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TOWN OF NORTH READING
Massachusetts

Board of Health

TOWN CLERK
NORTH READING, MA
North Reading Board of Health Meeting Minutes
February 22, 2021
Teleconference/Virtual

Members Present: Gary Hunt, Chairman
Karen Martin
Pamela Vath

Others Present:

Robert Bracey, Health Agent North Reading	Michael Gilleberto Town Administrator
Stephanie Connolly	Donna Hovey
Representative Mr. Jones	Steven O'Leary
Senator Mr. Tarr	Ms. Manupelli
Mr. Stuto	Mrs. Gonzalez
Mr. Wallner	

7:00 PM

Mr. Gary Hunt opened the meeting.

Minutes

Previous minutes have been sent for review.

New Business:

Public Comment:

COVID – 19 UPDATE AND VACCINATION UPDATE FROM BOARD OF HEALTH

Ms. Manupelli thanked Senator Bruce Tarr for being in attendance and also Representative Brad Jones.

Mr. Gilleberto asked the Chair of the Board of Health, Mr. Hunt to introduce the board and their team.

Mr. Hunt - we're here tonight to talk to you about the COVID-19 crusade that we have been waging since March 2020. Mr. Hunt introduced the board and health department. A mixture of volunteers and town employees. The Board - Mr. Gary Hunt, Chair, Ms. Pamela Vath and Karen Martin. The Health Department - Mr. Bob Bracey, Mrs. Stephanie Connolly and the new Public

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Health Nurse Ms. Donna Hovey replacing Pamela Vath. Mr. Hunt acknowledged Pam Vath and her commitment to the Town. Several stints as town nurse, many people aware of her dedication.

Mr. Hunt also acknowledge Chief Murphy, Mr. Gilleberto and Mr. O'Leary for their contributions during this time.

Ms. Vath gave an update on COVID numbers. A total of 1026 patients to date with 18 new this week. 18 is different than the higher weekly numbers we had previously been seeing. After Christmas we had an average of 13 patients per day, then dropped to 8 patients a day, then two weeks after Christmas we had 17 patients per day. That increase was anticipated due to the holidays. It's been very busy. BOH has been fortunate to have help of those in town hall who have been doing contact tracing and notifications. Mr. Hunt acknowledged support of school department a major effort on their part as well as volunteers.

Mr. Bracey offered a clinic update. The Board of Health has met frequently since March and receives regular updates from the Department of Public Health.

The Health Department hosted first responder vaccination clinics and have set up clinics weekly at Hillview for residents 75+ continuing this week. Next week will open to 65+ then will move on to 2nd doses for those who received first doses at Hillview.

Mr. O'Leary asked Mr. Bracey to give an update regarding second doses. There had been confusion and a most recent update from this past Friday,

Mr. Bracey spoke on his communications with the State and how it was unclear if the Town would be receiving additional vaccinations. This past Friday, the State confirmed that North Reading would be given enough vaccine to administer second doses to those who had received their first dose at the clinic. Town volunteers will be contacting residents with second dose appointment information within the next few days.

Ms. Manupelli asked if the clinics would be held in North Reading. Mr. Bracey confirmed that the clinics are being held at the Hillview in North Reading. Ms. Manupelli asked about the number of dosages the Town receives each week. Mr. Bracey responded that due to the limited amount being available by the DPH, the town will only receive per 100 per week. At this time in order to meet the need to vaccinate all those that we had previously vaccinated, we will require 370 vaccines. Mrs. Gonzalez inquired about the priority of 2nd doses versus new doses. Mr. O'Leary asked Mr. Bracey to explain about the memorandum received from the Department of Public Health. Mr. O'Leary continued that first doses to communities such as North Reading would cease, but there was a commitment made to have second doses available to those already

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vaccinated at Hillview. Mr. O'Leary mentioned he felt it important that Mr. Hunt and the Health Department were in attendance to give the board an update on what has transpired as well as our legislative officials Representative Jones and Senator Tarr. The State has determined that local clinics like North Reading will no longer have vaccines available.

Mr. Bracey discussed a memorandum received from the Executive Office of Secretary Sauders. Second doses would be available for those who have received their first vaccination. Moving forward it appears based on limited availability that the State is moving towards regional and or State clinics. The Town will not be receiving any additional doses after those needed for second doses.

Ms. Manupelli asked the Legislative delegation to speak on the matter. Mr. Hunt asked for a moment to speak about the evolution of the situation. Mr. Hunt mentioned the town's Emergency Preparedness plan. Time, energy resources devoted to a plan only to be told the town's services were no longer needed. Many of the BOH in the Commonwealth feel betrayed by the treatment of the Department of Public Health. This wasn't something we took lightly.

