

Wellesley Board of Health
Remote Meeting via Zoom
Meeting Minutes
February 3, 2022, 12:00 PM

Present:

Board:

Shepard Cohen, MPA, Chair
Marcia Testa Simonson, MPH, PhD, Vice Chair
Linda Oliver Grape, PA-C, MPH, Secretary

Staff:

Wanda Alvarez, LSW, Community Social Worker
Deadra Doku Gardner, Administrator
Leonard Izzo, MS, RS, CHO, Director
Cheryl Lefman, MA, Community Health Coordinator
Ann Marie McCauley, RN, Public Health Nurse Supervisor
Joyce Saret, LICSW, Senior Community Social Worker
Vivian Zeng, REHS, RS, CP-FS, Senior Environmental Health Specialist

In attendance:

Marlene Allen, Chair, Council on Aging
Connie Cardillo-Backoff, Executive Director, Human Relations Service
Lindsay Steinsieck, Psychologist, Human Relations Service
Ellen Subramaniam, Resident
Beth Sullivan Woods, Member, Select Board
Kathleen Vogel, Board Member, Council on Aging
Maura Wayman, Resident
Emily Whittaker Smith, Intern, Wellesley Health Department
Greg Wilson, Assistant Director, Council on Aging

The meeting commenced at 12:06 p.m.

Citizens Speak

Maura Wayman addressed Covid restrictions at the public schools, particularly those related to school athletics. She asked that the Board of Health consider loosening those restrictions, as they seem punitive.

Ellen Subramaniam agreed with the comments made by Ms. Wayman regarding reducing restrictions. She also requested that the Board of Health review the masking policies, noting the importance of students and parents being able to attend concerts and field trips, as well as in person meetings and events.

Chairman's Report

Shepard Cohen reported on the most recent Newton-Wellesley Hospital Community Benefits meeting, noting that Covid related hospitalizations have dropped off substantially.

Director's Report

Leonard Izzo reported that the department calls regarding Covid complaints and vaccination requests have dropped off. He said that daily activity has been slowly returning to normal in the department.

Community Health

a) Mental Health – Human Relations Service (HRS)

Dr. Connie Cardillo Backoff introduced herself as the new Executive Director at HRS, and started on December 1, 2021. She discussed HRS's collaboration with the town and reported on her plans to meet the needs of all residents. Dr. Cardillo Backoff said the pandemic exacerbated mental health issues and that there are extensive mental health needs in Wellesley, as well as in surrounding communities.

Shepard Cohen suggested that HRS bring together all the social service staff and agencies in town to identify issues and how to address them.

Linda Oliver Grape inquired about the former Metro West Hospital in Natick. Lindsay Steinsieck reviewed the history of the location, noting that the emergency department is closed. Mental health patients are now directed to the Framingham hospital location as that is where the emergency department is housed. Newton Wellesley Hospital is working hard to service emergency mental health cases.

b) COVID-19 - Community

Ann Marie McCauley reported that the Wellesley positivity rate is 3.6%, with an average of approximately 12 new cases per day. Several cases were students from the colleges. One individual was admitted to the hospital for a reason other than COVID, but was discovered to be positive for COVID while there.

c) Council on Aging (COA) – Draft COVID Vaccination Policy

Greg Wilson presented the draft policy on vaccination to the Board of Health. COA Board Chair Marlene Allen cited the reasoning behind the policy, noting

that they are trying to provide a low-risk place for seniors to go to socialize and sustain activities. The policy excludes the bus, as some non-vaccinated individuals may need the bus to get to appointments.

Marcia Testa Simonson commented that the draft policy cannot be a mandate. Boards of Health are the only authority in the Commonwealth that can authorize a mandate. Ms. Allen reported that the Council on Aging wants to have jurisdiction over the people coming into the building who conduct programs and attend events. Dr. Testa Simonson said the Council on Aging cannot have jurisdictional authority. She also wants to be certain that it is not a discriminatory policy.

Linda Oliver Grape said that she would not want the policy to give participants a false sense of security.

d) Sustainable Wellesley

Leonard Izzo reported that the Sustainable Wellesley group is running a program, "Coping with Climate Change Distress" on March 3, 2022, 7:30 PM.

1. Environmental Health

a) Camps

Vivian Zeng reported that she has begun the camp process for the upcoming summer season. She noted that there are a few camps scheduled to operate over February and April school vacations.

b) Food Establishments

Vivian Zeng reported that she has recently approved several new food establishment plans.

Beth Sullivan Woods reported that there has been a great deal of interest in Wellesley with approximately 7 or 8 new food establishments coming to town.

Leonard Izzo reported on the new food establishments, noting that the Department does not currently have the staff to review the plans and inspections in a timely manner.

c) Council on Aging – Kitchen

Beth Sullivan Woods reported on the status of the kitchen at the Council on Aging.

d) Tobacco

Vivian Zeng reported that she has not heard anything additional from the tobacco retailer that is expected to be leasing space in Wellesley. The retailer wishes to open within 500 feet from another tobacco retailer, which would require a variance. To date no variance request has been submitted.

e) Boston Sports Club - Pool

Vivian Zeng reported that Boston Sports Club will not pursue a variance. Instead of requesting a variance, they will close the pool during hours that they do not have lifeguards.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:15 p.m.

The next Board of Health meeting is scheduled for February 9, 2022, at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Deadra Doku Gardner, Administrator