

Meeting Minutes of the Chelsea Board of Health December 8, 2020

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Attendance: Names of members and Participants

Board members, City of Chelsea staff and guests were introduced.

Board Members:

- Ola Bayode
- Corinna Cuiller
- Allen Jackson
- Emmanuel Tellez
- Dr. Dean Xerras

Invited Speakers:

- Ric Bayly, Student, Tufts University School of Medicine
- Garrett Simonsen, Regional Public Health Planner, Cambridge Health Alliance

Guests:

- Chis Alonzo, Public Health Researcher
- Isabella Narvaez

City of Chelsea Staff:

- Paula McHatton, Public Health Nurse
- Luis Prado, Director of Health & Human Services
- Cheryl Watson Fisher, City Solicitor
- Pam Johnson, Law Office Clerk

Congratulations to Luis Prado on his Retirement

Luis Prado is retiring at the end of December. The Board congratulated Luis for his many years of service and thanked him for his passion, dedication, and service to the City and its residents.

Adoption of the Minutes of the November 17 Board Meeting

The Board adopted the minutes from the November 17 meeting by a unanimous vote.

City Solicitor Cheryl Watson Fisher's City Administration Update

- The City received an advisory from the Department of Labor Standards for Retail Operations. It will go on the City's website and will be distributed by hand to retail operators.
- The Governor rolled back the State to Phase 3, Step 1 of the MA reopening plan. The City emailed all licensed establishments of this change and requirements. Links to the new rules will be placed on the City's website.
- The liquor licenses for Latinos Falcon at 158 Broadway and Rincon Latino Restaurant at 33 Washington Ave. were suspended for violating COVID-19 regulations. Those suspensions were sent to the Alcoholic and Beverage Commission. The suspensions were lifted once the operators submitted COVID-19 plans to the Dept. of Labor Standards.
- The City issued a cease-and-desist order to a property owner at 307 Broadway who had twice violated the COVID-19 regulations during the Halloween weekend by hosting large gatherings. The Chelsea Fire Department and Department of Inspectional Services will be reinspecting that location.

- City Hall is now at operating at 40% of staffing capacity. Recently a department was closed after a worker tested positive for COVID-19. The department was closed and sanitized. City Hall is open but with limited hours, and each department will develop remote work plans.
- The City is looking at an indoor location on 4th Street to house the **Stop the Spread** testing campaign.
- **Chelsea Eats** cards have been issued and the program is underway. The City is still distributing food but is trying to eliminate outdoor lines as we get deeper into winter.
- Chelsea has signed onto the MA DPH vaccine agreement.
- Wastewater is currently being tested, and the Board can have a presentation on that program in January/February.
- The Recreation Department's Candy Cane event was cancelled, in part, due to the weather. Other virtual and physically distanced celebrations are still being planned. The City Council got a large shipment of masks that it will be distributing through community partnerships, and will be holding a toy drive where masks, gloves and other winter accessories will be distributed.
- The City has received 15 applications for the Public Health Director position. Interviews will begin next week. Later in the meeting, Luis Prado would later thank the City and Board of Health for recognizing the importance of and restoring the position.

Corinna Culler questioned whether schools would be a suitable location for the indoor testing sites. Cheryl Watson Fisher responded that they are not because of sanitation costs. The City is looking at function halls, City buildings and other buildings that are out of use.

Ric Bayly Presentation on COVID-19 Mapping

Ric Bayly presented his work on mapping the spread of COVID-19 in Chelsea. His previous work has included mapping opioid vulnerability. His presentation covered food distribution, the spread of COVID-19 in Chelsea, cumulative incidence and socioeconomic and demographic factors related to the spread.

