

JOHANNA RAVENHURST, Chair
TONY JUDGE, Vice-Chair
KAREN WALSH PIO, LICSW, LADC 1, Clerk
JESSICA COLLINS
CHRISTINE MCKIERNAN, MD

SHARON D. HART, Public Health Director

Board of Health Minutes

January 25, 2022

As Approved March 1, 2022

Present: Johanna Ravenhurst, Chair; Tony Judge, Vice Chair; Karen Walsh Pio, Clerk; Jessica Collins, Board of Health Member; Dr. Christine McKiernan, Board of Health Member; Sharon Hart, Public Health Director; Jennifer Jernigan, Assistant Public Health Director; Monasia Ceasar, Health Compliance Specialist

The Board of Health Meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chair Ravenhurst.

1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the December 14, 2021, meeting and December 21, 2021 Public Hearing:

Chair Ravenhurst introduced the minutes from the 12/14/21 meeting and questioned if there were any changes to be made. No revisions were brought forth. Chair Ravenhurst mentioned she would accept a motion to approve the minutes from the 12/14/21 meeting. Dr. McKiernan made the motion and Walsh Pio seconded it. A rollcall was taken.

Dr. Christine McKiernan: Aye
Karen Walsh Pio: Aye
Tony Judge: Aye
Jessica Collins: Aye
Johanna Ravenhurst: Aye

Chair Ravenhurst introduced the minutes from the 12/21/21 public hearing and questioned if there were any revisions to be made. No changes were presented. Chair Ravenhurst mentioned she would accept a motion to approve the minutes from the 12/21/21 public hearing. Dr. McKiernan made the motion and Walsh Pio seconded it. A rollcall was taken.

Tony Judge: Aye
Dr. Christine McKiernan: Aye
Karen Walsh Pio: Aye
Jessica Collins: Aye
Johanna Ravenhurst: Aye

2. Announcements and Open Forum:

Chair Ravenhurst provided guidelines for Board members interested in distributing supplemental documents amongst the Board to be reviewed in preparation for an upcoming meeting. Moving forward, Board members must submit any attachments ten days prior to a meeting. This is in hopes of having the agenda and the corresponding documents available at the same time. If received after, the documents will be shared verbatim during the meeting.

Chair Ravenhurst verified there were no memos left in the open forum. She noted there were attendees present at the meeting and asked if they had any announcements to bring forth to the Board. No additional announcements or comments were presented.

3. New Business:

(A) COVID-19 Update

Chair Ravenhurst introduced Director Hart to provide the COVID-19 update. Director Hart shared there were 152 new cases this week with a total of 193 active cases in Town. She worked with the Director of Council of Aging and identified that 25 out of the 152 were over the age of 62. Hart noted that 13 out of the 152 reported cases were for those under the age of 5 years old. Director Hart was notified by the Infection Control Department at Holyoke Medical Center about an additional death.

Director Hart noted that cases numbers were 224 and around 240 cases in previous weeks. The case numbers are on a downward trend similar to last year's case numbers. If following the same curve, there should be a significant decrease in the beginning of February.

Director Hart summarized the new DPH COVID testing option for school Districts. If School Districts choose to elect symptomatic and or pool testing, participants can discontinue contact tracing and the Test and Stay program. Participating School Districts will be provided with rapid antigen tests for staff and students. Hart received confirmation from Mary Walsh that the District is interested in participating in the new testing program.

Director Hart shared that the DPH is moving away from contact tracing. The surveillance systems will be looking to focus on severe outcomes, prevention measures, and vulnerable populations. The extensive case number information will gradually stop. The capturing of every case will end as the Department transitions to establish systems that monitor trends, emergence of new variances, and identification of cases in vulnerable settings.

Director Hart clarified that data availability has already started to decrease as the use of the rapid antigen tests increase. The test results from the antigen tests are not reported, the Department only receives case information from PCR tests. Hart shared that she is currently focusing on those under the age of 5 and those amongst the vulnerable population for contact tracing.

Director Hart announced she was awarded a 300,000-dollar Public Excellence grant. The grant will fund two nurses and a grant coordinator to be shared amongst Holyoke, Chicopee, and South Hadley. She recently met with the other two Health Directors and brainstormed potential areas of interest. The group proposed school-based programs that would potentially focus on youth obesity and substance abuse.

Each Town has an opioid/ substance abuse advocacy group that could be partnered with to increase outreach efforts. Currently, the Health Department has been focused on executing daily tasks and mitigating COVID and has not had the opportunity to do additional programming. This grant will provide the opportunity to execute additional initiatives and programming.

Director Hart shared that the grant is currently renewable for 3 years with the potential of being extended further. The Town will get a host fee between 40 to 45 thousand dollars a year. Hart highlighted the importance of the regional partnership as there is speculation that future funding will be distributed to regional groups. Chair Ravenhurst expressed her excitement about the collaborative as the state seems to be moving in the direction of supporting and encouraging regional collaboratives.

