

Ashland Board of Health  
Meeting Minutes  
January 5, 2022  
ZOOM Meeting  
(During the Ashland Select Board 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

Sgt. Ed Burman, Ashland Police Department

Michael Herbert, Town Manager

Jenn Ball, Assistant Town Manager

Select Board Members: Joe, Magnani, Brandi Kinsman, Rob Scherer, Yolanda Greaves, Steven Mitchell

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

Joe Magnani, Chair of the Select Board, invited the Board of Health to join the conversation regarding a mask mandate. Board of Health Chair, Ron Etskovitz, called the Board of Health meeting to order at 7:41 PM.

**Joint Discussion with the Select Board regarding Mask Mandate**

Mr. Magnani explained that Michael had announced that the Town Buildings will be changing to business by appointment only, effective Monday January 10, 2022. He announced that both Boards need to discuss a mask mandate. Mr. Magnani stated that he really doesn't feel we should worry about how to enforce a mandate, that a mandate would show support for the businesses.

Mr. Etskovitz mentioned that the Board of Health had a discussion about this last night and it seemed that Members felt that education might be the best route. Mr. Etskovitz stated that both Sergeant Burman and Mr. Gupta thought that with limited resources, trying to respond to non-compliance of the mandate may not be the best use of the resources we have. Collectively, they felt urging businesses to post signs recommending masks may be a better option.

Mr. Scherer asked whose jurisdiction the mask requirement falls under. Mr. Etskovitz explained he believes this falls on the Board of Health, however, in the past the Board of Health delegated authority to Mr. Herbert, as the Town Manager to make required decisions in a timely manner. Mr. Etskovitz mentioned that Mr. Gupta had shared some enforcement issues he had in the past with mandates and isn't recommending this based on those facts. Mr. Herbert reminded everyone that back in 2020 there was a joint meeting with the Board of Health and the Select Board to discuss how to proceed with the pandemic. At that time the Boards joined forces and delivered a joint message and he feel this decision should be made jointly as well.

Mr. Mitchell shared that he is not a fan of mandates and understands that 1 out of every 3 is not vaccinated and feels that we should be encouraging businesses to require masks. Ms. Kinsman feels that a mask mandate is a burden but would like to provide the businesses a flyer with a strongly worded message. Ms. Greaves would also support a strongly worded advisory but would not go as far as a mandate. Mr. Magnani said that in the past months he has noticed that many businesses have been proactive and he encourages others to do the same. Ms. Sekesogundu-Simon also recommended a strongly worded flyer telling everyone to wear a mask. Everyone understands that business owners need to protect their staff members so requiring masks would assist. Additionally, Members felt that staff should be wearing masks to protect themselves as well.

Mr. Scherer shared that he is sorry to hear that people are not supporting a mask mandate. He feels that businesses should know that they are being supported by the Town by requiring masks. He feels an advisory is not really addressing the problem. He said he would like to follow the lead of places like Boston where they require a vaccine card. He would like everyone to reconsider this and require a mask mandate.

Mr. Magnani suggested working with Mr. Etskovitz on a joint letter that would be distributed to businesses asking them to post a strongly worded advisory urging their patrons to wear a mask.

Mr. Gupta stated, as a Public Health Professional, he would support a mandate but the challenges with resources means it couldn't be enforced. He said that he spoke to his counterparts where they have mandates and they said they don't get anything done except mask enforcement. This creates another problem because the inspections are not getting done. Mr. Gupta also shared that when he was involved with enforcement at his prior job and it went to court it was overturned so they found it was not worth the effort.

Ms. Mortensen also recommended doing a reverse 9-1-1 reminding everyone that hand washing and face coverings will help to stop the spread.

Mr. Mitchell wants to be sure that the communication is a joint statement.

Ms. Mortensen stated that she would suggest in order to expedite that process that the Boards ask Mr. Herbert to work with Sergeant Burman and Mr. Gupta to create the joint letter. Ms. Kinsman explained that she would like this communication to include a flyer that could be printed out by the businesses to make it easier for them to post on their doors.

**Motion:** Ms. Mortensen made a motion on behalf of the Board of Health, recommending that Mr. Herbert work with Sgt. Burman and Mr. Gupta to create a joint letter which will include a flyer and the quarantine guidelines. This motion was seconded by Sekesogundu-Simon.

**Vote:** Lunkuse-aye, Mortensen-aye, Byrnes-aye and Sekesogundu-aye and Etskovitz-aye 5-0-0.

**Motion:** Ms. Greaves made a motion on behalf of the Select Board recommending that Mr. Herbert work with Sgt. Burman and Mr. Gupta to create a joint letter which will include a flyer and the quarantine guidelines. This motion was seconded by Ms. Kinsman.

**Vote:** Greaves-aye, Kinsman-aye, Mitchell-aye, Scherer-aye and Magnani-aye; 5-0-0.

### **Adjournment**

**Motion:** Ms. Mortensen made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Lunkuse seconded the motion.

**Vote:** 5-0. Motion approved.

The meeting adjourned at 8:12 PM.

ASHLAND BOARD OF HEALTH  
DOCUMENTS REVIEWED AT THE 1/5/2022 MEETING  
(All items stored in the Board of Health files unless otherwise noted)

1. A recording of the meeting is available at [WACATV.com](http://WACATV.com)