

Ashland Board of Health
Meeting Minutes
March 1, 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
Jim Adams, Ashland Superintendent of Schools
Kristin French, Decisions at Every Turn

Call Meeting to Order, 6:02 P.M.

Mr. Etskovitz called the meeting to order at 6:04 P.M.

Citizens' Participation

Mark Dassoni, resident, inquired as to elderly services available for residents to receive medical care in town. Mr. Etskovitz noted that it is a big undertaking to build and staff a medical office building. Ms. Mortensen suggested he contact the Ashland Council on Aging.

COVID-19 Update

Sergeant Burman noted that the COVID cases are trending down. Over the weekend we received four cases. Sergeant Burman noted that he is still seeing cases of younger children in the daycares.

Jim Adams, Superintendent, Ashland Public Schools, Update on Mask Requirement in Schools

Jim Adams discussed the Ashland School's updated mask policy, he noted that the Department of Education issued a statement that the mask mandate is no longer in effect as of yesterday (February 28, 2022). Because this is a local decision, the School Committee voted two weeks ago to allow for optional face covering starting Monday, March 7, 2022. Mr. Adams explained that School Nurses suggested waiting the extra week to see if there was a surge following the February vacation week. Mr. Adams noted that 25% of the students are utilizing at-home rapid testing, as well as 60-70% of the staff. Any positive cases that were identified in school are recorded in the MAVEN System, at-home positive cases are reported to the Department of Education. Mr. Adams noted that many of the surrounding towns had removed the mask mandate policy as of yesterday, others will also start next week, while some have not yet voted. Since coming back from the February vacation week, there has been a total of 5 cases reported to them, these were taken by an at-home test. Mr. Adams reported that from an air quality standpoint in the buildings, they are in a good position. Mr. Adams estimated approximately 30% of their students have contracted COVID, fortunately they did not see any severe sickness.

Ms. Sekesogundu Simon inquired as to whether students are social distancing; Mr. Adams explained that they were never able to allow for 6-foot distancing due to the space, and because there are 140 additional students this year; he noted that in larger areas, such as the cafeteria, it will be a gradual transition.

Mr. Adams noted that it is a personal decision as to whether staff and students continue to wear masks, he believes it will be a gradual progression.

Mr. Gupta thanked Mr. Adams for the update.

Kristin French, Decisions at Every Turn, Project Director, Director of Prevention Outreach, Update

Mr. Etskovitz noted that Kristin French does a wonderful job heading up the Town's Decisions at Every Turn (DAET) coalition, and as Director of Prevention Outreach. Mr. Etskovitz explained that DAET was the second recipient of the Mary Mortensen Public Health Award; Mr. Etskovitz asked Ms. French to describe what they do as a coalition, for the newer Board of Health Members.

Kristin French explained that she has been with DAET since 2014, and as Director since 2017. DAET is a drug-free community coalition, working with community partners to prevent substance abuse here in Ashland. Ms. French reviewed the five core areas that they focus on, which include: data collection, capacity building, social media, programming and outreach. The data they receive from the Ashland Adolescent Health Survey has been used for the core work that they do; she is grateful that the information is shared with them by the School Superintendent.

Ms. French discussed Kindness Week and Kindness stickers, which she explained can be a source of prevention; when kids know there are kind people in their lives, they will feel supported and have coping skills when they have challenges. They will hopefully turn to the people in their lives, rather than substances. Ms. French explained that there are six youth social media campaigns with a lot of great information. April 12, 2022 is their next coalition meeting; they will be reviewing the information from the Parent Surveys; Ms. French hopes that anyone who is able to, will attend.

Mr. Etskovitz inquired as to the survey, whether the numbers are going up, and which substance is the most widely used by teens. Ms. French noted that the substance of choice these days seems to be vaping; mental health seems to be a root cause of vaping for students. Ms. French believes that last year the numbers may have been slightly lower due to decreased access to substances with people not going out. But what we see as we emerge out from the pandemic, remains to be seen.

Ms. Lunkuse inquired as to the reason why vaping may be more widely used; Ms. French noted that ease of access to vaping products, and the perception that it is not as dangerous, may be the reasons why it is more widely used.

Mr. Etskovitz recognized what a great service DAET coalition offers to the Town; he stated that even if it were to keep a few kids off of a substance, or prevent them from smoking, it's a very good thing, and we appreciate it.

May Town Election

Ms. Mortensen announced that she will not be seeking reelection at the end of her term in May. Ms. Mortensen noted she has been involved in the Health Department for over 31 years, she is planning to focus on personal matters for the time being.