Representative Jones mentioned second dosing and that there is a commitment that a second dose will be given to the town for everyone who received the first dose in North Reading. Frustration lies with miscommunication, lack of communication and changing communication at all levels from the federal to state and from the state to municipalities. The base of the issues are relative to the supply of the vaccine to the commonwealth and to all of the States. Our preferences would always be to remain local, especially with the most vulnerable population. Challenges of getting the vaccinations are difficult and we hear it on a daily and nightly basis. The message is received from North Reading and other local communities that there is a strong preference to keep this local. Ms. Manupelli asked Rep Jones to clarify that the 270 that have already been vaccinated would receive second doses. Rep Jones stated that to his understanding the 270 that North Reading have given first doses that a commitment was made for those second doses. Going forward when you get your first dose you will get your appointment for the second dose. Ms. Manupelli asked about remaining residents wanting to be vaccinated. Would they have to go to a regional center? Do you foresee it coming back to local boards? Rep Jones would hope that, but only if level of supply is far greater than we have right now. Rep Jones mentioned good things on the Horizon and Johnson & Johnson coming out with single dose. Pharmacies get allocation from the Federal Government. VA gets a distribution as well.

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Senator Tarr stated that the topic is important and they are working everyday on issues around vaccines. Important to hear from those on the front line. Thank you to members of the BOH and Health Director for their work. This has been a long road. We have capacity in Massachusetts to be vaccinating even more through resources established through the emergency management plan at the local level. We could be vaccinating over 300,000 people in a week but only getting enough vaccine for 130,000. State government has to make difficult choices of allocating lesser amounts of product. Also a balance of trying to get to as many people as possible in some concentrated sites, but the other side of that balance is vulnerable populations who are unable to go to a "super vaccination site". Unless we see greater amounts of vaccine coming into the State, it's not likely that individual communities will be able to conduct vaccination programs for first doses in the way that they have. It's reasonable to have a conversation about a cluster of communities might be able to do something locally. We are committed to pursuing that idea. We understand the preference is to continue to be local in the community. There are a lot of conversations going on and it is a very fluid situation. The decision to stop providing 100 dose batches to communities seemed to happen very quickly. We don't know what could happen next week or after that. If we saw substantial increase in amount of vaccine we could make a strong case for going back to allocations for individual communities. Ms. Manupelli asked if it would behoove us to connect with neighboring communities to discuss a regional site. Sen. Tarr said that discussion is happening. Sen Tarr and Rep Jones to discuss with the DPH, what target we would need to hit. The ultimate goal being to get certification. Rep Jones that on top of a certification, we would want a comfort level that doses of the vaccine would come through. Don't want to do all the work of setting up a site to not receive enough doses. Need to ensure level of communication is better and comfort level of commitment being met.

Mr. O'Leary noted that NR was on the cusp of being regional site through DPH only to have rug pulled out. Can't imaging pharmacies doing what we've been able to do with observations and numbers safely. Hospitals have been cut off, doctors clinics have been cut off. Mr. O'Leary asked Mr. Bracey to comment on discussion about creating a regional site. Hillview has capacity to do 1000+ per week and we were preparing to do that.

Mr. Bracey commented on conversation with the DPH in February to make Hillview a regional site. A plan was submitted to vaccinate 1000-1400 per week. Plan was shelved due to vaccine shortage. Mr. O'Leary commented that we could easily meet the need. The needs of the most vulnerable in our community have not been met yet. It's unfortunate. Hope that local communities would be allowed to at least meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Rep Jones and Sen Tarr have been very supportive and will be very vocal with the administration. Sen Tarr

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made a point of clarification that Walgreens and CVS get their allocations from the Federal Government so they are not coming through the Commonwealth of MA allocations. Mr. O'Leary commented that the Federal government bypassing the States creates confusion. Sen Tarr commented that there is work being done on the accountability.

Mr. Stuto commented on his personal experience that his father received a call from MGH canceling his vaccination appointment due to doses being pulled from the hospital. He asked for clarification on the decision to pull from hospitals. Mr. Stuto also asked about increasing the tracking on doses to places such as Walgreens. He mentioned the issues with appointment scheduling at those locations. Online system shows first dose appointments but none available for second dose. Is there any way for State to step in. It just doesn't make any sense. Sen Tarr re Walgreens commented that there were widely reported issues with that site which adds a level of concern. In regards to the shift and reallocation of vaccines, thinking was that larger sites could get to a larger number of people faster to increase numbers of those being vaccinated more quickly. Explanation far from perfect. Allocation to larger sites gets to more people faster.

