

Wellesley Board of Health
Remote Meeting via Zoom
Meeting Minutes
January 6, 2022, 9:00 AM

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:

Linda Chow, School Committee, Wellesley Public Schools.
Shira Doron, MD, resident
Maureen Febiger, resident
Stephanie Hawkinson, Public Information Officer, Town of Wellesley
Ashley Hulme, Director of Nursing, Wellesley Public Schools
Sandy Joseph, resident
David Lussier, Superintendent, Wellesley Public Schools
Catherine Mirick, School Committee, Wellesley Public Schools.
Sarah Orlov, Director of Students, Wellesley Public Schools
Ellen Subramaniam, resident
Beth Sullivan Woods, Member, Select Board
Armin Molavi, resident

The meeting was called to order at 9:25 a.m.

The meeting minutes from December 16, 2021 were approved.

Citizens speak

Armin Molavi spoke on behalf of a group of Fiske school parents. Mr. Molavi addressed the current contact tracing guidelines (state guidelines based on CDC guidelines) noting that only the parents of children falling within this guideline are contacted about an exposure in the classroom. Mr. Molavi reported that the Fiske parent group would like Wellesley Public Schools (WPS) to notify the parents of all

students in the class(es) and bus riders (if applicable) of a student who has tested positive.

Maureen Febiger reported that she is in support of a vaccination requirement for all school age children.

Chairman's Report

Shepard Cohen provided a summary of the Select Board meeting that was held on Monday.

1. Administration

a) Wellesley Public Schools (WPS) update

David Lussier reviewed the school COVID-19 dashboard. There have been 318 documented positive COVID cases since the holiday break. Since this past Sunday, there have been 237 new cases.

Student attendance started out with 598 students absent from school on Monday. There were 391 students absent from the school district yesterday. Dr Lussier expressed concern over the number of staff absences, noting that 146 staff members were out yesterday.

Dr. Lussier reported on the athletic programs that took place over the holiday break, noting there were multiple positive COVID cases among the various team members. The athletic department chose to pause practices and games to prevent further exposure. Athletics are back in session.

Dr. Lussier reported that 36,000 KN95 masks were delivered for use by faculty and staff from the state. He estimates that this is a sufficient supply for the next 5 to 6 weeks. Rapid test kits were also supplied by the state and were distributed for use by the faculty and staff on Sunday and Monday. No test kits were distributed to student and families.

Dr. Lussier reviewed the three types of testing being done:

1. Symptomatic testing for students that are tested on site when they are exhibiting symptoms.
2. Test and stay for those who are unvaccinated and possibly asymptomatic.
3. Weekly surveillance program being done for Pre-K thru 6th grade. Results are available within 24-48 hours.

Dr. Lussier reported that contact tracing is not feasible given the increasing number of students testing positive. Dr. Lussier reported that WPS will be

following a different mode of communicating positive cases in the schools - there will be one message per school.

Dr. Lussier said that there is an increased sense of anxiety among parents and students. Linda Oliver Grape expressed concern regarding the types of masks that students are wearing, noting that she has witnessed all kinds of masks being worn. Dr. Lussier reported that surgical masks are being provided to students (if needed).

Dr. Lussier reported that WPS is looking into running booster clinics for students as young as 12.

b) COVID-19 Update

Ann Marie McCauley reported that there has been a tremendous increase in COVID cases since the December holiday break, noting an average of 40 COVID positive cases per day. Positive results from at home tests are not accounted for so there are many more cases than those that are reported. There continues to be no pattern of infection – different age ranges, lots of children and many household infections. Ms. McCauley reported that she is not aware of anyone being hospitalized.

Marcia Testa Simonson reported that there is a much lower death and hospitalization rate across the country. The case fatality rate has plummeted with the Omicron variant.

Dr. Shira Doron elaborated that the Omicron variant is a mild form of the virus for the vaccinated. Dr. Doron stated that everyone will eventually get the Omicron variant and vaccination will provide very good protection against the Delta variant should it return.

c) Masks

Staff reported that there has been no issue obtaining masks however there is N95 mask price gouging taking place.