(B) Mask Mandate- discussion of article and COVID-19 (Christine)

Chair Ravenhurst introduced analyzing the COVID metrics to review the mask mandate as the next topic. Dr. McKiernan shared the importance of setting definitive standards when considering the lifting of the existing mask mandate. Dr. McKiernan referred to an article from the CDC that summarized metrics used when prevention strategies have been increased to address an increase in community transmission. The following items should be considered: new cases per 100,000, percent positivity, health system capacity, vaccination coverage, and the ability to detect an increase in cases.

Dr. McKiernan presented the DPH data that reflected recent COVID activity in the area. She mentioned the data for both South Hadley and Hampshire County as there are several bordering towns who share access to amenities. Based upon the DPH metrics, South Hadley had 217 cases per 100,000 residents while Hampshire County had 209 cases per 100,000 residents. Both of which exceed the threshold set by the CDC for the greatest risk category, which is 100 cases per 100,00 residents. The percent positivity rates for South Hadley was 12.8 %, while Hampshire County had 11.67%. Both recordings fall into the highest risk category as they exceed 10%.

As previously mentioned by Director Hart, the numbers are visibly decreasing and are expected to continue doing so. Dr. McKiernan noted that transmission rates are high, and she would not be in favor of rescinding the mask mandate. The Board members shared the same sentiment and proposed to revisit the metrics in February.

Chair Ravenhurst shared the vaccination rates for South Hadley as 76% of residents having at least one dose and 67% having two doses. Ravenhurst clarified that the State is likely to consider those only who have had a booster as being fully vaccinated. She highlighted that the age groups 16-19 and 23-29 have the lowest rates in the community. Director Hart agreed to verify the details on the wastewater surveillance data collection as a potential resource to analyze.

The Board of Health has also received a compiled list of complaints received by Town Administration with the corresponding response. There have been no additional complaints in the month of January. Judge shared that he has observed widespread compliance amongst residents and businesses regarding the mandate. To summarize, Chair Ravenhurst mentioned that the Board will revisit the metrics in February with the hopes that the rates continue to decrease.

(C) Discussion of SHELD response to the Board's questions about Peabody Plant letter sent by Greater Boston Physician for Social Responsibility

Chair Ravenhurst introduced SHELD's response to the Board's questions regarding the Peabody Plant as the next topic. The Board of Health received a letter from the GBPSR in the Fall requesting the Board of Health to curate a letter requesting an environmental report and health impact assessment be done for the construction of the plant. SHELD is listed as one of the investors in the project. In consideration of drafting up request letter, the Board asked SHELD some additional questions for clarification. Sean Fitzgerald, the General Manager from SHELD answered those questions via e-mail. The correspondence was shared with the Board of Health members.

Chair Ravenhurst shared Mr. Fitzgerald's response on the screen to provide a brief overview to the Board. Dr. McKiernan referenced the presentation given on June 8th 2021 from Sean Fitzgerald in which he provided an overview of the proposed plant construction. The plant is projected to produce less emissions and will only be used a couple of times a year. In Fitzgerald's response he cited previous environmental reports that have been conducted and all areas met the state's standards for protection and welfare. Dr. McKiernan questioned how the plant would impact the people of Peabody. There are existing plants currently operating in the area. Peabody is known to have a vulnerable demographic, with high poverty levels.

Collins expressed her support for health assessments on such projects as they provide insight on how the residents of that area will be affected by the execution of the project. She also shared that she believed these types of reports and assessments are likely to become required on the State's level. Collins then referenced a situation where the Board of Health worked to protect a local aquifer and there were similar claims of standards being met. She clarified that the letter of request was simply expressing support of having the assessment done and not showing favor or lack thereof for the project. Entities typically oppose of these assessments as they delay the projects. Collins expressed the importance of such reports to identify potential equity compromises associated with the project.

Chair Ravenhurst questioned if the conducting of the assessment will cost SHELD additional money as the project will likely be delayed. She also shared the update she received from the GBPSR. The Board of Health in several Towns have decided to send a letter to the governor questioning further investigation prior to construction. The participating towns included Peabody, Danvers, Marblehead, Holden, and Wakefield.

Dr. McKiernan questioned how this would differ from the assessments previously done. Collins shared that health assessments typically involve a multi- sector advisory group that identify potential threats and areas of concern associated with the project. It is conducted through an equity lens and provides a platform to hear from the local people. Requests have been made from Board members to get copies of the previous assessments that have been cited as well as the plan approved documents. Collins proposed the possibility of reaching out to local Board of Health in Peabody to get clarity on what information was missing from the previously conducted assessments.

Chair Ravenhurst questioned how this project fell under the South Hadley Board of Health purview, besides SHELD's investment. Collins clarified that the Town should be aware of how its investment is impacting the health of Peabody's residents. Walsh Pio highlighted a lot of discrepancies between the claims from SHELD and GBPSR. The Board members hoped that receiving insight from the Peabody Board of Health and copies of the previous assessments would help clarify this.

