

Ashland Board of Health
Meeting Minutes
January 4, 2022
ZOOM Meeting

Ronald Etskovitz, Chair
Diane Mortensen, Vice Chair
Rajit Gupta, Health Agent/Director

Barbra Sekesogundu Simon, Clerk
John Byrnes, Member
Bernadette Lunkuse, Member

Members Present Via Zoom Meeting:

Ron Etskovitz, Diane Mortensen, Barbra Sekesogundu Simon, Jay Byrnes and Bernadette Lunkuse

Others Present:

Rajit Gupta, Health Agent/Director
Laura Clifford, BOH Admin. Assistant
Sergeant Ed Burman, Ashland P.D.
Mark Dassoni, Resident
Dona Walsh, Animal Inspector
Steve Morgan, Resident

Call Meeting to Order, 6:00 P.M.

Mr. Etskovitz called the meeting to order at 6:08 PM, and announced that the meeting was being recorded.

Citizens Participation

Mark Dassoni, resident, thanked Mr. Gupta for contacting him regarding a booster shot for himself and his father and thanked Sgt. Burman for coming out. Mr. Dassoni noted that he saw the MBTA Station / Testing Site on the news this morning, it was reported on the news that the testing site was being well run.

COVID-19 Update

Sergeant Burman discussed the Reverse 9-1-1 calls that were sent out in the past couple of weeks; this was due to the number of cases we are seeing, even higher than at the beginning of the pandemic. Last week there were 274 open cases; Sgt. Burman noted there is some confusion with the new CDC guidelines that they are working out. The testing site has transitioned to 'by appointment only', which has reduced traffic issues significantly. The hours were also changed due to commuters having trouble getting to their trains. Sgt. Burman noted that with the higher volume of cases, calling each COVID-positive person was not feasible; he noted they have transitioned to a letter/ mailing system which includes isolation and quarantine guidance. Sgt. Burman stated they see higher number of cases of unvaccinated/non-boosted individuals. The testing site was testing 800-1000 people per day prior to Thanksgiving. Sgt. Burman noted that there does not seem to be any spike in the older population.

Ms. Mortensen noted that they are receiving an abundance of calls from all over the State, looking for a testing location; it is concerning that there are so many people who cannot get tested. The next available date for testing in Ashland was 9 days out. Ms. Sekesogundu Simon inquired as to free self-test/at home test kits distributed by the State. Sgt. Burman noted that Ashland did not

qualify under that Program. Sgt. Burman explained that the self-tests are done at home, and the results do not need to be reported; Mr. Gupta noted this can do more damage than good when people do not receive proper follow-up information.

Review of Mask Policy

Ms. Mortensen noted that based on the high volume of calls they are already receiving on the COVID hotline, she expressed concern that they may be inundated if a mask mandate is put in place. Ms. Mortensen would like to see more education; she noted that the situation is constantly evolving, and given the lack of testing available everyone should take all the necessary precautions as if they are positive. Sgt. Burman also expressed concern regarding enforcement; Ms. Mortensen agreed this is an issue. Mr. Gupta noted we will push more information through the webpages and social media; Ms. Mortensen stated the Reverse 9-1-1 calls are good for the older population who may not use social media, to emphasize that we are at the height and tests are limited, to take precautions to protect yourself.

Ms. Mortensen inquired as to Sgt. Burman and Mr. Gupta's recommendation pertaining to the mask mandate; Sgt. Burman noted that we do not have the resources to be responding to phone calls reporting that someone is without a mask. Mr. Gupta agreed, he would prefer to see resources put into education, contact tracing and vaccine clinics.

Mr. Etskovitz noted his feelings are mixed; he noted that you are not allowed entry into any hospital without a mask, in the hospital setting a mask must be worn at all times. Mr. Etskovitz noted that he has not found any scientific or medical literature that does not espouse the use of some type of mask covering to reduce the risk, there is no doubt that masks decrease the spread. Mr. Byrnes asked what is the downside to putting a mask mandate in place and not enforcing it, if it gets more people to wear a mask.

Ms. Mortensen stated that after all this time most people know what to do; she noted that she personally is not in favor of a mandate, however, she would support her Board Members if they agree otherwise. Sgt. Burman discussed the volume of calls we received when the Governor issued the Statewide mandate, we were inundated with complaints. Sgt. Burman discussed the amount of time it took to respond and write a report, multiple times per day, to each complaint of an unmasked customer at various businesses.

Mr. Gupta noted that as a public health professional he would love to see a mandate, however, he explained, if there is a mandate in place, it must be enforced. Mr. Gupta discussed the challenges he encountered enforcing the mask mandate when he was working in another community. Ms. Mortensen suggested that we strongly advise all of the businesses to require the wearing of a mask in their facility, to protect themselves as well as the employees.