Ashley Hulme reported that most students are mask compliant, however there is a bit less compliance with little children wearing KN95 as they are uncomfortable. Surgical masks are more comfortable.

Ms. Hulme reported that she has a sufficient mask supply and is receiving another order today and will be putting in another order. Linda Oliver Grape reported that many sister communities have stopped using cloth masks and are now using surgical masks that need to be changed regularly.

d) Mask Mandate

Shepard Cohen reported that he would like to impose a mask mandate. Marcia Testa Simonson reported on mandates that have been issued in other communities and how they work.

Mr. Cohen stated that a mandate sends a very strong message to the community and to those who visit the community. Leonard Izzo presented concern over enforcement and Mr. Cohen responded that the mask mandate would be self-enforcing. Ann Marie McCauley reported that a mandate would not be effective.

Vivian Zeng reported on the business community, noting that many have mixed feelings regarding a mask mandate. Ms. Zeng stated that restaurants and gyms are already struggling, and enforcement means that the Health Department would have to fine businesses. Ms. Zeng believes that taking an educational approach is best. The Board of Health and Beth Sullivan Woods agreed that a visit be made to all businesses in town with a new educational masking poster to be presented. Beth Sullivan Woods suggested that each business be provided with a box of surgical masks. Ms. Sullivan Woods will make a request to the Fund for Wellesley to see if she can obtain a grant to make a large mask purchase.

Staff reported on two examples of mask mandates at Babson and Wellesley Colleges noting that they still struggle with case trends and the Omicron variant. Vivian Zeng reported that she spoke with Roche Brothers who initially did not have a mask requirement for employees. Once she discussed the importance of masking, they put the requirement in place the next day.

Beth Sullivan Wood reported that on a merchant call this week the group embraced strong signage regarding mask wearing.

Linda Oliver Grape reported that hospitals are at capacity, noting that semi elective surgeries and procedures are being cancelled. Ms. Grape said that we do need to do everything possible to reduce disease prevalence. While Wellesley has a well vaccinated population, we have to consider that other people come to Wellesley, and we don't know what their immunization status is. Ms. Grape said we need to do everything in our power to reduce virus transmission.

Ms. Grape suggested that the Board of Health look at what takes place in the next week in the community and in the surrounding communities and revisit the topic at the next meeting.

e) COVID Testing

At the last meeting, Leonard Izzo reported on recent information provided by the Department of Public Health concerning the availability of test kits. Currently test kits are priced higher in MA than in other states.

At today's meeting, the Board of Health voted to approve the purchase of 2000 COVID test kits at \$28 per kit. Beth Sullivan Woods will discuss financing with the Select Board.

f) Mental Health

Joyce Saret reported that more residents are becoming anxious. She noted that those she has been in contact with who have the Omicron variant are doing well. Ms. Saret reviewed the possibility of a mask mandate, noting that masking is difficult for everyone. Education and guidance are important and helpful.

Wanda Alvarez reported that there is a level of frustration that comes with the increase in numbers and confusion about the changes happening so rapidly.

e) COVID Vaccine and Clinics

Lenny Izzo reported that the staff is planning COVID vaccine clinics.

Ann Marie McCauley reported that she has not been receiving any calls from residents unable to secure vaccine appointments. Many of the calls received are to assist families with what they need to do for the infection.

Beth Sullivan Woods reported that she is receiving requests for a vaccine mandate in Wellesley.

Linda Oliver Grape reported that she believes that the virus will become worse before it improves. Ms. Grape suggested that the Medical Reserve Corp be activated to assist with contact tracing and to conduct vaccination clinics.

2. Environmental Health

a) Tobacco

Vivian Zeng reported that a new tobacco retailer 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.

b) Pool

Vivian Zeng reported that Boston Sports Club is considering putting forth a variance request to eliminate the lifeguard requirement. Currently they must have one lifeguard in place for every 25 bathers at their swimming pool. The club wishes to install cameras and supervise the pool activity remotely.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

The next Board of Health meeting is scheduled for January 13, 2022, at 12:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Deadra Doku Gardner, Administrator