

# BOARD OF HEALTH



**TOWN OF HEATH**  
Massachusetts

## **Special Meeting of the Heath Board of Health - MINUTES**

### **Topic: COVID-19 Collaboration Meeting with Community Stakeholders**

December 1, 2021, 7:00 – 8:30 PM

Remote meeting via Zoom – Meeting was recorded.

**Chair: Gene Garland (Chair, Heath BOH)**

**Moderator: Phoebe Walker (FRCOG)**

#### **ATTENDING**

**BOH: Gene Garland, Elissa Viarengo, Barbara Gordon, Susan Gruen, Claire Rabbit, Lorraine Berger, Kate Peppard (clerk)**

**FRGOG: Lisa White, Phoebe Walker, Randy Crochier**

**BOS: Hilma Sumner, Sue Lively, Robin Provost-Carlson, Brian DeVries**

**Emergency Management: Tim Lively**

**Building Use: Pam Porter**

**Library: Kate Barrows, Emily Cross,**

**Herald: Cathy Tallen, Pat McGahan**

**Heath Ag Society & Heath Parks and Rec: Kate Peppard**

- I. BOH Meeting Called to Order 7:01 PM (Gene Garland, Chair); Gene welcomed and introduced people at the meeting.
- II. Select Board opened meeting 7:01 PM (Robyn Provost-Carlson)
- III. Phoebe Walker (FRCOG)
  - a. Presented the FRCOG public health team
  - b. COVID-19 in the region – very high numbers recently, however, COVID rate is a little lower in our region than the state as a whole
  - c. Transmissions largely from family, social gatherings, sports
  - d. Reviewed the CDC Data Tracker – can search by state and county
  - e. Noted that the Stop the Spread testing site at GCC is free and open; will be available through the end of March
  - f. State site drills further down into the data and shares hospitalization data, deaths, and more by town/community
  - g. 68% of cases in our region are in vaccinated people; very low percent are hospitalized; state-wide 1.6% of vaccinated people are infected
  - h. Massachusetts regularly genetically sequences a percentage of COVID tests
- IV. Mask Mandate Review (Randy Crochier)
  - a. Greenfield, Montague, Bernardston, Colrain and Shelburne have shifted to mask recommendations
  - b. All other towns in FRCOG have mask mandates
  - c. Many cities and towns have mask mandates for town buildings

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- d. State rescinded emergency status, so regulations are per local authorities
- V. Current cases (Lisa White): have had 13 this past week in our region, trends are going up; at weekly LBOH meeting, state is recommending that LBOH only contact positive cases at the beginning, identify close contacts, and provide them with quarantine/isolation guidelines – seems to be effective and adequate; state wants local BOH to focus on getting people vaccinated and getting boosters rather than contact tracing.
- VI. Questions from Attendees (Respondent in parentheses)
  - a. Gene - HIPAA for individuals who test positive. (Lisa White): BOH is the elected entity for monitoring infectious diseases, FRCOG is their staff. FRCOG has a person on the BOH who they can share more information on about the cases. Cannot communicate private information over email, must be over the phone. Private health information is on a “need to know” basis.
  - b. Gene - Increase of cases in Heath – is there a common exposure/trend/etc. (Lisa White): there does not seem to be a single thread in Heath
  - c. Robyn – would like the slides; appreciates the opportunity to work hand in hand with the BOH to ensure what is best for our town
  - d. Brian – wants to discuss what we might do with preventive measures moving forward, especially with the omicron variant now here, and what we can do to encourage people to get vaccinated.
    - i. (Lisa): noted that Claire’s article in the Herald was a great way to encourage vaccination.
    - ii. (Phoebe): you can require vaccination for employees, you can make it more difficult to go places without a vaccine, you can make it easy for people to get vaccinated and noted Vax bus will be back on 12/21 and that RiteAide has walk-up vaccination.
  - e. Sue L – concern about how to move forward keeping people as safe as possible and want to work together to do that;
  - f. Claire noted that it is important to be informed about what is happening, she just found out it is up to infected people to notify people they may have infected. Phoebe confirmed this is a new development FRCOG was also just notified of.
  - g. Kate B – appreciates that the mask mandate is being kept in place and that compliance has been good – this helps her feel safe in the library; is there a way to notify about employees who test positive and are willing to let people know?
    - i. (Lisa White): noted that if there was a person who was infectious while in a public setting, some towns have decided to let people know that there may have been exposures and make an announcement to the community to encourage people to test without sharing personal information.