Highlights:

- The mapping is based on confirmed cases reported in the State's MAVEN database.
- From 4/24/2020 – 5/1/2020, 3,200 people from all parts of the City used food pantry services.
- From 3/31/2020 – 5/14/2020, there were 1,442 food deliveries associated with people in quarantine. The mapping showed that hot spots for COVID case data correlated with the isolation mapping.
- This was particularly true when looking at elderly congregate housing sites. Mapping by census district showed hot spots around several of these facilities in the City.
- Among other results, mapping showed more infections in areas with lower income, more densely populated sections of the city, areas with higher percentages of residents age 65 and older, crowded rental housing and among residents whose primary mode of transportation is not a car. It was noted that District 6, where Giovanni Recupero is the City Council representative, showed up on a number of these screens.
- Ola Bayode suggested forwarding this information to City Councilors that represent highly impacted districts so they can reach out to their constituents.
- Ric Bayly noted that Cambridge instituted a door-knocking program in their hot spots where contract tracers connected with residents and encouraged them to maintain COVID protocols.

Ric Bayly added that he would be happy to return to show results using more recent data, or if there are other items the Council would like him to investigate. Bayly also agreed to share his slides with the Council.

Dr. Xerras noted that with the case count in Chelsea surpassing 4,000, it means 1 in 10 Chelsea residents have had COVID-19, later adding that the prevalence in Chelsea was likely higher because early testing was focused on the symptomatic.

Emmanuel Tellez asked Ric Bayly if he had any recommendations, based on the data. Bayly suggested knocking on doors as they did in Cambridge to encourage testing and awareness of the COVID protocols. Paula McHatton added that when contract tracers cannot reach people, they are mailed letters in English and Spanish to encourage follow-up.

Luis Prado, Director of Health & Human Services

Director Prado noted that it will be important to educate people on the importance of getting vaccinated. He thanked Dr. Xerras and Paula McHatton, Public Health nurse, and others who worked on the emergency vaccine approval application. Hopefully, the vaccine distribution plan will be available next week, he said. He noted that for public health, this is a historic moment.

He added that molecular testing and contact tracing have been very intense in Chelsea and the ***Stop the Spread*** campaign has been very important. He suggested that people should commemorate end-of-year celebrations safely by following up-to-date guidelines and avoid furthering the spread of COVID-19.

Dr. Xerras recalled someone noting that vaccines do not stop disease, vaccination does. He noted an anti-vaccination article in El Planeta this week, adding that the City will have to work hard to encourage community leaders and residents to get vaccinated. He continued by noting that MGH and other health centers have been awarded a grant and are meeting with community leaders to figure out how to reach out to people who have not been tested and understand why.

In closing, Luis Prado added that he appreciates the invitation to return to future meetings.

Garrett Simonsen, Regional Public Health Planner, Cambridge Health Alliance

Garrett Simonsen reported on the COVID-19 vaccination planning campaign. Highlights include:

- Paula McHatton, Public Health Nurse has begun working on registering the Board of Health as a COVID-19 vaccination provider through the MA Immunization Bureau. Initially, vaccination providers will focus on hospital provides and pharmacies.
- To start, vaccines will be limited in availability, and priority will be given to frontline healthcare workers, workers in long-term care facilities and essential workers. Long-term care facilities will be required to get their vaccine supplies from the retail clinics – Walgreens or CVS.
- Massachusetts just put in its first vaccine order from Pfizer for 59k doses, and 300k doses will be allocated to MA by the end of December. These represent the first of two required doses. More details of the vaccine prioritization strategy will be available next week.
- Regionally, funding was secured for PPE kits for vaccinators. Those will be distributed to local health departments in January.

He concluded his remarks by noting that now is the time to identify opinion leaders in the community who can speak on the importance of vaccinations.

Corrina Culler asked whether the 300k doses allocated for MA will be distributed to MA or just allocated. Simonsen clarified that those doses will be available for distribution in December. Dr. Xerras added that

MGH's vaccine allotment will be arriving next week and they hope to get all their workers the first vaccine dose by the end of December.

Emmanuel Tellez questioned how vaccination would work with homeless populations. Garret Simonsen noted that it would depend on the prioritization strategies and priorities of the local boards of health in their outreach plans. The vaccine will be available at pharmacies as well, so people could go to pharmacies for vaccination.

