

WESTON BOARD OF HEALTH
Meeting Minutes for
Wednesday, February 2, 2022
10:06 AM – 12:12 PM
Zoom Meeting

Present: Laura Azzam - Chair
Dr. Jennifer Kickham - Member
Michele Fronk Schuckel MBA, BSN, RN – COVID-19 Response Manager, BOH Public Health Nurse
Kelly Pawluczzonek, RS, MS - Public Health Director
Michelle Hubbard – Administrative Assistant, Meeting Minutes

I. Residents' Concerns

Meeting called to order at 10:06 AM. No resident concerns unrelated to agenda items.

II. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

Dr. Jennifer Kickham made a motion to approve the minutes from December 1, 2021 and December 22, 2021. Laura Azzam seconds the motion. The motion is carried.

III. 25 Hubbard Road – Request a Variance from MA DEP Title 5-310 CMR 15.211 – Setbacks – To allow the septic system to be within 50 feet (approximately 44 feet) of a Bordering Vegetated Wetland instead of the required 50 feet

Peter Bemis is requesting a septic variance for the failing system at 25 Hubbard Road from the Weston Board of Health Local Regulation Chapter VI Sewerage Disposal Systems 2.5 Distance Requirements: “No part of the structural components of a leaching facility shall be located within 100-feet of a wetland as defined in M.G.L. Chapter 131 section 40 Wetlands Protection Act.” The setback would be approximately 44-feet.

Peter stated there were wetlands at the back of the lot, and there was ledge at the front and side of the lot. They did testing in the back away from the leaching area and found natural soils so they knew they could do the repair. During installation, they put in the septic tank and a contractor called Peter and stated there was ledge near the septic tank. They changed the geometry for the layout of the septic system to address that. As they started digging out to get ready for the leaching area, they found the ledge went further into the existing leaching area. They traced the existing leaching area and found that it was even closer to the wetlands than they had originally anticipated. Peter had to change the geometry again so that the system would be parallel to the building rather than perpendicular and were using an Elgen System. This system makes it easier to change the geometry. The system was put in but they could not get one corner of the leaching area to be 50-feet away from the wetland. These changes were run by Kelly

while they were doing the bottom inspection and Peter also spoke with Jordan in Conservation about the circumstances they were running into. They did put in an impermeable barrier and they also put in plantings along the edge of the limit of work at the top of slope to further stabilize the area. In the as built submitted, Peter documented where the ledge limits were found to be at the site and he also documented that the existing leaching area was closer to the wetlands than they had put with their repair plan so that Board of Health could have record of why this change was made. Both Kelly and Conservation feel as though this is an improvement compared to what is already there. Kelly does not see an issue with the variance request.

Dr. Jennifer Kickham made a motion to approve the variance. Laura Azzam seconds the motion. The motion is carried.

IV. COVID-19 Report/Update – Michele Fronk Schuckel, MBA, BSN, RN

Cases remain high across the country with high transmission rates due to Omicron, but case rates are easing, which is good news. Omicron remains the prominent variant in the United States, including Massachusetts and Middlesex County. There is a new sublineage of Omicron known as BA.2. This behaves similarly to Omicron and is in the news because of its different mutations. It is not causing a new surge in countries where it has been detected, but is it being watched carefully because of the new mutations and behavior. When it comes to testing, antigen tests are less sensitive than PCR tests and are most likely to be negative early and late in the disease. A positive result indicates likely infection and should be assumed to be positive. A negative result when someone is symptomatic should trigger a follow up PCR or another antigen test within 24-48 hours. If you expect a positive result because you were exposed and/or are symptomatic and you get a negative result, follow up with a PCR.

As of January 25, 2022: In Massachusetts, 87% of the population has received at least one dose of the vaccine, compared to 76% of the national population. In Massachusetts, 51% of those fully vaccinated have received a booster dose, compared to 40 % of the national population. Being up to date on vaccines continues to be the best protection against severe illness and death. Since last meeting, the CDC had started talking about the idea of using “up to date on your vaccinations” rather than “fully vaccinated and boosted.” The CDC made this change, and Massachusetts adopted that last week. Weston has adopted the language that being up to date means vaccinated with your primary series and boosted. This is important for quarantine and isolation because if you are not up to date on your vaccinations, you are in the same category as an unvaccinated person. We remain in a public health emergency, so we do have some state orders from MA DPH, as well as state guidance regarding quarantine, isolation, and masking. As of October 2, 2021, the CDC recommends that children ages 5-11 get vaccinated. As of January 6, 2022, the CDC recommends boosters for people ages 12-15 (booster doses recommended 5 months after primary series of mRNA vaccine or 2 months after viral vector vaccine. As of January 5, 2022, the CDC states everyone 16+

who is eligible, should receive a booster. If someone is vaccinated or boosted outside of Massachusetts, we do not have that information. If DESE adopts a new definition of vaccinated, that will make a difference in the schools. As of right now, they have not moved beyond “vaccinated.” They have left it as “primary series,” and there isn’t consideration for a different course following an exposure if you are boosted or not. The town will be offering booster clinics, Moderna Mondays and Pfizer Fridays throughout the months of February and March.

Case rates in Weston are currently declining. The case count from January 2 – January 16, 2022 was 333. From January 9 – January 22, the number was down to 234. The positivity rate dropped from 11.58% to 8.29%. As people have more at home tests, we are told that the numbers are probably double than what is being reported through the Public Health Reporting System because we are unable to track the at home tests.

