

Wenham Board of Health Joint with Hamilton Board of Health
Meeting of September 14, 2020
Wenham Town Hall, 138 Main Street

Pursuant to the Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. Chapter 30 A, § 18-25, written notice posted by the Town Clerk and delivered to all Board members, a joint meeting of the Wenham Board of Health with the Hamilton Board of Health, was held Monday September 14, 2020 at 7 pm. Due to the COVID19 Virus pandemic, and restrictions concerning in-person gatherings ordered by the Governor, this meeting took place virtually on Zoom.

The Wenham Board of Health (BOH) makes regulations as it deems necessary for the public health and safety of the Town. The Wenham Board of Health is responsible for the enforcement of State Sanitary Codes, State Environmental Codes and Wenham Board of Health Regulations. Areas of responsibility include: septic systems, housing and dwelling units, food service establishments, private wells and recreational camps for children.

BOH members: Dr. Andrew Ting, Chair (2022); Gerald T. Donnellan (2021); Regina Baker (2023)

Wenham BOH call to order - With a quorum present, Dr. Ting called the Wenham BOH meeting to order at 7:22 pm.*
Board members present: Dr. Andrew Ting, Chair; Gerald Donnellan Not Present: Regina Baker
Also present: Jackie Bresnahan, Director of Administrative Services; Maribeth Ting, Public Health Nurse;
Catherine Tinsley, Recording Secretary

Hamilton BOH call to order - With a quorum present, Mr. Smith called the Hamilton BOH meeting to order at 7pm.
Board members present: David Smith, Chair; Christopher Small; Dr. Giselle Perez
Also Present: Leslie Whelan, Hamilton Health Agent; Not Present: Christine Lee, Director of Public Health Nurses
Maribeth Banios, Superintendent of Hamilton Wenham Regional School District (HWRSD)
Thomas Geary, HWRSD Facilities Director, HWR School Committee members Michelle Baily, Chair and Dana Allara;
Zoom attendees: 96

Abbreviations

DESE Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

DPH Department of Public Health

Mr. Smith proposed the agenda be taken out of order; the agenda was taken out of order with permission.
Mr. Smith opened the meeting with an introduction and guidelines for the meeting.

Mr. Smith's opening remarks reflected on the recent reaction of the community to the COVID 19 metrics documents created jointly by the HWBOH at the request of the school superintendent to help guide the district in selecting a learning model (in person, hybrid or remote) for reopening and operating the schools.

The boards first met on July 23 to discuss the thresholds for changing learning modes.

The metrics created were not a mandate or formal BOH order but limited to a for the superintendent's team in their decision-making process.

Mr. Smith went on to say that the metrics was consistent with the guidance that was promulgated by DESE & the DPH and prepared collaboratively by the BOH to provide guidance on the opening and operation of school during this ongoing pandemic and presented with the understanding that there is still a fluid situation and to be prepared to be flexible when making the decisions on the mode of learning at a particular time.

The metrics provides a frame work based on current knowledge and is subject to change based on scientific knowledge and medical guidance.

During this unprecedented time of a global pandemic, there is limited experience and historical data on which to base an approach.

The BOH are working to balance protecting the public health and safety and all the students, and staff with providing for the educational needs of the children. Mr. Smith stressed that this was uncharted territory, and the BOH were doing the best they could with the information they have, reminding the public they are a volunteer board that worked diligently for a month.

Mr. Smith observed DESE guidance was a chart with a set of numbers with no references or context. The Boards chose to be conservative and reduce the thresholds without knowing to what extent they were conservative or what margins of safety were incorporated.

Mr. Smith noted at least five public meetings were held on the metrics and the only input was to be conservative and air on the side of safety. The boards continue to check for new information.

Mr. Smith referenced the credible source of Harvard Global health Initiative upper level thresholds that were conservative and recommended moving from the yellow to the (red) category of 10 verses the HW BOH proposed threshold of 8, based on a 7-day rolling average of daily new cases per 100,000 population.

Mr. Smith reported that after several repeated requests to the DPH, the chief epidemiologist responded the basis for the lower threshold for moving from green to yellow of 4 was chosen at the time the state-wide level had stabilized slightly below 4 and they felt that number represented a reasonable longer term epidemiological metric target for monitoring covid status.

