

**Newburyport Board of Health Meeting  
May 21, 2020  
Webinar Meeting Held Remotely due to COVID-19**

Date of Approval: 6/4/2020

**Attendees**

Dr. Robin Blair, Chairman of the Board  
Dr. Sam Merabi, Board Member  
Dr. Rob Slocum, Board Member  
Frank Giacalone, Health Director  
Patricia McAlarney, Note Taker

**Call to Order:** Dr. Blair called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m.

**Approval of Minutes:** Motion to approve the minutes from the Board of Health Meetings on May 7, 2020 by Dr. Sam Merabi and seconded by Dr. Rob Slocum. Votes to approve: 3; Votes to oppose: 0. Motion passed.

**Festivals –** Director Giacalone informed the Board that there have been no changes to the decision that Yankee Homecoming will be cancelled for this year. No further discussion ensued regarding festivals.

**High School Graduation Ceremony:**

Newburyport High School Principal, Andrew Wulfe, requested that the Board consider a proposal for a high school graduation ceremony that meets the guidelines recently released from the state Department of Public Health. The ceremony would take place the third week in July outside on the football field. The field would have marked squares measuring 15' x 15'. In the center of each square three chairs would be placed for a graduate and two of the graduate's invited guests. All attendees would be escorted on to the field through four entry gates, face coverings and social distancing would be maintained by everyone in attendance and hand sanitizer would be readily available. The size of the graduating class will require 176 groups of three for a total of 288 squares (but Mr. Wulfe indicated there is plenty of room to expand the size of squares or number of squares available, if necessary.) The Board indicated that crowding at the points of entry/exit are concerning. Mr. Wulfe emphasized that from the point of parking to entry onto the field social distancing would be strongly managed to ensure 6' separation between household groups. Each entrance would only be accommodating 42 groups of 3 (graduate plus two invitees.) He further noted that he could include in his remarks at the ceremony that attendees should refrain from gathering with others [non-household members] following the event.

The Board was concerned with potential for cross-contamination due to close proximity with graduates as the Mayor presents their diploma to them. It was noted that state guidelines require that all in attendance wear face coverings during the ceremony.

The Board explained that a gathering of this size should incorporate a plan for post-surveillance so that if any attendees became ill within the two weeks following the ceremony they would be quickly identified, tested and isolated, and their direct contacts would be notified, tested and placed on quarantine, as indicated. Mr. Wulfe explained that the school will dutifully follow whatever state and local guidance is in place at the time of the ceremony.

The Board noted that the situation is very fluid and it is not possible for them to approve any plan at this point in time.

Mayor Holaday thanked the Board for their consideration and the High School for their careful planning and encouraged the Board to issue a conditional approval of the proposal with the understanding that any plan is subject to change based on the COVID-19 situation.

Newburyport teacher, Tracey Glynn, asked the Board to consider one other graduation event that is being planned for June 7, 2020. A car parade in which would students would drive down High Street and Low Street and then back to their homes. Mr. Wulfe explained that shortly after the parade a video of the graduates will air on local cable network so that graduates would be encouraged to head immediately home to watch the video.

Superintendent of Schools, Sean Gallagher, thanked the Board for their support in this planning process. He informed the Board that he has been working together with neighboring communities (Amesbury, Salisbury, Hamilton, Masconomet) and he commented on the fact that the plan that Newburyport had developed was so closely aligned with the guidance issued today by the State; and attributed this to the close working relationship the school has with the local health department. He commented that he is confident that a plan can be designed (and modified as needed) that allows for a graduation ceremony that addresses all of the concerns presented by the Board of Health.

**Motion:**

A motion was made by Dr. Sam Merabi and Seconded by Dr. Rob Slocum to approve the planning of a graduation ceremony that the Board of Health will approve in the coming weeks. Votes to approve: 3; Votes to oppose: 0. Motion passed.

The Board agreed that High School Graduation Ceremony will be placed on the Board of Health Agenda for the foreseeable future so that the Mayor, School Department and interested participants may present their plans for the graduation ceremony for the Board to consider.

**Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19):**

**COVID-19 Testing:**

Director Giacalone explained that the state health department has issued guidance to the local boards of health that any positive COVID-19 serology results are to be considered and handled as a positive COVID-19 result and, unless the individual also presents with a negative PCR test, that individual would be isolated for 10 days and their direct contacts would be placed in quarantine for 14 days. It is expected that until such time that the state has confidence that serology results can be interpreted to determine levels of immunity, this practice will continue.

Director Giacalone informed the Board that the Public Health Nurse, Pam Palombo, is now working part-time from home following cessation of her maternity leave and is participating in contact tracing for individuals who are confirmed positive for COVID-19. He also informed the Board that the state has developed a team of Contact Tracers who are also assisting Health Departments with surveillance. The Health Department maintains control of any cases involving long term care facilities, group homes, health care workers and health care facilities. Office Manager, Pat McAlarney also noted that the Health

Department is also following workplace clusters which involve coordinating with other local boards of health for communities in which the employees reside.

