

# Meeting Minutes of the Chelsea Board of Health

October 13, 2020

## Attendance: Names of members and Participants

### Board Members:

- Corinna Culler
- Allen Jackson
- Emmanuel Tellez
- Dr. Dean Xerras

### Guests:

- Chris Alonzo, Public Health Researcher
- Ric Bayly, Student, Tufts University School of Medicine
- Dinanyili Paulino, The Chelsea Collaborative

### City of Chelsea Staff:

- Tom Ambrosino, City Manager
- Bea Cravatta, Chelsea Recreation & Public Affairs Division
- Paula McHatton, Public Health Nurse
- Luis Prado, Director of Health & Human Services
- Cheryl Watson Fisher, City Solicitor

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## Adoption of the Minutes of the September 8, 2020 Board Meeting

The Board adopted the minutes from the September 8 meeting, which they had reviewed earlier via email.

## City Manager Tom Ambrosino's update to City's response to COVID-19

City Manager Tom Ambrosino gave an overview of several of the City's initiatives to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **CARES Act Funding Increase:** Chelsea's CARES ACT funding will be increased from \$3.6 million to \$6.3 million. \$3.1 million will be used to reimburse costs incurred from July 1 – December 30. The city anticipates spending approximately \$5.5 million of these funds.
- **Food Insecurity:** The City hopes to end the daily food distribution program by the end of October 2020. Moving forward, food support will be provided by providing residents with pre-paid Visa debit cards. The city received approximately 3,600 applications for the program and distributed 2,074 cards by lottery. Funds will be loaded onto the cards on December 2. Winners will need to prove Chelsea residency and provide a valid ID. The City has secured enough governmental funding to support the debit card program through December and has received private philanthropic support to continue the program after that through February. The Fort Park food distribution program will continue, and it is expected that private food pantries will see an uptick in demand.
- **Housing Insecurity:**
  - *Rental Assistance:* \$1.25 million will fund second round of rental assistance and will serve approximately 300 families. The City expects to see a greater demand for these services.
  - *Legal Clinic:* \$381k will fund legal assistance for people facing eviction.

- *Housing Assistance Task Force*: \$500k will be used to fund scattered-site housing, transitional assistance and crisis housing needs.

### **HHS Director Transition Plan**

Luis Prado has tendered his resignation, effective December 31, 2020. Ambrosino reported that the goal is to hire a Director of Public Health relatively quickly. The City may hire a new HHS director in FY23. Ambrosino will reach out to MGH and the Board of Health for assistance reaching out to potential candidates. He will share the job description with the Board. Because the Public Health Director will be a union position, there will be a 7-day internal posting period. After that period ends, the position will be posted widely.

### **Chris Alonzo: Research regarding COVID-19 Cases in Chelsea**

Chris Alonzo presented an overview of COVID-19 cases in Chelsea. Chelsea saw approximately 3k cases between March 9, 2020 – August 3, 2020.

Highlights include:

- There were many issues with the quality of the data used in this analysis. For example, there was a lot of incomplete data, race/ethnicity data was not consistently recorded, and other responses were unclear (unknown vs. NA). Outcomes data was missing in 51.8% (n=1,711) of cases, and Employment was missing in 77% (n=2,250) of cases.
- When tracing the number of cases by weeks they occurred, Alonzo was confident COVID-19 was present in Chelsea in February 2020.
- The average age of cases in the study was 44.2 years.
- Chelsea residents who were hospitalized spent an average of 7.9 days in the hospital 90% recovered, 9% died and 1% were lost to follow-up.
- 35% of those in the study had no symptoms, and 35% of those hospitalized were retired and the unemployed were hospitalized at a rate slightly higher than essential workers.

Data analysis:

- There was no significant difference in symptoms by race.
- Study participants with comorbidities were 132.6 times more likely to die than were those without comorbidities.
- Women were less likely to be hospitalized than men. Pregnant women had a higher risk of being hospitalized.

Conclusion:

- Better quality data will make for better analysis.
- Hispanics, the retired and essential workers in their 40s were most at risk of contracting COVID-19 during the study period.
- Pregnant women were highly likely to be hospitalized.

In discussing the findings, Dr. Xerras reminded everyone that correlation does not equal causality, and the need to be careful in interpreting the data. He questioned why BMI was not included as a risk factor. Alonzo responded that BMI was not collected as part of contact tracing. She also confirmed that asymptomatic people were part of the study, as a positive COVID-19 test was how people were identified for inclusion in the study.

Corinna Culler noted the *Stop the Spread* campaign started in mid-August, adding that it would be interesting to see how this analysis would change with the implementation of the campaign.

Emmanuel Tellez questioned the generalizability of the study given we do not have data on 52% of cases for some elements. He applauded the efforts in collecting and analyzing the data. Alonzo responded that modification to the data system may need to be made and suggested adding a variable that identifies potential exposure location. City Manager Ambrosino noted that the contract tracing team is now collecting data on exposure location. Public Health Nurse Paula McHatton added that exposure location began being collected with the *Stop the Spread* campaign.

City Manager Ambrosino questioned what the City would need to do to get a follow-up study done? Alonzo responded that the Board of Health would need to make a request to the MA Dept. of Public Health.

Ric Bayly did some mapping work using his data and was invited to present the results of his work at the November meeting.

**Luis Prado, Director of Health and Human Services**

Prado opened his remarks by thanking Alonzo for the report, adding that it is very useful to helping understand COVID-19 spread in Chelsea.

