

Meeting Minutes of the Chelsea Board of Health

January 12, 2021

Attendance: Names of members and Participants

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

Board Members:

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

Guests:

- Chis Alonzo, Public Health Researcher
- Mike Sheridan, Proprietor of Chelsea Station Restaurant
- Mark Nadow, Proprietor of Chelsea Station Restaurant

City of Chelsea Staff:

- Tom Ambrosino, City Manager
- Paula McHatton, Public Health Nurse
- Cheryl Watson Fisher, City Solicitor
- Pam Johnson, Law Office Clerk

Adoption of the Minutes of the December 8 Board Meeting

The Board adopted the minutes from the December 8, 2020 meeting by a unanimous vote.

Update from City Manager Tom Ambrosino

Chelsea Eats

The *Chelsea Eats* program launched in late November 2020. The program provides Visa debit cards to program participants via a lottery. To date approximately 2,000 cards to have been distributed to lottery winners. Thus far, two rounds of card distribution have been completed. A third round will be completed by the end of January, and the final distribution will occur by the end of February.

Researchers from Harvard led by Jeffrey Liebman will investigate whether the program is having a beneficial impact for lottery participants and whether the funds are being spent responsibly. Analysis thus far has shown that less than ½ of 1% of funds spent have been for “non-essential” items. A final paper on the project will be presented at the end of the project.

The City is looking for additional funds to support two additional card distributions and is working with the Shah Family Foundation to secure the additional funding.

Corinna Culler asked what the administrative costs were to run the program. Ambrosino reported total administrative costs were less than \$10,000. He later added that non-food costs were significant for the food pantry programs, much more so than the Chelsea Eats program.

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Dr. Xerras asked why the program didn't expand to cover more people. Ambrosino explained that that decision was made in the beginning, as the program was intended to be a six-month pilot. Also, for the academic study, it was important to have a control group.

In response to a question about program eligibility, Ambrosino noted that the program only required proof of Chelsea residency which participants self-certified. Banking and other financial information was not required. The lottery was designed to give more chances to people who met more of the program's selection criteria.

COVID Testing

- Chelsea currently has three **Stop the Spread** testing sites – one drive-through site run by Beth Israel, and one at City Hall and one in Chelsea Square. The Chelsea Square site will close as of 1/13/2021. The City Hall testing site has been relocated to 35 4th Street and will run through at least March 31. That site is open to all, 7 days per week.
- MGH is doing pop-up testing in a mobile van and will be doing testing in Chelsea on Tuesdays. For the next two weeks, the van will test at La Colaborativa food distribution site on 4th Street. Dr. Xerras added that the MGH H health center is doing testing for patients by appointment as well. In response to a question from Ola Bayode, Dr. Xerras added that current testing will detect the new strains of COVID-19 and vaccines will be effective on the new strains.

Vaccination

Municipalities are working with the MA Dept. of Public Health and are going through the prioritization list of who will be vaccinated and when. Chelsea's first responders will be vaccinated first via the North Suffolk Public Health Collaborative at the Rumney Marsh Academy in Revere the weekend of 1/16/21 and 1/20/2021. Approximately 70% of Chelsea first responders have agreed to get vaccinated.

The state is next looking to vaccinate in congregate settings, in conjunction with CVS and Walgreens. Residents of 5 Admirals Way got their first vaccination shot on Monday. Large-scale vaccinations may take place during Phase 2, and the Burke School is being considered as a vaccination site.

Dr. Xerras added that the vaccination phases are being used in the hospital as well, starting with providers and moving into the patient population.

Corinna Culler asked whether vaccinations have occurred in long-term care facilities. Paula McHatton confirmed that they had.

Emmanuel Tellez wondered how the Board of Health should address vaccine hesitancy. Corinna Culler suggested getting through the reports and come back to this afterwards.

City Solicitor Cheryl Watson Fisher – City Administrative Update

- A flier for the 35 4th Street testing site is going out. The hours will be extended at this site, and the site is indoors. The Suffolk Downs drive through site is easily accessible as well.
- The City has made an offer to fill the Public Health Director position and is awaiting acceptance from the candidate. The new director should be on board in time for the February Board of Health meeting.
- There was a second round of rental assistance provided funding through a lottery system last week.

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- The legal services clinic is ongoing and helps people facing potential eviction and helps people apply for rental assistance as well.
- Watson Fisher also noted that she shared the MWRA presentation with the Board.

The Chelsea Police Department cited El Corral on Broadway for COVID violations. The allegations are all COVID related – over occupancy, no social distancing etc. The restaurant owners will appear before the Licensing Board at their February meeting. The Licensing Board provides continuous updates to restaurants on the COVID-related regulations.

Allen Jackson asked how interested persons would find out about the legal clinic. Cheryl Watson Fisher responded that this information is on the Planning Board’s website and the clinic has a website which she will forward to the Board. The clinic is located near on Arlington Street near the La Colaborativa food pantry.

Corinna Culler asked what the process is regarding violations. Watson Fisher explained that the Licensing Division would get the police report, and the matter would then go to a disciplinary hearing. At this hearing, the restaurant can have their license suspended or hours reduced. The restaurant can still operate while waiting for the hearing.

