. Discussion ensued on the logistics of regional collaboration and the difficulties encountered in coordination of work due to varying levels of each town’s resources. Mr. McDonald noted the example of Melrose and Wakefield sharing a combined public health department but reporting to two separate Boards of Health. Mr. McDonald stated that state support is needed to support regional collaborations.

Other Business:



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Dr. Cosgrove stated his concern that the senior center is not yet fully up and running. Mr. McDonald noted that the in-person programs do not have enough participants due to continuing Covid-19 concerns. Continued assessment of data is important in developing policies that support safety of all participants and visitors in senior programs. Mr. McDonald will discuss further with the chair of Council on Aging.

Adjournment

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Brown and seconded by Dr. Cosgrove, it was unanimously voted to adjourn. Dr. Brown-Y, Dr. Cosgrove-Y, Ms. Mathews-Y and Dr. Partridge-Y. Motion passed 4-0. The meeting was adjourned at 11:25AM.

Attachment:

October 14, 2021 Meeting Packet