Sen Tarr mentioned that distribution of vaccine is being reviewed on a daily basis. Rep Jones mentioned that his understanding is that hospitals are more in pause than permanent state. A lot of this is fighting about supply. Rep Jones is hopeful for Johnson & Johnson a single shot to become available to the Local level. Nothing we have seen in the past year has been set in stone. It changes from week to week, day to day. Hopefully hospitals are able to provide some level of support. Mr. Stuto quoted a physician acquaintance describe vaccine system as the hunger games. Sen Tarr commented that we will relay your concerns to those making these decisions.

Mrs. Gonzalez commented thank you to BOH and Health Director. Her in-laws were able get into Hillview. She is very reassured they are able to get 2nd dose.

Rep Jones commented that hopefully changes come in the next 6 weeks and we're able to build on what is already on-going. A hopeful feature on the horizon includes a "select your seat" feature hoping to add to registration that would hold the appointments for a period of time while registering. Ms. Manupelli stated to use a Massachusetts IT vendor for that. We have the best of the best right here.

Ms. Donna Hovey spoke and thanked the Select Board, Sen. Tarr and Rep Jones. While in the situation for a short period of time she recognizes the commitment to this program by BOH staff and Health Department. Ms. Hovey expressed concerns for the elderly population. Spoke that they were so appreciative to go to Hillview and that they were concerned about having to go elsewhere. Elderly with comorbidities and their ability to contract other ailments. There is an ethical situation as well. We have a responsibility to our residents and we're not being given

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support to provide that support and care to residents. The entire team has done an excellent job setting the site up, the process is smooth and easily expandable. Don't want to lose that for our community.

Mr. Gilleberto mentioned the staff from the council on aging and the feedback from the elderly population. He recognized senior center staff and their work assisting residents to get appointments and by assisting at the clinics. Since the beginning of the pandemic we have had open discussion and honest feedback from Sen. Tarr and Rep. Jones. I am on the phone with them regularly and they have always stepped up and advocated and told us when what we wanted would be a challenge.

Mr. O'Leary applauded the effort of Pam Vath and her work for the Town for many years and during the pandemic and her willingness to continue to serve. Mr. Gilleberto continued by recognizing Mrs. Stephanie Connolly from the Health Department. He also noted that the

Public Health Nurse has been in transition. Mrs. Vath has risen to the challenge. Agreed to stay on during transition, two years ago. She came back to serve in the best interest of the community. She has taken the call three times to stay on. This is a great opportunity to recognize Mrs. Vath and to also introduce and welcome Mrs. Hovey.

Ms. Manupelli offered Sen Tarr and Rep Jones the opportunity to comment further. Rep Jones commented that the Town Administrator understates how often they speak. He reaches out and they always try to get back to him with an answer. Even if it is an answer he doesn't want to hear. Rep Jones is always happy to be of help on the vaccine front and other issues we face. Ms. Manupelli commented that we think we have expressed that the Board would like to keep this in the local hands. Sen Tarr added his thanks to all members of the board and complimented Mr. Gilleberto as a representative on behalf of the Board. Sen Tarr recognized Mrs. Vath and Mrs. Hovey.

Mrs. Pam Vath was recognized and thanked Mr. Gilleberto and the Select Board. Mrs. Vath offered additional thank yous to Mr. Bracey, Chief Murphy, Stephanie Connolly, Donna Hovey, Mary Prenney, Amy L, Marcy Bailey, Jen Ford, Laura Miranda and a special thank you to the school nurses. Proud to be able to say I will continue with my BOH position. Thank you to everyone for all of their thoughts and well wishes.

Ms. Manupelli turned it over to colleagues for comment.

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Mr. O'Leary - That was the best 5 hrs a week ever contracted. Pam, thank you for your willingness to serve. Recognized the members of the BOH and all of their efforts.

Mr. Wallner - I'm learning tonight a lot about what has been going on and it's a lot deeper than I imagined. Appreciate everything that the board has done.

Mr. Stuto - Thank everyone who put in a lot of time. Hopefully get back to doses at the local level.

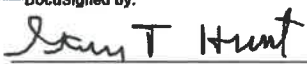
Mrs. Gonzalez - Thank you to everyone and Rep. Jones and Sen. Tarr for keeping everyone in loop. Thank you to Mrs. Vath for years of service and thank you Mrs. Hovey for joining us.


Mrs. Manupelli - Ditto thank you to Mrs. Vath and welcome to Mrs. Hovey. Thanks you to the Board of Health and to Mr. O'Leary the liaison.

Mr. Hunt - Town is blessed to have colleagues at BOH. We didn't expect this pandemic. We responded accordingly. Recognize the Town Administrator Select Board and Chief Murphy for support.

Next Board of Health Meeting is scheduled for 3/18/2021 @ 7pm.

The business between the Select Board and Board of Health concluded and members logged off the Zoom.

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Gary Hunt

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Pamela Vath

DocuSigned by:

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Karen Martin

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