Allen Jackson asked whether there were any updates on the police department issuing citations. Watson Fisher stated that the City does not want to fine people but would rather educate them on the COVID-19 regulations. There has only been one citation issued thus far which was for a property owner throwing parties in violation of the COVID protocols. Restaurants are subject to losing their liquor licenses and license to operate if they continue to violate the COVID regulations.

Emmanuel Tellez wondered if billiards playing would be allowed under the current COVID restrictions. Watson Fisher recalled that the COVID regulations do not allow music and singing but did not recall whether the regulations specifically addressed billiards. Mike Sheridan noted that there are only two people playing in each game, and the billiards table is 12 feet long.

Watson Fisher later noted that the City recently gave \$25,000 to St. Luke’s for cremation or burial services for families making final arrangements for people who died due to COVID-19.

Cris Alonso, Public Health Researcher – Results of the Community Impact Survey

Cris Alonso presented the results of the community impact survey, the goal of which was to understand the social, economic, and psychological impacts of COVID-19 on Chelsea residents. Highlights included:

- There were 365 participants, and approximately 50% of respondents did not complete high school in their country of origin. 81% of respondents were women.
- Nearly half of respondents had lost their job.
- 33% reported a health problem, 50% had non-communicable diseases, and 10% had no health insurance.
- Around 55% believe in a conspiracy theory about COVID-19, and 25% believed COVID-19 was a ploy to influence the election.
- About 40% of respondents have never been tested for COVID-19, and around 22% of respondents had contracted COVID.

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- 83% of interviewees used food pantries. Respondents noted that using the food pantries allowed them to spend money on other things like housing.
- About 25% of respondents reported being “more depressed” or having “more anxiety.” Essential workers and people who owe more than one month of rent were more likely to be depressed. Young adults (ages 18-30) were more likely to suffer anxiety and were more likely to be in therapy.
- 33% of respondents thought COVID giving them more family time was a positive outcome of the pandemic.

Alonso noted that families often shared their food pantry items with other family and neighbors in need. She also noted that pantries were a big help in helping people pay rent, and that many people trusted “God’s plan” – there was a lot of reliance on churches for support during the pandemic.

She also noted that respondents had a sense of pride, belonging and appreciation for being part of the Chelsea community and being able to access services.

Paula McHatton, Public Health Nurse

There were no reported cases of tuberculosis or influenza this month.

The North Suffolk Public Health Collaborative will be vaccinating first responders at the Rumney Marsh School in Revere. Local and state media will be at the first clinic. Dr. Xerras and Paula McHatton will be there to help vaccinate first responders. Chelsea will be receiving vaccinations for residents shortly.

As of 1/12/2021, Chelsea had 6,911 confirmed COVID-19 cases including 64 new cases.

The positivity rate increased from 10.74% to 11.5%. The statewide rate is around 7%-8%.

The incidence rate decreased from 125.4/100,000 the previous week to 113.6/100,000.

Public Comments

Cheryl Watson Fisher presented Mark Nadow and Mike Sheridan of Chelsea Station Restaurant who were requesting a waiver to the bar seating order the Board passed in December. Watson Fisher noted that the Director of Inspectional Services was not able to visit the restaurant before the meeting.

The Board received pictures and a diagram of the bar area. Sheridan stated that the area can accommodate 16 seats but would be scaled back to three groups of two seats each and would be spaced 6.5 feet apart. Because of the way the bar is designed, there would be more than six feet between the server and customer. The bar service is very popular with customers, he said.

Corinna Culler asked for clarification on how the server and patron would be six feet apart. Sheridan responded that the bar itself is nearly four feet wide, and when you consider the equipment behind the bar, there will be six feet between the patron and server. Sheridan noted the bar is designed for dining and is wider than a normal bar. He noted there is very limited contact between the server and patron. Dr. Xerras noted the diagram is not to scale.

Corinna Culler suggested deferring to the inspector who would review the setup in person. Emmanuel Tellez supported this idea and added that he would be concerned in allowing the waiver due to current state of COVID-19 spread in Chelsea and concerns about whether the restaurant had adequate

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ventilation. Sheridan noted that the restaurant is less than five years old, and has a newer HVAC system and high ceilings. He added that since August they have had no issues with COVID spread.

Cheryl Watson Fisher discussed the idea of having a table between the patron and the bar as a solution. Sheridan commented that was not a viable solution because he received negative patron feedback when they implemented this idea previously. They considered installing plexiglass, but it was cost prohibitive for other restaurants.

Cheryl Watson Fisher suggested approving the request pending approval of the city inspector. The motion would be to approve/disapprove the request following a physical inspection by Inspectional Services. The inspection would need to confirm the proposed bar set up follows current COVID-19 regulations.

Corinna Culler moved and Dr. Xerras seconded a motion to approve the waiver and allow bar seating provided that the Building Inspector deems the bar seating is compliant with statewide COVID-19 standards which includes six feet distance between customers and staff.

The motion passed on a unanimous voice vote.

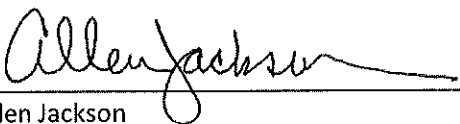
Next Meeting

Tuesday, February 9 at 5:30pm, virtually.

The Board discussed the agenda for the next meeting and items members would like updates on, including vaccine hesitancy.

The meeting adjourned at 7:25pm.

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Allen Jackson

2/10/2021
Date