Mr. Etskovitz noted this was a good conversation and ultimately he would defer to the people who are fielding the complaints and phone calls, such as Sgt. Burman, Mr. Gupta and Ms. Mortensen; he noted he did not see any employees in Market Basket or Shaw's without a mask. Mr. Byrnes agreed he would also defer to those fielding the calls, and noted a strongly worded advisory to the businesses may be a good compromise. Ms. Lunkuse and Ms. Sekesogundu Simon also agreed that this is a good compromise. Board Members agreed they will all be at the Select Board meeting tomorrow night for further discussion on this matter.

Ashland Board of Health Keeping of Animals Regulation, Vote to Adopt

Ms. Mortensen noted that she had reviewed the suggested changes in the email from the resident as discussed during the last meeting, she did not find that the issues raised in the email warranted changes to the Regulations. Ms. Mortensen noted that she wanted to make sure we had a full Board to adopt the new Keeping of Animal Regulations.

Motion: Ms. Mortensen made a motion to adopt the Town of Ashland Board of Health Rules and Regulations, Relative to the Exhibition, Housing, Maintaining and Keeping of Animals, dated January 4, 2022. Mr. Byrnes seconded the motion.

Vote: 5-0. Motion is approved.

Ms. Mortensen noted this can be posted on the website and can become effective February 1, 2022.

Motion: Ms. Mortensen made a motion that the Regulations become effective February 1, 2022. Ms. Lunkuse seconded the motion.

Vote: 5-0. Motion is approved.

Consent Agenda:

- Review and Approve Meeting Minutes: November 16, 2021
- Review Year-to-Date Budget Report, FY2022

Motion: Ms. Lunkuse made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Ms. Mortensen seconded the motion.

Vote: 4-0-1. Motion is approved. (Ms. Sekesogundu Simon abstained as she was not present at this meeting.)

Health Director's Agenda

- **Board of Health Grants, Update**

Mr. Gupta discussed the Metrowest Health Foundation Grant, a \$50,000 grant for contact tracing and clinics. This would be available in early February; this would be the fourth grant through the collaboration. The Public Health Excellence Grant has already been granted for \$300,000 for 3 years; Contact Tracing Grant is \$200,000 for the next 2 years; both are through the Collaboration. Through the Collaboration, we had a nursing professional and the coordinator attend the last vaccine clinic.

- **Bellview Heights and Concord Road, Educational Flyer Mailed**

Mr. Gupta noted that we have not received any additional complaints; the informational flyer was sent out regarding the controlling of rodents in neighborhoods.

- **Market Basket Complaints-Physical contamination in packed foods**

Mr. Gupta explained that we received two complaints pertaining to Market Basket, one was regarding a piece of plastic wrap in the prosciutto; another complaint was regarding a small metal piece in the meat. Market Basket has corrected any issues and assured us that they will take care of this; we are keeping an eye on this.

- **Restaurant Updates**

Mr. Gupta noted that we had two restaurants with campylobacter foodborne illness, both have been investigated and resolved.

- **Permit Updates**

December 31st was the final day to submit permits; two establishments have not been granted permits and are currently not operating. One is Honey Dew on Pond Street, the other is Kidde Fenwal. Both have now submitted applications and are in the process of completing their applications. Both will be paying a \$50 late fee. We are still waiting on some Animal Permit applications.

Discuss Agenda Topics for Future Meetings

Next meeting date will be January 18, 2022. Mr. Byrnes discussed an organization he has had some involvement with that he would like to put on the next agenda. It is called Remote Area Medical, based in Tennessee, and involves pop-up medical clinics. He is looking in to seeing if this is something that could be brought to Metrowest, but takes many months of planning. The purpose is to set up clinics for vision, dental and some medical clinics, operating mainly on weekends. It is a big undertaking, but could be beneficial in this area. Mr. Byrnes would like to ascertain whether this may be feasible. This will be an ongoing agenda item.

Steve Morgan noted he missed Citizens Participation at the beginning of the meeting, and asked if he may have a few moments. Mr. Morgan discussed the Noise Bylaw that the Town was involved with a few years back, and noted Noise Meters purchased for the Police Department. Mr. Morgan discussed the rock breaking that is occurring at the Mindess School Project, they have hauled the boulders to other side of the property where they are broken up. Mr. Morgan expressed concern that the noise may be violating the OSHA levels; he was told this would be reviewed by Town Counsel. Mr. Morgan noted the project has been starting at 6:00-6:30 AM, and was told they are exempt from the 7:00 AM start work time. Mr. Morgan would like to see the meter used to measure the noise level.

Adjournment

Motion: Ms. Mortensen made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Sekesogundu Simon seconded the motion.

Vote: 5-0. Motion is approved.

The meeting adjourned at 7: 29 PM.

ASHLAND BOARD OF HEALTH

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED AT THE 1/4/2022 MEETING

(All items stored in the Board of Health files unless otherwise noted)

1. COVID-19 Confirmed and Probable Cases – Charts
2. Keeping of Animal Rules and Regulations
3. Draft Minutes, November 16, 2021
4. YTD Budget Report
5. A recording of the meeting is available at WACATV.com