

Meeting Minutes of the Chelsea Board of Health

September 8, 2020

Attendance: Names of members and Participants

Board Members:

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

Guests:

- Garrett Simonsen, Regional Public Health Planner, Cambridge Health Alliance
- Ric Bayly
- Chris Alonso

City of Chelsea Staff:

- Tom Ambrosino, City Manager
- Paula McHatton, Public Health Nurse
- Luis Prado, Director of Health & Human Services
- Cheryl Watson Fisher, City Solicitor

Adoption of the Minutes of the August 11, 2020 Board Meeting

The Board adopted the minutes from the August 11 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.

Chelsea Eats and Food Program: The City has operated a daily food pantry program since April 2020. The pantry sees about 500 people/day, Monday - Friday. Mr. Ambrosino noted inefficiencies in the current food distribution model, specifically that operating the program requires workforce diversions from other city functions to operate, spends a lot of money on non-food items (ex. Transportation) and requires people using the program to carry heavy boxes of food away.

The program will shift to providing pre-loaded debit cards to eligible residents, and the current distribution program will end on September 25, 2020. The city received approximately 3,300 applications for the debit cards and will distribute 2,200 debit cards by weighted lottery which will prioritize families, the disabled, very low-income, and other special populations.

The program costs approximately \$750,000/month to operate. The City has funding sufficient to operate the program for two months, and has secured philanthropic support for a third month. City Manager Ambrosino noted the program has received interest from several grantmaking foundations, and that the Shah Foundation will partner with Harvard University to study the impacts of the debit card distribution program.

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The City will also be issuing a request for proposals for \$500,000 to support other local food pantries.

COVID-19 Testing: The City continues to support the Stop the Spread testing initiative. In addition, the two mobile testing sites that have been operating 5 days/week will offer testing from 11am – 5pm on weekends through October 1, 2020. Ambrosino noted that results from these testing sites are usually available within 24 hours.

City Manager Ambrosino went on to describe other initiatives the city is undertaking:

- **Rental relief:** The City is using \$1.25 million to fund a rental relief program. Under the program, 302 residents received up to \$5,000 in rental assistance. A second round of rental assistance will be distributed by lottery in October 2020. People who did not receive rental relief earlier will be eligible for this second round.
- **Legal aid clinic:** In anticipation of the end of the eviction moratorium expiring, the city is setting up a legal aid clinic.
- **Emergency housing:** The City allocated \$500,000 for emergency housing assistance. Whether this means the city will rent hotel rooms or provide assistance in some other form has yet to be decided.
- **Small business assistance:** The City will provide grants to local small businesses of up to \$20,000, which are forgivable after two years under certain conditions.
- **Homeowners/mortgage assistance:** The city will provide loans to help residents pay mortgages, under certain conditions.

Updates

- Information on influenza vaccines: Garrett Simonsen, Public Health Emergency Planning, Region 4AB

Garrett Simonsen, Regional Public Health Planner with the Cambridge Health Alliance briefed the Council on flu and COVID-19 vaccination planning.

Flu Vaccinations: Simonsen reported that the MA Dept. of Public Health (DPH) has rolled out a public messaging campaign to urge people to get tested.

There are no anticipated supply issues for the upcoming flu season. Many providers are turning to technology to aid in scheduling vaccinations, and it is expected that persons 18-64 years of age who normally participate in flu vaccination programs at work will be vaccinated at retail pharmacies.

DPH will also be rolling out online tools to reduce the paperwork and make the vaccination process run more smoothly for public health flu clinics.

COVID-19 Vaccinations: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently issued guidance on COVID-19 vaccination planning. The guidance describes the planning assumptions for two different types of two-dose vaccines anticipated to be available later this year, as early as November. Distribution and administration of the vaccine will be targeted, with essential workers and high-risk populations likely to have priority.

The state will issue directives interpreting the CDC guidance, and regional planning authorities will work with local officials on distribution of the vaccine.

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Dr. Xerras added that MGH has been approved to be a testing site for a Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Emmanuel Tellez questioned whether the vaccine would be compulsory for healthcare or long-term care workers. Simonsen responded that the guidance is silent on that point, but that could be accomplished by workplace policy or regulatory requirement.

- Current data on pandemic/Public Health Nurse's Report: Luis Prado, Director of Health and Human Services and Paula McHatton, Public Health Nurse

Ms. McHatton reported that there were 8 new cases of COVID-19 in Chelsea today, bringing the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases to 3,438 as of September 8, 2020. The positivity rate in Chelsea was 5.88%, which was down from 6.07% the week before. Statewide, the positivity rate is 1.07%.

Director Prado commented that there were 155 new cases in the last two weeks of August, and that the incidence rate of infection in Chelsea was 29.4/100,000, well above the MA rate of 8/100,000. He urged the public to continue wearing masks in public, washing hands often, and observe physical distancing to help stop the spread of the virus.

The board then discussed whether data was available to compare the current metrics to April 2020. Prado reported that there are several useful tools on the DPH online dashboard that allow for comparisons of many metrics over time. He will send some of the useful information and slides he has collected to the board via email.

City Solicitor Cheryl Watson Fisher on BOH Citations and update on enforcement efforts

City Solicitor Fisher reviewed a copy of the emergency COVID-19 cease and desist citation form with the Board. She reported that the Attorney General has sent cease and desist orders to several establishments for COVID-19 violations. Most of these were deemed to be nuisances. Enforcement has focused on restaurants that turn into clubs serving alcohol and no food later in the evening.

So far, two restaurants have had their operating hours reduced. Fisher noted that fines for those found to be in violation of the Governor's COVID-19 guidance can include a fine of \$1,000 which can be appealed to the Board of Health.

Fisher explained that her office spends a lot of time explaining the orders to local businesses, and that about 80% of businesses are following the guidance. Businesses frequently call into her office to report violations occurring in other establishments.

In response to a question about what we should do if we are in an establishment and notice a potential issue violating the Governor's COVID-19 guidance, the Board was encouraged to email her directly so she can send a team out to investigate.

Public Comments

The Chelsea Collaborative emailed asking to give a presentation to the Board of Health, but it was received too late to make it onto this month's agenda. They will be scheduled to present at the October meeting.

New Business

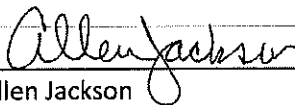
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- Chris Alonzo, the researcher who presented at a previous Board of Health meeting on her use of data to track COVID-19 has received the data she requested from MA DPH. The Board can invite her back to present her findings later.
- The City Manager is looking to fill the vacancy created by Catherine Maas' resignation. He would like a youth representative. The Board discussed the nomination process briefly, noting that the City Manager makes the appointment, and the City Council confirms the appointment. Board members are encouraged to forward potential candidates to the City Manager.
- The Board discussed returning to in-person meetings. Doing so might increase engagement, but the Board would need to consider occupancy, space availability and physical distancing requirements. Some members felt that given the state of the infection in Chelsea, we should continue online meetings. Others noted work and other restraints that would make meeting in person difficult. The Board decided that meetings will continue virtually at least through October.
- Luis forwarded an email presenting issues presented by standing water and stagnant water in buildings. Luis clarified that this email was being sent to various city departments for information sharing and did not require Board action at this time.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held Tuesday, October 13, 2020 at 5:30pm, virtually.

The meeting adjourned at 6:50pm.


Allen Jackson

10/17/2020
Date

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