



Meeting Minutes #0204.21

MEDFIELD BOARD OF HEALTH

Meeting dated February 4, 2021

Members Present: Stephen Resch, Carol Read, Holly Rand, Melissa Coughlin and Kathleen Thompson, members,

Also Present: Bridget Sweet, Health Agent, Nancy Bennotti, Administrative Assistant Kristine Trierweiler, Town Administrator, Dr Jeffrey Marsden, Superintendent of Schools, Roberta Lynch, Director - Council on Aging, Jessica Reilly, Chairman / Medfield School Committee

Meeting was through Zoom teleconferencing.

Dr Resch opened the meeting by reading the notice of meeting by remote participation.

The health agent, Mrs Sweet, updated the Board as follows: The state has changed sector specific capacity effective 2/8/21; however gathering indoors remains at 10 people inside / 25 people outside. Routine inspections of food establishments include COVID-19 compliance as well as food code compliance. Continue to work with the Town of Needham to obtain vaccine appointments for residents aged 75 + including those who reside in the Medfield Housing Authority complex at Tilden Village. Mrs Sweet and the Town Administrator are exploring more options for the vaccine including Brewster Ambulance as a provider of vaccine for residents as the phases work towards including the general public. Mrs. Trierweiler confirmed that the CVS Pharmacy in Medfield is one of the sites the state selected to offer vaccine. Dr Resch confirmed that there is no change to the state mandated phased order of which populations are allowed to receive the vaccine. Council on Aging Director, Roberta Lynch, expressed concern about how home bound residents are to receive the vaccine. Mrs. Sweet shared that the state is refining guidance with regard to the vaccine and how best to serve the homebound population.

Dr Resch asked if the state is doing surveillance on genetic variants. Mrs. Sweet will forward information she recently received. Mrs. Coughlin asked about private indoor gatherings that continue to congregate? Mrs. Trierweiler cautioned that members should refrain from discussing hypothetical situations as the police chief was not able to attend this meeting. Dr Resch tabled discussion until the police chief can be present and make it a discussion item at a future meeting.

Mrs. Thompson shared that she has contacted CVS and discussed a future vaccine clinic for teachers and school staff when that group is available to receive the vaccine under the state phased program.

Ms. Lynch is working with CVS about the possibility of hosting vaccine site at the COA.

Ms. Lynch left the meeting and Dr Marsden and Ms Reilly were brought forward as participants.

Dr Marsden stated that he is in talks with Cataldo Ambulance Service about a possible vaccine clinic for school staff as well, when appropriate. Dr Marsden shared that there has been a one week pause on sports through last Tuesday and reports from the Athletic Director indicate that the spread has slowed down.

Dr Marsden reports that use of the BINEX antigen test and the clinics appear to be running smoothly thanks to the school nurses, led by Mrs. Thompson. Pool testing is ready to be rolled out for students and staff and will begin with the Middle and High school. Pool testing allows several samples within a group to determine a source of infection. Pool testing is also less expensive than individual testing. Dr Marsden continued that this is another data point to be collected as we work towards returning to school full time. The target date of April 5, 2021 is being used and it is his hope that by that date teachers will be vaccinated and would appreciate the continued advocacy of the Board of Health. Mrs. Rand asked if there have been any conversations about teachers going forward without receiving the vaccine. Ms. Reilly stated that there are other factors to take into consideration and that this meeting was not the appropriate setting for that conversation. Dr Resch stated that the School Committee should look for Board of Health participation in planning going forward. Mrs. Rand suggested that discussions about variants and issues are a public health concern, and the Board of Health is happy to provide assistance and expertise to the School Committee with regard to this matter.

Dr Resch brought Mr. Leo Brehm forward in order to speak. Mr. Brehm stated that he felt that there is a lack of solid messaging from the town boards. A solid message would install confidence to the community at large.

Dr Resch clarified that the Board of Health wants to be supportive of the schools when asked to do so and, if there is a clear role. The Board of Health role is secondary and constrained to a set of issues connected to health aspects of disease transmission and community risk. This is just a piece of information that gets included into the decision that the School Committee and School Superintendent have to make. Dr Resch noted that the school administration has reached out on multiple occasions for Board of Health opinions and feedback on issues.

Dr Resch noted that there are online questions and some are not constructive for the Board of Health to answer as the subject is beyond the purview of the Board of Health.

Dr Marsden stated that he does appreciate the collaboration, support and opinions that the Board has offered and added that the school physician has also been contacted constantly during this process. Ms Reilly clarified her position regarding safe vs unsafe return to school.

Dr Resch wanted to bring the following question by online participant: Chris McCue Potts:

Can we please just make sure that our local BOH does not relinquish its legal authority to create health regulations to protect the community? That does include schools. It is no different than the school committee creating school policies. I don't believe most people don't understand the roles and responsibility of their local board of health. According to the Association for Boards of Health the broad legal authority to pass local public health laws is somewhat unique to Massachusetts. The Mass Supreme Judicial court has consistently upheld local Board of Health regulations. As a community member I respect and appreciate the strong role of our local Board of Health.

Dr Resch: I don't think we are trying to relinquish our legal authority. That is part of the reason we have tried to stay in communication. If the Board of Health encountered a situation where the community's health was being put unreasonably at risk, we would be more proactive about taking action to protect public health within the bounds of the authority we have. But we would only want to assert ourselves on issues that are in another board's domain when we have a significant concern about public health risk. Are there any other board member comments?

Ms. Reilly and Dr. Marsden left the meeting.

Dr Resch brought the following question by online participant: Tara Oliveto:

It just seems as though the Board who oversees public health during a public health crisis, you don't want to make a decision on public health. It seems as though you are suggesting we leave it up to the educators. I just want to clarify your statement and stance. I know that many members of the community would feel better if you weighed in, as August 2020 and February 2021 are very different.

