

Newburyport Board of Health Meeting
June 18, 2020
Webinar Meeting Held Remotely due to COVID-19

Date of Approval: 7/2/2020

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 7:13 p.m.

Approval of Minutes: Motion to approve the minutes from the Board of Health Meeting on June 18, by Dr. Sam Merabi and seconded by Dr. Rob Slocum. Votes to approve: 3; Votes to oppose: 0. Motion passed.

High School Graduation – Andrew Wulf, Principal of Newburyport High School

Mr. Wulf presented a slide presentation of the plans for high school graduation that is set to take place on Thursday, July 23 at the school's football field. Parking and walking to and from the field will follow planned paths and will be staggered to maintain social distancing. Attendees will enter through four gates and each group (consisting of a graduate and two guests) will be escorted onto the field to their designated spot within one of the four sections of the field. Graduates and guests will be pre-registered and contact information will be retained for purposes of contact tracing. Graduates have already been presented with their diplomas which further reduces the concern of cross-contamination from hand-to-hand contact, and which has reduced the number of graduates that will be attending the ceremony.

The Board discussed concerns about having such a large group assembled but agreed that the proposed plan incorporated important risk reduction methods including the outdoor setting, social distancing, face coverings for all attendees, and information collection for contact tracing. It was further discussed that the proposed plan complies with the High School Graduation Guidelines issued by the Mass. Department of Public Health to Help Prevent the Spread of COVID-19. At the Board's suggestion, Mr. Wulf agreed that two weeks after the graduation he will arrange for phone calls to be made to every attendee asking whether they have developed any symptoms of, or have tested positive for, COVID-19.

The Board expressed to Mr. Wulf that while the proposed plan meets guidelines and has their tentative approval, the COVID-19 situation is very fluid and the event is subject to change. Mr. Wulf agreed that he will attend the Board meeting prior to the graduation for final confirmation of plans and approval from the Board.

Food Establishments – Director Giacalone: The Board expressed concern that food establishments are not aware or are not complying with the state recommendation that contact tracing information be secured from all restaurant patrons. Director Giacalone stated that he would draft a letter to be sent by email to all food establishments reminding them of the importance of contact tracing. Director Giacalone informed the Board that as establishments have been opening, site visits have been

performed and he has ensured that establishments are complying with protocol for social distancing, use of proper disinfectant, use of face coverings, etc.

Animal Control - Kayla Provencher, Animal Control Officer

Ms. Provencher informed the Board that most surrounding towns have now re-opened their off-leash dog parks. West Newbury has re-opened parks for residents only; and other communities, such as Danvers, have posted signage that the park is to be “used at your own risk.” Ms. Provencher also stated that she has noticed a decline in out-of-state license plates at the City dog parks. She noted that most people have complied with the on-leash restriction, and those who had their dogs off-leash, quickly complied when she advised them of the new requirement. She informed the Board that while she has not received any direct comments concerning the rule that all dogs remain leashed, she has seen comments on social media about resident’s displeasure with the requirement. Ms. Provencher recommended to the Board that the off-leash parks revert to the original rules and allow dogs to be off-leash during designated hours. She stated that if any problems arise, the restriction could be re-instated.

A motion was made by Dr. Slocum; seconded by Dr. Merabi, to rescind the temporary Board of Health Order to require that all dogs be on leash at all off-leash dog parks in the City. Votes to approve: 3; Votes to oppose: 0. Motion passed.

Dr. Slocum questioned whether the Cashman dog park presents a potential danger since it is an unconfined off-leash area adjacent to a child’s playground. Ms. Provencher agreed that the potential for an issue is present and that she has been surprised that she has not been informed of any issues or received complaints related to the proximity of the off-leash park to the play area.

Annunciation Greek Food Festival – Director Giacalone

The Greek Church has requested that they be allowed to hold a modified version of their annual food festival in August. All food will be prepared and cooked indoors at their permitted kitchen. Patrons will order and pay in advance and will drive by to pick up their orders. Director Giacalone noted that the church would be allowed to set up a tent on their property to cook outdoors, if they choose to do so. Included in the Church’s proposal was a request to hold a similar event in October that would allow patrons to walk up to a counter to pick up their take-out meal (rather than drive by.)

The Board expressed that the plan for the food festival submitted by the church seems very reasonable, conservative and cautious. Director Giacalone will notify the church that the event is approved as an extension of their annual food permit.

Farmers’ Market – Director Giacalone

Director Giacalone informed the Board that after much consideration, the Coordinator of the Farmers’ Market, Shari Wilkenson, has determined that the Market will remain closed for the foreseeable future. Ms. Wilkenson had informed the Department that the restrictions placed on farmers’ markets by the State of Mass. caused several of the market vendors to decide not to participate; and there were too few remaining vendors to make the market viable.

Coronavirus Update – Director Giacalone

Director Giacalone anticipates that tomorrow or Saturday the Governor will announce that indoor seating at food establishments will be allowed with restrictions that include (but are not limited to): a six foot distance between each table, parties will be limited to six people, servers must wear face coverings

at all times, patrons must wear face coverings when not seated. Other openings that are anticipated include Day Cares (provided approval has been granted to the establishment by the state.) Swimming pools are open at this time only for supervised youth activities.

COVID-19 Testing – Patricia McAlarney

The current number of cumulative positive COVID-19 cases in the City is 95, there are currently 24 active cases and six COVID-19 related deaths. There is a cluster of positive cases at a long-term care facility. Several of the individuals at the facility have now recovered, and some residents that tested positive remained asymptomatic. Two patients required hospitalization and there were two COVID-related deaths. Director Giacalone informed the Board that the state is offering testing for anyone who has attended at large gathering.

Other Matters – Director Giacalone

Director Giacalone informed the Board that Dunkin Donuts on Storey Ave. suffered an electrical fire earlier in the day.

Meetings: The Board decided to continue to meet every two weeks. The next Board of Health Meeting will be held remotely on July 2, 2020 at 7 pm.

Motion to adjourn made by Dr. Slocum; seconded by Dr. Merabi. Votes in favor: three; Votes to oppose: 0. Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 8:23 pm.