



Acton Board of Health

Meeting Minutes

February 23, 2022

7:30 PM.

HYBRID & VIRTUAL PARTICIPANTS VIA ZOOM

Present:

Members Present: William McInnis & Dr. Thomas Jacoby

Virtual Members Present: Mark Conoby, Michael Kreuze and Dr. William Taylor

Virtual Associate Members Present: Dr. Rekha Singh

Staff Present: Sheryl Ball-Health Director

Others Present: Himaja Nagireddy (SelectBoard liaison), Patrick Keefe, Jill Sullivan, Jim Wood, Kaarin Jeanson, Missy, Tommy Whalen, Weiyuan Sun, Yingxia, M. Rooney, Linda Vieira, Beenu Gupta, Ben Wolfson, B. Pohl, Brendan, Brian, Carl, Casey Easton, Chrissy Cunningham, Colleen McGovern, Lydia Napoli, Amanda Ragusa, Jill Salamon, Lara Kasey, Melanie Mazares, Deborah, Jn. J, Susan G., Wendy Whelan, Timothy Holy, Meredith, Michael Yaner, Peter Light, Cathy Fochtman, Dan Slouch, Siddharth Nirqudkar, Susan Mitchell- Hardt, Karen Peirce, Sarah Kent, Shaun Shattuck, Christian Waltmire A, Ryan, Keenan, Peter Berry, Lees Stuntz, Carolyn Platt, Pryan, Stephen Giuliette, David Leuci, Eva S., Kim Davis, Fire Station guest, Kimberly Powers, PNR, Tyler B, Sharon Mercurio, Assembly, Dana, Dave Randolph, Charlee Leuie, Holly Fitzgerald, John Konstantitia, and Spencer and Lori Harvey. There were additional virtual attendees logged as call in users.

1. Opening

Chair - William McInnis opened the meeting at 7:32 P.M. A script was read that was provided by the Town stating why the meetings are virtual during this pandemic and this emergency meeting of the Board of Health was called to order.

2. Regular Business

Health Director Update

Funeral Assistance Program:

The MDPH announced that there is a Funeral Assistance program that can help the families of those that had a COVID related death between 1/20/20 – present and if eligible may qualify for up to \$9,000 in assistance. For more information please contact 844-684-6333.



Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) – Face Coverings

The MDPH sent out a new face covering guidance, dated February 15, 2022 that is now advising those that are unvaccinated or are at high risk to wear a face covering while indoors. Ms. Ball stated that face coverings will still be required in certain situations including, while on transportation, in health care settings and while visiting congregate care facilities. It was also noted that those in isolation or quarantine will also need to continue to wear a face covering on day 6-10 as required by the current Isolation/Quarantine guidance.

Ms. Ball also noted that Department of Secondary Education (DESE) lifted their face covering requirement effective February 28, 2022. The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) who regulates daycares has not come out with updated guidance but we expect it soon.

MDPH Recommendations

The MDPH also advised Massachusetts cities and towns to consider using the following metrics to decide whether or not to lift a mask mandate and they include:

1. # of deaths/hospitalizations
2. Decrease in clusters
3. Current school cases
4. Vaccination Rates

CDC metrics

Ms. Ball mentioned that the State and Acton are currently still listed as red which means that the risk of getting COVID is very high, however, this was discussed at a Statewide call yesterday with the MDPH and they indicated this will be updated very shortly.

Vaccination Rates

Ms. Ball stated that vaccination rates for our schools are approximately 80-89% for our elementary schools and 93-94% for the Junior and Senior High School. This is compared to the following:

	Nationwide	State of MA
Age 5-11	32%	53%
Age 12-18	67-70%	83-84%

This is good news for Acton as our vaccination rates for children are higher than both the State and the US.

Nursing Director – Update

Ms. York was not present but Ms. Ball updated the Board. The current cases in Acton are 10 on active isolation and 4 of those will be lifted tomorrow. Of those 10 cases, we have 2 school aged children. Ms. Ball mentioned that our numbers are declining in Acton which is a good thing. For example we had 75 in isolation on February 4, 2022 compared to 10 today. Acton's percent positivity rate has also decreased from 3.5% on 2/19/2022 1.85% as of today.



Ms. Ball also mentioned that Life care of Acton has 0 positive staff and 0 positive residents and there last case was on February 14, 2022. Senior Living at Robbins Brook has 0 positive residents and 0 positive staff and there last positive case was on February 3, 2022. In addition both facilities are mandating booster doses for both staff and residents and town staff will be doing a booster clinic for both facilities on February 28, 2022 to assist with those that still need the booster dose.

Ms. Ball stated that hospitalization rates for the State have also decreased from 3187 on January 18th to 573. We contacted Emerson and found that they have 2 COVID related hospitalizations but it is unknown if they are Acton residents.