Collins mentioned that Senator Jo Comerford has proposed the *Healing Act*, a legislation that focuses on getting health assessments conducted across several sectors prior to doing similar projects. For the next steps, Chair Ravenhurst will follow up with the Peabody local Board of Health to get a current set of concerns regarding the projects and to acquire copies of the assessment reports previously done.

(D) Update- Indoor Air Quality Assessment Report for South Hadley High School

Chair Ravenhurst introduced the update on the indoor air quality assessment report for the South Hadley High School as the next topic. The Board members were interested in getting the status on the measures being taken following the assessment has been received from the state. Chair Ravenhurst

reached out to the Superintendent and associated staff members on an update. Chair Ravenhurst was told that Committees are currently being established to discuss the report and the next steps. There will have to be an extensive discussion on the funding and the mitigation of Facilities Management. Chair Ravenhurst is under the assumption that this would fall under the purview of the Selectboard and the School Committee. She then questioned what specific information the Board of Health would want.

Collins shared that she feels as though things are shifting in a different direction. Sectors that have previously operated in solitude will now collaborate with other entities on situations that overlap into different subject of interests. It has been demonstrated with COVID, that the School Committee values insight from the Board of Health. This insight could be in the form of presenting data and offering recommendations. The Board of Health should be informed on the measures being taken despite it not being within its direct jurisdiction.

Judge expressed the importance of evaluating the School's preventative and maintenance plan to ensure that the health and well-being of the students and faculty are not being compromised. Health threats at the local High School are well within the oversight of the Board of Health. The Board of Health should express their approval or dissatisfaction with the proposed remedies within the plan. The action plan should also be considered time sensitive as the weather will shift and provide unfavorable conditions for mold.

The Board of Health has been proactive in addressing this matter by coordinating the indoor air assessment with the State. Chair Ravenhurst agreed the Board should stay in touch with the School Committee in relation to receiving updates on the plan but felt that the Board of Health did not need to weigh in on funding and mitigation strategies. Dr. McKiernan expressed the importance of the Health Department being involved to ensure that the appropriate standards are being met in the plan. Director Hart suggested that the Board of Health request a priority list and progress report on the actions being taken from the Superintendent and School Committee.

In conclusion, Chair Ravenhurst agreed to reach out to both the Superintendent and School Committee regarding updates on the preventative plan as well as to make this topic a recurring monthly agenda item to be reviewed on a regular basis.

(E) Update- South Hadley Drug & Alcohol Prevention Coalition (Karen)

Chair Ravenhurst introduced an update on the South Hadley Drug & Alcohol Prevention Coalition as the next topic to discussion. Walsh Pio shared that the work of the Coalition has been delayed by COVID-19. The alcohol compliance checks have been postponed to March and the High School Cotillion dance has been rescheduled to a date not yet determined. The Coalition typically conducts a lot of outreach programming in preparation of the dance. The Coalition will be informed later this month if they have

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been awarded a grant to purchase two more vape detectors from the District Attorney's office. This would be in addition to the two detectors given to the Coalition by the Board of Health.

The School social worker will be hosting a webinar on February 6, 2022, regarding online safety for caregivers. Walsh Pio shared she would be willing to forward Board members the flyer with additional information pertaining to the event. On April 7, 2022, the Safe School Summit will be held with the option of being virtual if necessary. The summit is an annual event that discusses various elements that contribute to the safety in the school environment.

The High School has a new peer leader and senior class advisor. The peer leaders have been working on the *Sandy Hook Promise* initiative which targets adolescent mental health. Walsh Pio also noted that the Coalition is currently operating in its 8th year out of its 10-year grant. Collins proposed utilizing some of the Public Excellence grant to advocate for youth mental health. Walsh Pio expressed her interest in youth mental health, as mental health issues are often tied to substance abuse. The Coalition has done work with suicide prevention and has made collaborative efforts with peer leaders in the past.

Collins shared she had learned about a new tobacco product being sold in small businesses recently at a Tobacco Control Meeting. The product comes in a clear container mimicking a test tube. The test tube has crushed up tobacco leaves that has been mixed with other ingredients. The container is not labeled and is sold discreetly. Director Hart attested to the challenges faced as new tobacco products emerge. The Board of Health must stay updated on new products and think of ways to skillfully curate regulations that will target the emergence of new products. Hart shared that the product in question maybe known as Fronto King, which is crushed flavor enhancer. The Town of South Hadley has banned the sale of flavored tobacco products.

4. Set Next Meeting Date- (TBD) at 6:00 p.m. Virtual using Zoom

The virtual meeting was set for Tuesday March 1st, 2022, at 6p.m.

5. Adjourn Meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 7:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Monasia Ceasar

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ATTACHMENT A

RECORD LOCATION

County Level Positivity Rates	BOH File
GBPSR Peabody Plant letter Fall 2021	BOH File
Peabody Plant Questions	BOH File
Weekly COVID-19 Municipality Vaccination Report	BOH File
Guidance for Implementing COVID-19 Prevention Strategies	BOH File