

Wellesley Board of Health
CONFERENCE CALL - ZOOM
Meeting Minutes
August 26, 2020
11:30 AM

Present:

Board:

Shepard Cohen, MPA, Chair
Marcia Testa Simonson, MPH, PhD, Vice Chair
Linda Oliver Grape, PA-C, MPH, Secretary
Carol Hannenberg, MD, Associate member

Staff:

Deadra Doku-Gardner, Administrator
Leonard Izzo, Director
Cheryl Lefman, Community Health Coordinator
Ann Marie McCauley, Public Health Nurse Supervisor
Joyce Saret, Community Outreach
Vivian Zeng, Environmental Health Agent

In attendance:

Margorie Freiman, Board of Selectmen
Allen Hebert, Facilities Management Department, Town of Wellesley
Beth Sullivan Woods, Board of Selectmen
Meghan Jop, Executive Director of General Gov't. Services
John Lanza, Advisory Committee
Matt Liebowitz, Newton Wellesley Hospital
Jonathan Snider, Newton Wellesley Hospital
Jodi Larson, Newton Wellesley Hospital
Joseph McDonough, Facilities Management Department, Town of Wellesley
Mary Passananti, resident
Ethan Davis, resident

The meeting was called to order at 11:30 am.

Citizen Speak

Residents Mary Passananti and Ethan Davis spoke regarding the opening of Wellesley Public Schools.

Ethan Davis, a Wellesley parent, had forwarded an email to the Board of Health (BOH) in advance of the meeting. His questions were answered by Newton Wellesley Hospital staff (in attendance). From a health perspective, the BOH believes it is safe to return to school based on current metrics. The physical and facility restrictions are preventing staff and students from returning to school. There is no building that will allow students to be six feet apart.

Mary Passananti reported that she is a Schofield School parent. She reported that her concern on the metrics was answered. Her concern is that elementary school students do not do well in a hybrid remote system. Ms. Passananti asked the board if there were any plans to recommend full return to school. Linda Oliver Grape said that children should be in school. The BOH agrees that there is a behavioral and social benefit to a child being in the classroom. The BOH had recommended a different hybrid schedule to the school committee and the school department however the recommendation was not approved by the school department. The BOH reported the request to commandeer additional school space (and teachers) within the community is a school decision and needs to be addressed with the schools.

1. Administration

a) Newton Wellesley Hospital (NWH)

Shepard Cohen reviewed the relationship with NWH and his recent discussions about COVID-19 testing.

Dr. Jodi Larson reported she recognizes the importance of getting children back to school. Symptomatic children and staff need to be tested quickly. The hospital plans to offer prioritization to get children in for same day testing. The goal of the hospital would be if they have enough PCR testing supplies, testing would be done in an hour with results being provided within 4-6 hours.

Dr Larson explained that the first step is for individuals to call their primary care doctor (for students and children) to see if they can get a test there. If that testing is not available, they would be instructed to contact the hospital directly.

Dr. Jonathan Snider reported that currently NWH conducts 225 tests per day. This is maximum capacity for NWH and as a Partners affiliate facility, they have a full system in place behind them. He reiterated the importance of keeping individual primary care physicians as the first contact for COVID-19 testing. If there is a problem getting people tested at NWH they obtain testing resources from across systems.

Dr. Matt Leibowitz reported that NWH is making room to accommodate communities for rapid testing. The administration is currently working on a strategy to get the appointments in and have assurance to get testing turn-around time in 4-7 hours. They currently have adequate testing supplies. Dr. Leibowitz reported that the CDC recommendation is those who are asymptomatic should not be tested.

Marcia Testa Simonson reported on the testing results from Boston College and Boston University. The results coming in from the schools are very low with students coming from all over.

Linda Oliver Grape reported that a large number of pediatric providers do not routinely refer their patients to NWH, as many of them are in the Harvard Pilgrim Health network. In addition, testing time is delayed by 3-4 days within the Harvard Pilgrim Network. Ms. Oliver Grape would like NWH to encourage Harvard Pilgrim to come to NWH for testing, as well as to make providers aware that there are options. Dr Larson will look at what they can do. Dr. Snider reported that it is difficult to notify the pediatric practices as they are not part of the Partners network.

Leonard Izzo inquired as to having all town employees tested. NWH has trialed pop-up testing sites and identified what works for them. Mr. Izzo will follow up with NWH on these efforts.

b) Facilities Maintenance Department (FMD) and Physical Plant

FMD Director Joe McDonough discussed the school ventilation systems. They are increasing the MERV rating of the buildings to MERV-8 filters. FMD is addressing the ventilation systems on a case by case scenario depending upon the school in question. The other Wellesley municipal buildings will also be tested. Mr. McDonough noted that custodians must utilize PPE precautions when filters are changed.

Linda Oliver Grape inquired as to the estimated delivery of the MERV 13 filters, noting that they are delayed in shipment. Mr. McDonough reported they would they be delivered by mid- November. In the mean-time school windows would most likely have to remain open.

Joe McDonough reported that custodial staff intend on cleaning every night, including all desktops and surfaces. Lunch service is planned to be outside under tents and when not possible, students will be in classrooms having lunch. Classrooms may not be disinfected after lunch however spray bottles and paper towels will be provided so teachers and students can clean up.

Vivian Zeng reported on school lunch, noting that schools are looking at additional outdoor spaces for students to eat. There are building code regulations that need to be factored in and these will limit the size of the tent.

Mr. McDonough will keep the Health Department updated.

c) Nursing Report

Ann Marie reported the State numbers jumped to 571 cases as MAVEN was being serviced over the weekend and no reporting was done. Marcia Testa Simonson reported that the death rate had not increased. Every indicator is tracking in the right direction.

d) Advisory

Marcia Testa Simonson and Leonard Izzo will be meeting with John Lanza from the Advisory Committee to discuss the current budget.

e) Mental Health

Joyce Saret reported that Mark Kline from Human Relations Services will be attending an upcoming meeting.

Ms. Saret reported that anxiety levels are increasing in the more needy families. The BOH asked for her to provide a written update.

f) Human Resources

Leonard Izzo reported that Human Resources has approved the position for Wanda Alvarez as the Community Social Worker. Mr. Izzo must discuss the details of the position. Ms. Alvarez has not yet accepted the position.

g) Tobacco Grant Collaboration

Cheryl Lefman provided an update on the grant with city of Newton. Wellesley and Newton health departments will be sharing an inspector who will visit locations in both communities. The program begins in September.

h) School Reopening Update

Beth Sullivan Woods announced that at last night's meeting, the School Committee announced that they will start programming on September 15 however it will be remote until October 1 at which time school will revert to a hybrid model.

i) COVID – 19 Testing

Leonard Izzo reported there has been no additional information available on the testing program for the schools.

j) Washington Street Parklet

Meghan Jop reported on the new parklet being supported by a grant to benefit the restaurants and food services located in the area close to the Clocktower Park.

The next meeting of the Board of Health is scheduled for Monday, August 31, 2020.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:50p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Deadra Doku Gardner
Administrator

Documents reviewed during this meeting and on-file in the Health Department:

- NONE