

Newburyport Board of Health Meeting
June 4, 2020
Webinar Meeting Held Remotely due to COVID-19

Date of Approval: 6/18/2020

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 May 21, 2020 by Dr. Sam Merabi and seconded by Dr. Rob Slocum. Votes to approve: 3; Votes to oppose: 0. Motion passed.

COVID-19 Update – Director Giacalone

Reopening of Massachusetts: The Governor is expected to announce that Phase 2 will begin on Monday, June 8, 2020. Guidelines are being distributed by the state for restaurants (for outdoor seating initially and, later in Phase 2, for indoor seating), lodging, parks and some organized recreation programs, day care settings, and summer camps. The Health Department has been sending guidance documents to establishments in preparation for their re-opening. Restaurants that were approved for outside seating prior to COVID-19 will be able to open for outdoor seating as soon as it is allowed by the state (providing they have complied with all guidance such as social and physical distancing.)

COVID-19 Tracing: Surveillance tracing of individuals who have tested positive or who are contacts of infected individuals is being performed by Health Department Staff Patti McAlarney & Pam Palombo and by the state run Community Tracing Collaborative (CTC.) An outbreak has been reported at Atria Healthcare with nine residents and three staff members testing positive for COVID-19. Two residents who had tested positive for COVID-19 were reported to have passed away.

Social Gatherings: The Board discussed the necessity of revising the current ban on social gatherings to instead align the local order with the state guidelines.

Motion: Dr. Merabi made a motion to revise the local order on social gatherings to be in compliance with state guidelines for social gatherings. Seconded by Dr. Slocum. Votes to approve: 3; votes to oppose: 0. Motion passed.

Farmers' Market – Shari Wilkinson

Due to concerns and state guidelines related to COVID-19, Ms. Wilkinson proposed that the Farmers' Market resume as a drive-through market. Orders would be pre-ordered and paid for online. Customers would remain in their vehicle and Farmers' Market staff would place their orders in the car. The number of vendors would be greatly reduced from the usual number of vendors at the Newburyport markets. State guidelines contained numerous limitations that are all adhered to in the proposal. Director Giacalone stated that he would be reaching out to the City Marshall to advise him of the traffic situation associated with the Market.

The Board suggested that Shari conduct the market as proposed and report back to them after one or two markets have taken place to report on the success or challenges of the markets. The Board indicated that it might be possible for the restrictions to be lessened depending on what happens within the community related to COVID-19 cases/spread and how social distancing would be maintained at the markets.

Phase 2 Re-Opening

Director Giacalone reported that retail stores which are currently restricted to curbside pick up, will be allowed to open but with a restricted capacity of 40% of their maximum occupancy or a specific number of persons per 1000 square feet of space. Restaurants will be required to space tables 6 feet apart or install physical barriers, and the maximum size of any party will be six persons. Youth sports will be limited to non-contact, practice drills, no official games will be allowed at this time. Other businesses that will be opening in Phase 2 include personal service (massage, nail salons), pools and recreational camps.

The Board expressed concern with contact tracing of confirmed positives, specifically noting the challenge of 'super-spreaders' who are individuals that can potentially infect a significantly higher number of people than is typical. As the economy opens up, it will be of the utmost importance to quickly identify and stop the train of spread from confirmed cases. An important component will be the development of readily available, increasingly accurate tests for the general public.

Greek Church: Director Giacalone informed the Board that the Greek Church has submitted a proposal for an event which would be held in August that features pre-ordered and pre-paid dinners that would be given to customers as they drive-by the Church's Harris Street location (without vacating their vehicles.) The church plans to hold the event over a two day period and anticipates approximately 500 meals to be sold. The Board said that the concept seemed plausible but asked that the item be placed on the agenda for the next meeting for discussion and final decision.

High School Graduation: Director Giacalone informed the Board that High School Principal has asked for the graduation ceremony to be placed on the agenda for the next Board meeting.

Off-Leash Areas: The Board requested that the Animal Control Officer, Kayla Provencher, attend the next meeting to report to them the situation at the Newburyport dog parks and provide them with a listing of which other communities currently offer (or have closed their) off-leash dog parks; along with her recommendation as to whether the ban of Off-Leash times/areas should be lifted in Newburyport.