In discussing the end of his tenure, he added that the Board would need to keep track of important public health programs being implemented by DPH in Chelsea. He noted that *Stop the Spread* has conducted roughly 35k tests, and Chelsea is seeing lower positivity rates than other surrounding communities. He also noted that the average cases/day in Chelsea has been steady at 8.9.

He suggested future research for Chris include whether there is any correlation between COVID-19 clusters in Chelsea and wondered how the upcoming holidays will impact the spread of the virus.

He thanked everyone for their support over the years in his role as Director.

Dinanyili Paulino of the Chelsea Collaborative wondered if the Collaborative could be given a copy of the study and wondered how the organization could help on this. Prado suggested the need to continue advocating for mask wearing, hand washing, limiting outdoor activities, staying home if you do not feel well and pushing seasonal flu vaccinations.

Paulino agreed on the need to push flu vaccinations and wondered whether a public education campaign would be useful, or maybe the Board could address residential food delivery in some way. Emmanuel Tellez suggested the Board may need help reaching out to residents while maintaining anonymity. He added that data collection needs to be narrowly tailored to help develop trust with residents, and that the Board welcomes the public involvement. Public Health Nurse Paula McHatton added that we could use help in making sure people answers the phone when contract tracers call. Paulino highlighted the need to have creative ways to conduct outreach and discussed the Collaborative's own difficulty in this area.

**Report from Public Health Nurse Paula McHatton**

McHatton reported that Chelsea had 11 new cases today, and 3,740 total confirmed case through October 13, 2020. There have been no other reports of communicable disease normally traced by her

office recently. She has also recently held several flu clinics, recently completing clinics for firefighters and city employees.

She conducted one flu clinic at a staffing agency for workers at the produce center, where many workers have no insurance. She worked with DPH to set up this vaccination program.

#### **Recreation Department – Plan for Halloween**

Bea Cravatta of the Chelsea Recreation & Public Affairs Division presented a plan for her department's Halloween celebration. The department held an annual Halloween program pre-COVID, but with the pandemic came a need to tailor the program. She consulted other cities plans and state guidance on creating this plan.

The Halloween event will be held outside at the Williams School near the Arlington Street entrance. The event will be limited to 2 hours. Families will need to pre-register to attend. To attend the event, registration must be completed by phone, email or online by October 26. Cravatta noted that most of the current registrations have been completed online.

While past Halloween events held by the Recreation Department have drawn upwards of 400 participants, Cravatta anticipates approximately 80 children to register. The event will be staffed by 12 staffers.

Each registered family will receive a 30-minute time slot when they register. They will be directed to come to the event and pick up candy, take photos and get information on COVID-19 and Halloween safety during that time.

Emmanuel Tellez thought it was a good idea to hold it outdoors. Cravatta added that each family will get an individual ID number in case follow-up is necessary.

#### **COVID-19 Enforcement and an Order on Halloween/Día de los Muertos**

City Solicitor Cheryl Watson Fisher walked the Board through a review of a draft emergency order on Halloween and Día de los Muertos.

The City is looking to avoid large indoor events, or large outdoor events with more than 50 people. The Governor left it up to local cities and towns to determine whether and how to regulate Halloween activities.

She noted most single-family trick-or-treating occurs in Pratile. Cars go to the area and go house-to-house.

Corinna Culler asked whether, pre-COVID, when trick-or-treating happened. Watson Fisher answered that usually happened on Halloween night. Historically few events happen on Halloween nights, but the goal in drafting the order was to limit large gatherings.

The order discourages trick-or-treating.

Board members agreed avoiding the word "ban" was important because the enforcement issues it raised. In reviewing the order, Emmanuel Tellez wondered if the order could emphasize low-risk, time-limited interactions. Corinna Culler and Dr. Xerras agreed. Dr. Xerras wondered if the Board should

focus on encouraging certain behaviors and develop additional guidance for households on safe participation in these activities.

Enforcement around Halloween trick-or-treating is unlikely, as the City Council will be more focused on other enforcement actions going forward. Inspectional services have given citations to 4 hair salons. The CPD will be more assertive in issuing citations rather than warnings going forward. The City is trying to control public events and use of public spaces, focusing on mask wearing.

Dr. Xerras suggested the ordinance that encourages less-risky behaviors while not being prescriptive. Bea Cravatta noted that the City of Salem is using "discourage" language in their discussions.

A motion to adopt the proposed ordinance passed unanimously.

Cheryl Watson Fisher will be getting reports from city inspectors. She asked the Board to send her suggestions for the types of report the Board would be interested in.

**Proposed Legislation re: Statewide Accelerated Public Health for Every Community**

Corinna Culler reviewed the SAPHE 2.0 Act (Statewide Accelerated Public Health for Every Community) which will accelerate equity and effectiveness of our local and regional public health system. The act will:

- Establish minimum public health standards for every community.
- Increase capacity and effectiveness.
- Create a uniform data collection and reporting system.
- Dedicate sustainable state funding to local boards of health and health departments.

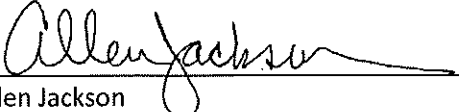
Corinna Culler asked whether the Board would support the proposed legislation. Emmanuel Tellez wondered what Luis Prado thought, and Prado responded that he supports the legislation, noting that provides funding for coordination activities and clear reporting guidelines.

Corinna Culler, Emmanuel Tellez and Allen Jackson voted to approve signing a letter from the Board in support of the legislation. Dr. Xerras abstained.

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held November 10, 2020 virtually.

The meeting adjourned at 7:27pm.

  
Allen Jackson

11/18/2020

Date