### **Social Gatherings:**

Dr. Merabi questioned whether the Board should consider aligning with state guidelines by relaxing the current local ban on social gatherings to allow for more focused attention and enforcement on gatherings of ten or more individuals which present a higher infectious probability. The Board discussed the challenges of enforceability and buy in from the community, especially over this Holiday weekend.

Councilor McAuley noted that the Board's current order (which bans social gatherings in public places) conflicts with the state's order (which allows gatherings up to ten people.) He encouraged the Board to keep local orders consistent with the state's, especially since the state's rules get considerably more publicity. The Board noted that the only local order that conflicts with the state is the order banning social gatherings of less than 10 people.

Director Giacalone informed the Board that the parking lots at the beach will be re-opened on Monday, May 25; the number of cars allowed will be at the discretion of the beach manager, Paul Hogg. Beach-goers will be required to maintain a social distance of 6' from others not from their household and a 12' distance must be maintained between 'groups'/beach blankets. The Health Department has scheduled the Animal Control Officer and her Assistant to do patrols for four hours on Saturday and on Sunday. The City Marshall will have patrols available on Plum Island on those dates and on Monday, as well.

### **Motion:**

A motion was made by Dr. Rob Slocum and seconded by Dr. Sam Merabi to advise vulnerable populations at risk for severe complications from COVID-19 to avoid congested public spaces over the Memorial Day weekend. Votes to approve: 3; Votes to oppose: 0. Motion passed.

Meghan Kinsey, 1 Griffin Court, owner of a fitness studio informed the Board that she is interested in holding outdoor classes at local parks. She has received support for the classes, with a waiver of fees, from the City Parks Commission. Council Shariff Zeid is currently drafting ordinance that would allow for the fee waiver. Ms. Kinsey stated that she is aware that fitness studios are not currently due to re-open until Phase 3, however, she and other similar studios have reached out to the state via Representative Kelcourse asking to be classified differently than 'big box gyms' which function very differently than their studios (which often do not require equipment, and can be held outdoors, etc.) The Board indicated that some considerations that would be important to include would be limiting class size to the least number of people per class, with no overlap of people from one class to another class (to avoid cross-contamination.) Director Giacalone noted that the recent state guideline specifically notes that earlier openings and special consideration may be given to studios that can operate outdoors.

The Board decided that the local order prohibiting social gatherings of any size will be reconsidered at the next Board meeting that is due to occur prior to the start of the State's Phase 2.

### **Re-Opening of Massachusetts:**

Director Giacalone explained that the state guidelines require that each business must draft and keep on site a written COVID-19 Control Plan, they must train their employees on COVID-19 prevention

strategies and must post signage provided by the state. In addition, there are Control Plan guidelines specific to many types of businesses (i.e. retail, hair salons and barber shops, dog grooming, etc.)

Ginny Eramo, owner of Interlocks Salon addressed the Board and requested guidance on how she will need to respond to staff or customers' notification of a positive COVID-19 test result. The Board informed Ms. Eramo that, as a business owner, her responsibility would be to notify the Health Department if she is made aware of a positive test result from an employee or customer. If necessary, the Health Department would provide her (as the employer) with guidance as to whether further action is necessary on her part. The Health Department, possibly in conjunction with other local Health Department and/or the state Health Department, will issue any isolation or quarantines to the impacted individuals. The Board advised Ms. Eramo that as part of best management practice she should ensure social distance (6') between employee workspaces and should consistently schedule employees to only work alongside the same co-workers to minimize the number of staff persons that would be required to undergo simultaneous 10 day isolation/14 day quarantine. Ms. Eramo raised a concern regarding the motivation that may exist for some businesses to *not* report exposure to positive COVID-19 cases because the required 14 day quarantine would significantly impact a business's workforce. Director Giacalone explained to Ms. Eramo that every COVID-19 case is considered on a case by case basis since there are many factors that are taken into consideration when determining isolation and quarantine requirements.

**Phase I:** Director Giacalone informed the Board that Phase I will allow the following businesses to open on May 18 and May 25 (as specified and with specific limitations): Opening on May 18 - Manufacturing, construction, houses of worship, hospitals and community health centers and certain medical facilities; and on May 25: Lab and life sciences, offices (not Boston-based), hair salons and barber shops, dog grooming, car washes, recreation and outdoor (with guidelines), and retail establishments (remote fulfillment and curbside pick-up only.) Director Giacalone noted that the Health Department does not have a comprehensive list of businesses in the City and nor does the Department permit the majority of City businesses. City and State guidelines indicate that the local health department is *not* responsible for inspecting businesses to ensure compliance with COVID-19 requirements prior to opening; inspections *may* be conducted based upon complaints from the public.

**Recreational Camps:** Director Giacalone informed the Board that the state has not released guidance for recreational camps at this time but it is expected shortly.

The Board decided to continue to meet every two weeks. The next Board of Health Meeting will be held remotely on June 4, 2020 at 7 pm.

**Motion to adjourn** made by Dr. Rob Slocum; seconded by Dr. Merabi. Votes in favor: three; Votes to oppose: 0. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 9:47 pm.