Dr Resch: We are not leaving it up to the educators; it really is their decision as far as operationalizing a return to in person learning. If you look back at the meetings that we've had and materials we have put out in the summer and fall, you do get a perspective about what the Board of Health has said about these things; the input generally supports a return to full in-person, especially in lower grades. The schools do ask for BOH input at times as to different aspects of policy as it relates to the pandemic. We are here to try to assist schools by providing information related to public health risks. However, aspects of the school reopening related to labor negotiations or specific dates have to stay with the School Committee. We all have opinions about school reopening as individuals, but as a Board of Health, we don't want to insert ourselves into things that are not in our domain. As a Board of Health, unless we see something that we feel compelled to weigh in on because it is putting the community at significant health risk, we want to restrict our contribution to input on health-related aspects that we get asked by the school leadership or the School Committee.

Mrs. Trierweiler stated that it's a fair question but hard for Board of Health to answer. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education determined that the elected officials of the School Committee and the Superintendent have the authority to open/close schools. The Board of Health can make recommendations but does not make the decision. It is up to the School Committee and elected officials to make those decisions.

Mrs. Rand clarified her stance that her statements are about the public health aspect related to school reopening. The public can reach out to us and we can reach out to the School Committee. The School Committee looks at things from a variety of perspectives.

Mrs. Read added that the policies and procedures of operations are determined by the final votes of the School Committee. Mrs. Read confirmed that the Board of Health respects the process, but emphasized that this does not mean that the Board of Health would not be involved when there is a threat to public health.

Mrs. Thompson confirmed that the school very much appreciates the Board's involvement. There are occasions when information is brought to only the chair because he is the appointed liaison and that is the process that has been determined.

Mrs Coughlin stated that residents may not understand that board members are restricted by the Open Meeting Law and cannot have private conversations. Mrs. Coughlin continued that there was a misunderstanding on her part when we met in August with the School Committee in that she felt that the Board of Health would reassess after school had resumed in the fashion of the hybrid model and discuss what went well and what did not, put together data and make a recommendation to the School Committee. That has not happened. Mrs. Coughlin asked if the board could make a recommendation to the School Committee, even if it has not been requested.

Dr Resch stated that even without being requested to do so the Board of Health could discuss and vote, but it would only be a recommendation, as the authority to open schools does not sit with the Board of Health. Mrs. Trierweiler noted that if the Board of Health wanted to deliberate over such a recommendation, they would have to do so at a future meeting when that topic is on the agenda. Mrs. Coughlin asked that it be added as an agenda item for the next meeting. Mrs. Rand asked for clarification as to what the recommendation would be. Dr Resch stated that if the board is going to deliberate that it would have to be an agenda item, and he would frame the agenda item as follows: Item 1: Are we going to make a recommendation? and Item 2: Talking about the substance of it.

Dr Resch brought forth the following question by online participant, Mike Mattiolo:

Why is the School Committee not asking the Board of Health's opinion as it relates to 3 feet vs 6 feet; and about the vaccine?

Dr Resch stated that this would be a question for the School Committee to answer.

Dr Resch brought forth the following question by online participant, Bobby Rinn:

Will the reopening of the schools affect the health of the public in general in Medfield?

Dr Resch stated, yes, in some way or another, and; that this question does get to the heart of the matter.

Dr Resch brought forward additional online questions beginning with the following question by online participant, Chris McCue Potts:

When children/staff report being sick due to fumes from gym floor resurfacing and the administration becomes angry with staff who attempts to address the situation, what is the role of the Board of Health?

Dr Resch offered that complaints should be communicated to the Board of Health office and the health agent will review the complaint and address it.

Dr Resch brought forth the following comment by online participant Joshua Stefanik:

I think Holly made a great point about protection after the first vaccination. Planning school reopening after two doses plus two weeks does not seem be the metric that the school should be hanging their hat on. It also adds more time to get back. I hope the Board of Health will continue to talk to the School Committee about this.

Dr Resch acknowledged that the Board has heard that message and we are trying to do our best in that regard.

Dr Resch brought forth the following comment by online participant Jennifer Hern:

If the Board of Health took a vote about 3 feet being ok for full return it seems that the School Committee would move forward to make the full return happen sooner, it seems they need your thumbs up to do this.

Dr Resch offered that the point was taken but not sure what influence that would have. It is reasonable to speculate that the vote that the school leadership would ask the Board of Health to formalize their recommendations with a vote if they thought it would be useful to their process.

Dr Resch brought forth the following question by online participant Mike Mattioli:

Can I suggest that be put on the agenda?

Dr Resch brought forth the following comment by online participant Josh Stefanik.:

Thank you, Melissa, for bringing this up, if the School Committee has not discussed opening plans with the Board of Health since August that is not good.

Dr Resch brought forth the following question by online participant Lauren Liljegen:

Thank you for supporting our town with science and common sense. What impact is the hybrid remote learning having on the health of the community, parents, kids and families?

Dr Resch closed the public comment section and would like to schedule the next meeting for February 10, 2012 at 3:00 pm, and asked the board to focus on meeting minutes.

Mrs. Trierweiler asked that an agenda item be added for discussion next week as two residents have expressed interest in becoming associate members to the Board of Health. Also, stormwater regulations will be handled by another individual at EBI Consulting and Mrs. Trierweiler will make arrangements to have the board meet this person at a future meeting.

Mrs. Rand made a motion to adjourn, Mrs. Thompson provided second. Roll call vote was 5-0 unanimous.

Meeting adjourned.

Meeting Minutes: #0204.21
June 17, 2021