

BOARD OF HEALTH

Zoom Meeting <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88585170991?pwd=RUIWOFVBYzNuOHZOSmZRQlFrRE9Mdz09>

ID: 885 8517 0991 Passcode: 717776

FINAL January 13, 2022 Minutes FINAL

BOH Members Present: Dr. Joanne Levin; Dr. Suzanne Smith; Dr. Cynthia Suopis; and Dr. Laurent Levy
Staff: Merridith O’Leary, Director and Kelly Constantine, BOH Clerk, Vivian Franklin, Public Health Nurse, Amy Hutchins, Assistant Director

Public Comment Session: No Public Comments

- I. Meeting opened** January 13, 2022 at 5:35 pm by Dr. Levin, who announced the meeting was being recorded.
Motion: Motion made to open the meeting by Dr. Levy, seconded by Dr. Suopis. All in favor (4-0).
- II. Presentation: Vivian Franklin, Public Health Nurse** - Ms. Franklin reported that since March 2020 Northampton has had a total of 2,856 COVID-19 cases. In the past 14 days, we have had 788 new cases reported. The 14-day incidence rate is now up to 200 cases per day per hundred thousand people, and the state is reporting our test positivity rate in Northampton as 8.3%.
- III. Discussion:** Dr. Levin indicated that this meeting is a continuation of the Board of Health meeting originally held on December 28, where there were three hours of public comment. All who raised their hand to speak at that meeting were heard. Dr. Levin said that all of the Board members are truly interested in the comments and opinions of those who live, work or study in Northampton. The comments are informative and the Board members often learn new perspectives on the issues, which may influence their deliberations. However, hate speech is never welcome. Dr. Levin indicated that the Health Department and the Board members have also received hundreds of pages of emails, which were distributed to all of the members of the Board.

Dr. Levin pointed out that the agenda, date and time of all Board of Health meetings are posted on the City website at least 48 hours prior to meeting in the agendas and minutes section. City Councilors often alert their wards of upcoming meetings, and the date of the next meeting is usually discussed near the end of a meeting, so nothing is done in secret.

Dr. Levin opened up the discussion of a possible vaccine requirement for certain establishments and advocacy of vaccine by talking about the science of COVID-19. A power point slideshow of MA and CDC data was presented. The vaccines have been extremely effective at preventing severe COVID-related disease and death. In the Spring of 2020, it appears that vaccination significantly decreased disease transmission. However, we learned during the Delta wave starting in the summer of 2021 that vaccines were not as protective against transmission. Now that we are in the Omicron wave, we are seeing many breakthrough infections, and we do not have the data to say whether vaccines significantly decrease transmission. We believe, though, that vaccination, especially combined with boosting, continues to protect from severe COVID-related disease and death.

Dr. Smith indicated that the rationale for a vaccine mandate that limits space only to those who are fully vaccinated would be to reduce or eliminate transmission, but unfortunately, the evidence to support this is lacking. Dr. Smith believes that a mandate would not be worth the effort. COVID vaccines are very

effective at reducing the risk of hospitalization and death; however, the explosion of breakthrough cases of fully vaccinated individuals demonstrates that the vaccines are less effective at reducing transmission, especially of the Omicron variant. A vaccine mandate would screen out uninfected, unvaccinated persons, but it would not screen out an asymptomatic, infectious person who is vaccinated. The intervention would not do what was intended. The responsibility for enforcing this, like the existing mask mandate, would fall on the employees of businesses that continue to be among those who are most severely battered by the pandemic and the Health Department, as Dr. Smith indicates, does not have the resources to help.

Dr. Smith summarized her points by saying that she thinks requiring vaccinations to enter specific establishments is unlikely to have the impact on reducing transmission that we would hope; it would be an additional burden on the business sector. It is a mandate that is likely to give a false sense of security to those who are vaccinated. Dr. Smith would hope that some businesses would choose to require vaccines to enter their premises as an added safety measure, and we should give these businesses our support for their extra efforts.

Dr. Levy indicated that he had read all the feedback from the public comments that were received. There were both comments against and in favor of the mandate, which were submitted by residents, visitors, business owners and employees, as well as some that seemingly had not been to Northampton before. Dr. Levy spoke to the managers of two local businesses, The Roost and the Dirty Truth, since they have instituted a vaccine mandate for entrance to their establishments. Both businesses reported no confrontation issues from patrons, though the Dirty Truth mentioned backlash on social media.

Dr. Suopis reminded the Board that the Senior Center vaccine mandate came from seniors using the center through public comment.

Dr. Levin checked with Attorney Seewald whether the subject of mandating vaccination can be brought up again in the future. Attorney Seewald said yes.

Meeting Closed: Motion to Close Meeting: Motion made to close the Board of Health meeting by Suzanne Smith, seconded by Cynthia Suopis. All in favor (4-0)

Meeting closed at 6:48 PM.

The next scheduled Board of Health Meeting: January 20, 2022
Kelly Constantine, BOH Clerk

BOARD OF HEALTH

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Meeting Document List

The following documents were available to the Board of Health during their scheduled meeting.

These documents are available for review at the:

Northampton Health Department, 212 Main Street, Northampton, MA 01060

- Meeting Agenda