Ms. Mortensen noted that Mr. Byrnes has pulled papers for the 3-year position, leaving open another 2-year spot. People may contact the Town Clerk's Office for further information if they are interested.

Mr. Etskovitz thanked Ms. Mortensen for all of her service, he noted that she has been a valuable Member of the Board. Her knowledge and information will be missed. Ms. Mortensen noted she will plan to volunteer and will still be around to help out. KG Narayana thanked Ms. Mortensen for her service, he appreciates all of her ideas and solutions she has given that have helped to improve the Board of Health. Mr. Narayana noted that he has officially moved back into town and is interested in coming back onto the Board of Health.

Consent Agenda:

- Review and Approve Meeting Minutes: February 1, 2022, February 15, 2022
- Review Year-to-Date Budget Reports, FY2022

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

Vote: 5-0. The motion was approved.

Member, John Byrnes' agenda:

- Remote Area Medical (RAM) Clinic
Mr. Byrnes informed the Board that he received an email from RAM informing him that they have set up a phone call for this Friday, this is a good sign and means they are interested in talking to us. In two weeks he will have another update. Mr. Etskovitz thanked Mr. Byrnes for his work.

Health Director's Agenda:

- Board of Health Grants, Update
Mr. Gupta explained we have three grants with MetroWest Shared Services, as well as two of our own. Our grants are related to food and foodborne illnesses. The Shared Services grants are for things like COVID, and for the community. The collaboration currently consists of a director, two epidemiologists, one full-time public health nurses; a part-time public health nurse will be starting soon. There is a communications specialist, a community health worker, and possibly another part-time nurse. They have been very helpful so far.
- Childhood Vaccine Program, Update
Mr. Gupta reported that DPH did a walk-through at Town Hall, Ms. Mortensen and Sgt. Burman were both present for this. We should be able to order vaccine soon and will then start to have clinics. Mr. Gupta is pleased with the progress thus far.
- Blood Pressure Clinic, Ashland Community Center
Mr. Gupta explained that we will be starting blood pressure clinics on Wednesday mornings at the Community Center, this will be conducted through the Shared Services Grant utilizing the public health nurse.
- Housing Code Violations, Update
Mr. Gupta reported there have been a few housing code cases, including two leased residences which had no hot water, as well as other violations.

Mr. Etskovitz inquired about the childhood vaccine clinic program, how it will be rolled out. Mr. Gupta noted that someone came into the office last week looking for a vaccine for their child who needed the vaccines to start school. He was able to coordinate with Southborough to get the necessary vaccines. But is glad that soon this will be something we will be able to handle here in Ashland, for the eight communities in the collaboration. We will start off slow,

but once we are ready we will put the information out on social media and through the school nurses.

Ms. Sekesogundu Simon inquired as to which age groups the vaccines are geared for, whether they are for younger children who need them to enter school, or for students of all ages. Mr. Gupta noted that there are kids who will be entering school who are uninsured, this will be the focus; but it may progress to TB testing and other vaccines as well. There are also certain requirements through the State that will need to be followed. Ms. Sekesogundu Simon thanked everyone for their work in making this happen. Mr. Gupta recognized Ms. Mortensen who had worked toward a vaccine program for a long time, he thanked her for her service to the Town and the community.

Sgt. Burman announced that he will be leaving his position with the Ashland Police Department and has accepted an opportunity with a police department in another community. Sgt. Burman noted he will be around and is available to help. Board Members congratulated Sgt. Burman in his new job and thanked him for all of his work throughout the pandemic. Ms. Mortensen noted we had two recipients of the Mary Mortensen Public Health Award on our meeting tonight, Sergeant Burman and Decisions at Every Turn. Ms. Mortensen noted it has been a long two years, and we appreciate all that Sgt. Burman has done.

Discuss Agenda Topics for Future Meetings

Mary Mortensen Public Health Award

Adjournment

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

Vote: 5-0. The motion was approved.

The meeting adjourned at 7:06 PM.

ASHLAND BOARD OF HEALTH
DOCUMENTS REVIEWED AT THE 3/1/2022 MEETING
(All items stored in the Board of Health files unless otherwise noted)

1. COVID-19 Confirmed and Probable Cases – Charts
2. February 1, 2022, February 15, 2022, Draft Meeting Minutes
3. YTD Budget Report, YTD Revolving Budget Report
4. A recording of the meeting is available at WACATV.com