Rescind Mask Mandate – Discussion

Mr. McInnis stated that he would like the Board to discuss whether or not the current mask mandate should be rescinded. Mr. McInnis referred to the memo from the Health Director recommending that the mask mandate be lifted effective February 24, 2022 due to Acton's high vaccination rates, lower case numbers and hospitalizations. Mr. McInnis polled the Board and some stated that it is time to lift and others stated it should be extended until March. The Board discussed this at length and mentioned that Acton is doing better than some other communities and stated this decision should be made on what the current public health metrics are showing. The Board was also concerned with Health staff needing time to get the word out if the mandate is lifted. Mr. Kreuze thanked all the residents for the thoughtful emails expressing their views on whether or not to lift the mandate but would like the mandate to stay in effect until March 8, 2022. Mr. Conoby stated he was concerned with those that may be vulnerable so he would like to see the mandate continued a bit longer. Mr. Conoby also reminded everyone that if the Board lifts this mandate tonight that there are still other scenarios where masks will still be required and asked staff to include this in any documentation. Mr. Light, School Superintendent, was present and stated that he has reviewed the data and believes that masks should be optional only for students except within the preschool where students are too young to be vaccinated and on buses and in health care office as required by DESE. Ms. Nagireddy who is health's Selectboard liaison but stated her personal opinion is that she would like the mandate to continue longer. Members of the audience mostly expressed the need to lift the mandate but some mentioned it should continue longer. The chair called for a vote.

On a motion made by Dr. Jacoby, seconded by Dr. Taylor, the Board voted to rescind the mask mandate in Acton effective February 24, 2022, however, the current state guidelines will still need to be followed and the board advised everyone to please be respectful for those that continue to wear one. Roll call was taken and the vote was 4-1. Motion passes.

Proposed Polystyrene and disposable plastic reduction bylaw – Discussion

Ms. Ball stated that there is a group with us tonight looking for Board support for the proposed polystyrene and disposable plastic reduction bylaw. This proposal would ultimately ban disposable service ware, encapsulated foam polystyrene and disposal plastic utensils and are looking for health staff to enforce. This ban would also need Town Meeting approval and they



are looking for it to be effective on January 1, 2023. There is also an additional component seeking to charge fees for paper bags to encourage people to bring reusable bags.

Lees Stuntz presented a power point presentation to the Board outlining why these items should be banned based on science, potential health concerns and the need to minimize plastics in the environment. Ms. Stuntz stated that they have already visited some retail establishments and found that out of 56 businesses, 23% were already using an alternative to styrene and 75% had some alternatives. There were three businesses that raised concern about an increase cost. Ms. Stuntz stated that other communities already have this ban in place and some of our biggest grocery stores have other stores in those communities so they have experience with replacement products. The Board asked if the Acton stores had made that change and it was stated they have not. The Board also asked if construction items will be included in this ban as there are some construction foam products including insulation board. The group was not familiar with this product but will look into it. The Board also spoke about the polystyrene recycling that the town offers once per month asking why this couldn't be done more often than monthly or whether the town should consider single stream recycling. Mr. Berry stated that this product is porous and any food packaged in polystyrene product leaches in to the container and thereby makes it non-recyclable. The Board also stated that they feel that the Board should not take action on the proposed article to require businesses to charge for paper bags.

On a motion made by Dr. Taylor, seconded by Mr. Conoby, the Board voted to endorse the proposed ban on polystyrene and disposable plastic products. Roll call was taken and the vote was 4-1. Motion passes.

On a motion made by Mr. Conoby, seconded by Dr. Taylor, the Board unanimously voted to take no action on the proposed article to charge for paper bags. Roll call was taken and all were in favor.

BOH meeting schedule change - Discussion

Mr. McInnis asked the Board if the meetings could be changed from Wednesday to Tuesday evenings. The Board was polled and all members agreed to this change.

Other

Ms. Ball asked the Board for support in changing the way COVID cases are reported on the Town's website. Ms. Ball stated that the Town would like to update the information weekly and it would be reported in a chart similar to the way the State reports but listed on the town's website so residents will no longer have to locate the data on the State website. The new update would also include additional metrics specific to Acton, like vaccination status, etc. The Board stated that this would be fine but asked to make the change effective in the next week or two.

Minutes – January 26, 2022

On a motion made by Dr. Taylor, seconded by Dr. Jacoby, the Board voted to accept the minutes of January 26, 2022 with corrections. The Chair took roll call and all were in favor.



Next Meeting

The next BOH meeting is scheduled for March 8, 2022.

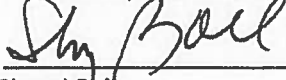
4. Adjournment

On a motion made by Dr. Jacoby seconded by Dr. Taylor, the Board voted to adjourn at 9:40 PM. The Chair took roll call and all were in favor.

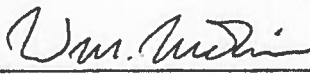
Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting;

- Town of Acton script for boards and committees opening meeting
- Board of Health agenda
- Mask Mandate – 3 documents – memo from Health, Schools, advisory from DPH
- Polystyrene Ban – memo from Ban the Bag and More, single sheet proposal and alternatives, proposed polystyrene and disposable plastic reduction bylaw, proposed act to establish a minimum charge for check out bags
- BOH memo to propose change of meeting dates
- Minutes from 1-26-22

Respectfully Submitted,



Sheryl Ball
Acton Board of Health



William McInnis- Chairman,
Acton Board of Health