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- ii. (Phoebe) noted the state is encouraging people to get on “Mass Notify” app. It is not clear if it will work without cellular service.
  - iii. (Gene) noted we can make a decision on how to handle this in future meetings.
- h. Kate B – asked if the state is thinking about offering pool testing to municipalities;
  - i. (Phoebe) noted there is no plan for pool testing and recommends going to the Stop the Spread test site
- i. Emily – are there trigger points as to when the library should not be open? Or when even outdoor gathering should not be happening.
  - i. (Gene) noted we do not currently have a guideline, but if we continue to see upward trends we would revisit and that we will follow up with this in future collaboration meetings.
- j. Cathy T – is there data showing cases with/without masking alongside town mask mandates;
  - i. (Phoebe) noted that these alignments would be difficult to scientifically extract
- k. Pat – appreciated Kate B’s question about sharing information about people in public roles who are infected.
- l. Pam – Building Use Committee often receives questions over requirements in municipal buildings – do they differ whether it is a public event versus a private event? Are masks required when people are eating in private spaces?
  - i. (Randy) state that the Select Board has authority over the implementation of BOH mask mandates in the municipal buildings.
  - ii. (Randy) Mask mandate applies to public spaces *and* spaces open to the public; IF an event is completely closed to the public, it can be considered a private space.
  - iii. (Randy) If there is food, masks need to stay on until they are seated with their food
- m. Susan G – noted the critical level of transmission in Wilmington and Readsboro; noted employee vaccinations might impact insurance rates; asked Randy about mask mandates in churches/chapels;
  - i. (Randy) noted they will need to comply with same masking guidelines
- n. Barbara – confused about the mask mandate in regard to Randy’s answer – verbiage about food/eating is not included in our mandate; will need to discuss and clarify. Noted the three layers of regulations – State/Select Board/Board of Health – wants to improve/clarify how the regulations/mandates apply to the use of the buildings.

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- o. Lorraine – asked about testing in our area, can we make this information more accessible?
  - i. (Phoebe): testing is very easy at GCC – have to register and then can walk in anytime. FRCOG has a site that lists all testing options.
  - ii. (Gene) noted that disseminating this information is something we can work on
- p. Sheila L – noted that her most recent test came back from GCC in 10 hours, UMASS was 8 hours.
- VII. COVID Collaboration Committee in Heath (Garland). Intention is not to make decision in this meeting or take votes, but it sounds like people are interested in moving forward with establishing a COVID Collaboration Committee. Sue Lively asked for some clarification as to what this committee might look like.
  - a. (Barbara) healthy to have ongoing communication between the different groups/committees/departments. Meet on a regular basis to share information and concerns
  - b. Work together to develop informed protocols and criteria ahead of time to be proactive rather than reactive to situations (e.g, what criteria do we use to close the library, at what point does PO change window service, when might we drop the mask mandate). If we develop criteria, we can move forward in a way that keeps our community safe without feeling the pressure from what other communities are doing.
  - c. This will partly model the Rowe COVID committee that brought in representatives from the town departments and stake holders.
  - d. Sheila confirmed the Rowe committee was very helpful in sharing information
- VIII. Gene thanked all who attended and extended special thanks to the FRCOG staff who were here tonight.
- IX. Barbara Gordon moved to adjourn. Susan Seconded. Ayes: Gene, Barbara, Susan, Elissa, Lorraine.
- X. Sue Lively moved to adjourn Select Board Meeting. Brian seconded. Ayes: Brian, Susan.
- XI. Meeting Adjourned 8:23 PM.