The K-12 schools (WPS, Cambridge School, Rivers, Meadowbrook, and Gifford) have the option to stop test-to-stay and are adding in home antigen tests. Last year we found that in school transmission with masks, distancing, and vaccinated teachers to be effective in preventing in-school transmission. The public schools will contact the positive case, but will no longer do contact tracing, they will ask individuals to notify their own close contacts. The home antigen tests are available this week for teachers. Higher Ed (Regis College and Pope St. John XXIII Seminary) got a memo from the Secretary of Education and HHS with the goal to ‘normalize,’ meaning trying to find ways to minimize the impacts of quarantine and isolation on their student bodies. For town staff, we had a very successful testing program by using federal funding to cover PCR tests for staff and their immediate household members who had known exposures with the goal of workforce preservation. We also provided every employee with a set of 2 antigen tests, so that if they had a known exposure or were symptomatic, they could test themselves. We have had some minor outbreaks and a few individual cases, but the program seems to have worked to identify people who had an exposure and were asymptomatic positive, and as a result we were able to keep them out of the workplace. The preschools in town are beginning an earnest testing program this week. This will be helpful due to the fact that this age group cannot yet get vaccinated. As of January 30, Maplewood and Campion appear to be COVID-19 free. There is a robust testing program and 100% of the residents are vaccinated/boosted.

A couple of issues were brought up such as why masking is still being recommended if wearing an N95 or KN95 is so effective that you don’t have to worry about anyone else and that one-way masking is being embraced, and also the issue of disposable masks being thrown on the ground and ending up in the landfills. The question was also raised about whether the vaccines for the clinics are FDA approved or Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). Michele stated the vaccine is the same and is population specific. The Pfizer vaccine is authorized for use in individuals ages 12 and older. It is population specific for whom it is EUA approved vs. who has full FDA approval.

Update: Mental Health Concerns Triggered by the Public Health Crisis of the Pandemic

A resident asked about the mental health update. Kelly stated there is a social worker at the Council on Aging, a social worker at the police station, and a couple of other people in town who have set up a meeting to discuss what population we are targeting and what population in town that we need to target. Sudbury has a pretty robust mental health program where they have a social worker who works in the Board of Health office and the recently went to the Selectman to get ARPA funds to increase the social work. The meeting is Friday morning for that discussion and the next meeting will be scheduled to talk with the social worker out of Sudbury. A discussion ensued about the mental health in the schools and if the mental health crisis there is being addressed. Michele stated that the mental health resources in the schools have been increasing throughout the course of the pandemic and most of that has been through staff resources. She spoke with the head of counseling services, Maddie Steinberg, who stated that what they are seeing is the need for one-on-one services but it is difficult to find people to talk to. The schools have encouraged skill building with their faculty and staff to identify individuals in early need and to try to get them some additional support. Many caretakers in mental health such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers are private pay and many do not accept insurance. This can be difficult for someone looking for help. There are some deep systemic issues around how we can approach and provide mental health care and separately, how we talk about it. Kelly stated that for the last 10 years, Board of Health has had a contract with Human Relation Services (HRS) with the school, and we have been giving \$25,000 to them a year. This program works with families who have children in crisis. If the child is in crisis, the school department works with them, and if the family needs additional support, HRS can help with that. We are trying to increase that financially and Kelly has a meeting with the financial committee on Thursday to discuss. We are looking to the future of mental health and what we can do at a local level out of our department.

Dr. Jennifer Kickham stated that we lift the mask mandate in the schools back in November to be in line with DESE and to allow the schools to apply for the mask waiver if they felt it was appropriate. An issue was brought up about the kids in the middle schools sitting in rows eating their lunches in their laps and DESE has said that this is not a requirement anymore. Michele stated that that is a decision made by the school, and the Board of Health has nothing to do with how the kids are eating lunch. We have spoken to the schools telling them we do not think there is any science behind having the plexiglass barriers and that they could potentially be detrimental. A couple of parents addressed the concern of students not being able to use their lockers. The date of going mask optional on February 28 was brought into question because it is after school break, there are schools that are doing it now, and the case numbers have come down. Michele believes going mask optional should be data based, and not date based. The schools have a lot of latitude in terms of the measures that they put in place. We are working with the school department. The school believes they can offer a safer community for everyone and would like to wait until they are in the yellow. We did not

offer a date to them, but we do work with them and have weekly conversations with them. We do make recommendations, but at the end of the day, the school department can be stricter than DESE or the Board of Health. Another issue that was brought up is why the schools are still closed to parents. Michele stated that is a DESE recommendation. If DESE changes their guidance on this, the schools can decide if they will open up to parents.

Dr Jennifer Kickham made a motion that the Board of Health draft a general memo to the school committee suggesting that they immediately review all of their COVID-19 protocols. Laura Azzam seconds the motion. The motion is carried.

V. Director Monthly Review – Kelly Pawluczonek, RS, MS – Public Health Director

Was not discussed.

VI. Next Meeting Date

March 2, 2022 at 10:00 AM via Zoom.

VII. Adjourn

Dr. Jennifer Kickham motioned to adjourn the meeting. Laura Azzam seconds and adjourned the meeting at 12:12 PM.