Public Comment:

Pioneer League – Youth Sports – The Pioneer League had previously submitted a letter to the Board outlining their plan to re-open youth baseball in their league. The Board determined that the plan appeared to appropriately address COVID-19 concerns (social distancing etc.) but also noted that actual games are not slated to be allowed until Phase 3. The Board further advised Steve McConnel, President of the Pioneer League, that it is important for the league to have a means of contact tracing if anyone in attendance at games (or practice) develops symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19. This is of particular concern when games are played against other towns and with visitors from different communities. The Board invited Mr. McConnel to attend upcoming meetings to further evaluate their plans for holding the games.

Resident, Tish Malloy, submitted a comment through Zoom commending the League for creating a well thought out plan that would allow the children to play while still adhering to COVID-19 safety guidelines. She stated that if Newburyport does not allow this organized sport option players may decide to go to other communities which may pose other (health) threats to the community.

Steve McConnel, President of the Pioneer League, referred to the letter that had been sent to the Board (see attached) outlining the League's plan to adhere to the state and local guidelines related to organized youth sports. He also informed the Board that at each game there will be an individual who will be specifically watching to be sure that all COVID-19 safety guidelines are being followed.

Economic Recovery and Revitalization Task Force - Mayor Holaday provided an update from the Steering Committee, specifically with regard to the work of the restaurant group which is gearing up for a License Commission review next week. The restaurant group has received detailed guidelines from the Mass. Restaurant Association and are working toward compliance (with regard to staff training, personal protective equipment, social distancing, etc.) Limited space in the downtown area remains a challenge for provision of outdoor dining. Mayor Holaday stated that she hopes that the City Council will vote on a plan to develop a subcommittee to review the outside plans.

Next week restaurants that are able to expand outside seating with social distancing protocol on their own property are allowed to submit proposals to open for outdoor dining. These establishments include Starboard Galley, Brick and Ash, Sea Level, The Pointe, Park Lunch, Giuseppe's and Michael's. All decisions depend on the Governor's final decision about the starting of Phase 2. The next group that will go before the City Council Subcommittee and/or Parks (and then to the Licensing Commission) will be those restaurants that want to expand outdoor seating in public areas in the downtown area. Each establishment must submit plans for approval. Legal counsel and the Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission (ABC) has advised that current regulation states that alcohol may be served by an establishment as long as it is within *eyesight of the establishment* (previous regulation required it had to be contiguous with the establishment.) The Mayor stated that through the Cares Act she is hoping that funds will be available to put toward personal protective equipment (PPEs), such as masks, for restaurants. Mayor Holaday noted that restaurants are the backbone of the economy downtown and that as a means of supporting the local economy and local restaurateurs, the City is planning two events that will be held in the downtown area on a portion of State Street that will be closed to allow for additional outdoor seating at restaurants. Mayor Holaday emphasized that it is critical that anyone dining or shopping in Newburyport be confident that all safety considerations are firmly in place.

Reopening of the City and a return of people to the downtown area present concerns related to the availability, sanitation and social distancing at public restrooms. Mayor Holaday informed the Board that the bathrooms at the Chamber Information Booth would be closed and replaced with portable bathrooms that are cleaned daily and replaced weekly. There are also single stall public bathrooms at the Harbormaster Office and at the parking garage. Restaurants that offer outdoor dining will also be required to have restrooms available for patrons.

The Board expressed appreciation for the hard work being done by the Mayor and the City relative noted their concerns in holding 'July 4th-type celebration' that would make social distancing a challenge and suggested that smaller events over a longer period of time may be a safer option than larger-scale 'weekend' events. Mayor Holaday acknowledged these concerns and emphasized that public safety is of

the utmost concern during the planning process. City Councilor, Joseph Devlin, reiterated Mayor Holaday's comments and stated that City Council is taking social distancing concerns into account. The current plan is to hold one of the events (possibly 4 – 11 pm on a Thursday through Friday or Saturday), then allow for a review of the event at a Council meeting to determine whether any changes need to be implemented before holding the second event. Only a portion of State Street is expected to be used for the event and there will be a police presence. Mayor Holaday explained that the reason for closing only for the three evenings and for the location of the event is that it will not impact retailers (because the event is after hours) and the location allows traffic from Essex Street to Pleasant Street.

The Board decided to continue to meet every two weeks. The next Board of Health Meeting will be held remotely on June 18, 2020 at 7 pm.

Motion to adjourn made by Dr. Sam Merabi; seconded by Dr. Rob Slocum. Votes in favor: three; Votes to oppose: 0. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 9:38 pm.