Board of Health Minutes September 21, 2021 9:30 am Zoom Meeting

Call to Order: Chairman Ron Kelter called the meeting to order. Other members present: Jodi Stetson, Fred Vohr, FRCOG Health Agent, Randy Crochier, and Town Administrator, Terry Narkewicz.

Acceptance of Minutes: Ron presented a motion to accept the meeting minutes of September 8, 2021. Fred seconded the motion. Jodi noted one minor correction needed. Minutes were accepted.

Appointments:

Attorney Kevin Parsons, 33 Bridge Street RE: Indoor Mask Mandate – Kevin began the conversation by recognizing the Board of Health for their volunteer service to the town particularly during the Covid pandemic. While he recognized that there are arguments to be made on both sides, he wanted to relay some of the conversations that he has had with local businesses regarding the Board’s recent mask mandate and make members aware of the impact that their decisions have on local businesses in town. Mr. Parsons believes that the mask mandate is “inappropriate and unwarranted”. He stated that a number of businesses in the food service industry are afraid to speak up for fear of retaliation. Mr. Parsons is concerned that the Board of Health implemented the mandate based on nationwide statistics and not what is in the best interests of Shelburne. He made reference to data extracted from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts noting that of the 10,622 clusters, three were traced to food establishments and sixty-three were traced to restaurants. He stressed that employers are struggling to find and maintain help and the mask mandate is making it more difficult. He indicated that the mandate was the final straw for former Foxtown owner, Judy Grader (stating that both her cook and a waitress quit when they learned of the mandate). While Mr. Parsons understands and appreciates the need to protect the public, he does not believe the mandate is warranted and requested that members of the Board of Health rescind it.

Chairman, Ron Kelter asked members of the Board if there was interest in rescinding the mandate. Member, Jodi Stetson stated that Covid is still present regardless of ones’ vaccination status and masks have proven to be an effective means of preventing the spread. Shelburne has gone from zero to four cases in a short period of time and if preventative measures are not in place, the numbers will continue to climb. Jodi also indicated that the mandate does not include any enforcement provisions however, should the Board of Health receive numerous complaints that might change.

Attorney Marcie Smith of Buckland indicated that she too has had a number of conversations with businesses from Buckland and Shelburne. While she appreciates that the Board of Health wants to keep its residents and visitors safe, the mask mandate in its current state is basically an urgent recommendation. She encouraged members of the Board of Health to consider revising the language on the posters/signs to reflect a recommendation rather than a mandate and to include language that excludes individuals with medical exemptions.

Before the discussion ended, Mr. Parsons recommended that if the Board decides to do nothing, they need to convey that there is no enforcement should individuals and/or businesses decide not to comply. He further suggested that the Board begin thinking about a future policy for relaxing the mandate.

Closing comments by Board of Health members:

Ron suggested that the Board of Health meet in a couple of weeks to look at trends and reassess the mask mandate. Fred Vohr stressed that Covid is a highly contagious disease and believes that it is important to keep masks in place. He agreed that there is a lot of inadequate data but reported that the leading cause of deaths amongst law enforcement in the Commonwealth in the first 6 months of the year was due to Covid. Both Fred and Jodi agreed to meet again in two weeks to reassess the Covid trend in the area.

Health Agent Update: Food service licenses have been issued to the new owners of the Foxtown Diner. Randy reported that the new owners hope to reopen the business sometime later this week. The Cooperative Public Health Service District interviewed four applicants for the Community Health Education position and the third Health Agent position should be filled soon.

Covid-19 Update: Presently there are four cases in Shelburne.

DEP’s “PurpleAir” Sensor Grant Program – the application deadline for this particular grant is October 1st. Ron agreed to work with Randy to submit an application if members were in agreement. Jodi indicated that she had attended Buckland’s Board of Health meeting and they intend to apply for five sensors. She thinks it would be wasteful for two neighboring communities to apply given the close proximity of our towns. Both Ron and Randy agreed with Jodi.

*Fred left the meeting at 10:30 am.*

Public Comment:

Laurie Wheeler indicated that when the Covid Task Force was active, the library was instrumental in providing valuable information to the public via their website, bulletin boards, handouts, etc. She expressed a willingness to continue to provide that service as needed. She also indicated that there has been some preliminary discussion about whether to host Moonlight Magic this year and asked for some feedback. Given the unpredictability of the pandemic and the proposed event two months away, neither Randy nor members of the Board of Health could provide any insight.

Next Meeting: - The date for the next Board of Health meeting will be set once Ron has had an opportunity to speak with Fred regarding his schedule.

Adjournment: Jodi presented a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:35 am. Ron seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.