Paula McHatton, Public Health Nurse

- There have been no reported cases of communicable diseases, tuberculosis or influenza. The City may begin to host flu clinics after the holiday season.
- McHatton thanked Dr. Xerras and Garrett Simonsen on their work in completing the vaccination agreement to register the Board of Health as a COVID-19 vaccine provider.
- The positivity rate (7.06%) is down slightly from last week (7.22%).
- The incidence rate also declined from 72.9/100,000 to 62.1/100,000.
- As of today, there were 63 new confirmed cases, 5,178 confirmed cases in Chelsea in total. On Dec. 3 there were 129 cases alone.

Emmanuel Tellez questioned whether there was a way to schedule COVID testing in inclement weather or some other way to mitigate risk. Paula McHatton responded that the City is still trying to move testing inside, adding that demand for testing is high as the line at City Hall is often long. Ola Bayode questioned whether mobile testing could be offered. Dr. Xerras stated that part of the NIH grant he mentioned will be looking at how to get testing to hard-to-reach populations.

Emmanuel Tellez questioned whether the lack of other communicable diseases being reported could be related to people having fears of reporting. Paula McHatton reported speaking with other local public health nurses, and they have not reported any communicable diseases either. Corrina Culler added that mask wearing could be preventing the spread of these diseases.

Dr. Xerras suggested that more could be done in limiting household gatherings, perhaps a curfew. Emmanuel Tellez noted that Gov. Baker encouraged local boards of health to take more active measures, noting that the board may be able to exercise more authority than what was previously allowable. He noted that would be hard to do without supports for the businesses that would be impacted.

Dr. Xerras wondered if we could pass an ordinance advising residents not to congregate with people outside their households. Luis Prado commented that this is a very complex issue. He noted that we must be careful not to phrase things in a way that may be interpreted as hostile by the communities we are trying to work with. Dr. Xerras clarified that his intent was not to criticize but wondered if it could be asked in a way that encourages people to limit socializing to only people in their household. Emmanuel Tellez questioned whether we could use the out-of-work staff at restaurants in other capacities.

Luis Prado will forward to the Board information about ongoing discussions about these issues and suggested additional ideas would be well received. He expressed about the anticipated COVID-19 spikes coming after Christmas and New Year's Eve and suggested working with Christine Alonzo, who has been working with the Chelsea Collaborative in developing these messages.

Ola Bayode suggested the City could revisit building code regulations to require consideration of airflow issues in future construction.

Public Comments

Chris Alonzo commented that from her qualitative research, people are searching for connection, and are exhausted from quarantine. She noted that people are replacing those social connections missing through schools are through church, and at food pantries.

She added that public health should consider how to replace bonding and social interactions that are missing due to quarantine. And that people may be engaging in the risky activities we have seen to seek out connection.

She reported that some churches have set up small pods on Zoom for people to connect, and that the City should think about how to create these spaces where people can connect to one another.

Emmanuel Tellez wondered how we might engage residents and other local leaders in vaccine messaging, PPE distribution and other efforts to combat COVID-19 while they work on building connections among their followers. He noted a concern - that the Board has in the past had a difficult time in enforcement.

Emmanuel Tellez wondered whether the wastewater monitoring program had been discussed. He noted that from the data he reviewed, Chelsea has high RNA viral load samples, and those samples correlate to adverse events and deaths within three weeks. Corrina Culler noted that the Board is scheduling a presentation on the program, scheduled for January or February 2021.

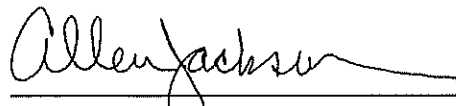
There were no other public comments.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held January 12, virtually.

The meeting adjourned at 7:17pm.

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CITY OF CHELSEA
OFFICE OF THE CLERK


Allen Jackson

1/12/2021
Date