The BOH proposed threshold of moving from green to yellow was 3 was arbitrarily lower without any real epidemiological basis. The original metric draft included two additional metrics removed when the boards were criticized that the metrics was too complicated. Both have been recommended to be put back into the oral reports: Trends of percent test positivity and Trends of covid -19 patients in local hospitals.

This follows DESE recommendation to monitor beyond the average daily case incidents e.g. 4 or 8.

DESE released September 14 the guidance not to rely on a single numerical metric but to include the context of the bigger picture of what is the percent positivity, local hospitalization trends.

*Dr. Ting called the Wenham Board of Health meeting.

In closing, Mr. Smith mentioned he has received many emails, calls, letters, including from a Hamilton resident who is a credentialed expert in epidemiology and infectious diseases and voluntarily reviewed the BOH report. Dr. Steven LaRosa would be invited to speak later in the meeting.

- Covid-19 Update from Public Health Nurses

- Wenham - Ms. Ting reported that there were no new cases in Wenham since August 31. The total COVID -19 positive cases remains at 22.

DESE just released new guidance and updated the protocols about responding. Any single positive case of a student or teacher is to be reported by a designated person.

DPH rapid response covid-19 mobile testing is available to school districts if two or more students in a classroom or three or more in a cohort, or three percent, whichever is greater or three percent within a school. If there are that number of cases in any of those settings, DPH will work with the school.

There was an arbovirus report today (tick/ mosquito) and four new human west Nile virus cases in local counties.

Residents were encouraged to be mindful and wear long sleeves a use repellent with DEET.

- Hamilton - In the absence of the Public Nurse, Mr. Smith gave a brief update that Hamilton has one additional positive case in September for a total of 47 positive cases. The Public Nurse is following six people in quarantine.

Mr. Smith noted the positivity rate combine (Hamilton & Wenham) if less than one percent.

During May, the height of the pandemic in Essex County, the number of covid-19 positive cases in Beverly Hospital was more than 80 and North Shore Medical Center had more than 120 patients compared to today, Beverly Hospital has 4 and North shore medical Center has 7.

- Review all of the continuing efforts of the Boards to assess and update (1) the population numbers in the HWRSD Metrics spreadsheets, (2) the epidemiological basis for the DESE Covid Command "Metrics for Selecting a Learning Model", and (3) the latest Covid-19 data reports from DPH used as input to the Boards' metrics.

Ms. Ting spoke on the population data used by the BOH which were sourced from the UMASS Donoghue Institute. The Donahue Institute included the collage numbers in the total population data. The Town Clerks also include the college population. Therefore, the student population has always been included along with the case numbers.

Dr. Perez reiterated the importance that residents understand regarding, this pandemic, that there is no black or white but a lot of gray areas and to take one number in and of itself in isolation fails to take into consideration number of contextual factors which need to considered in conjunction with the matrix. Dr. Perez stressed that the BOH did not drive the closer of the schools. Dr. Perez voiced her concern with the amount vitriol in the community was concerning and that spreading of misinformation fuels anxiety and mistrust and as a result undermines the efforts of the BOH to effectively protect the public, and impacts the socio emotional health of the children, who learn from their parents and observe how adults handle challenging situations and encouraged trust the BOH are maintaining public safety.

Mr. Smith introduced Dr. LaRosa who spoke in more detail regarding the HWRSD decision to go to remote learning and commented on the DESE guidance and the use of data in the metrics prepared by the BOH and opined in person learning is acceptable and can take place in a pandemic, resilient teaching and learning spaces can be achieved. Dr. LaRosa explained COVID-19 is a disease of "hot spots", (large gatherings no face coverings) and that clusters do not adequately reflect the risk to a school population.

Approved 9.23.2020

Dr. Ting added the board based their decisions on what information was available and the fluidity of the pandemic will have an impact on the day to day decisions. Dr. Ting noted the town's situation as a small population and that a small change in the numerator compared to the denominator was significant and DESE recommended for hybrid learning between of 4 and 8 incidents for a hundred thousand of a rolling 14-day average and for school districts with multiple towns, DESE recommended just using a single town with the larger population (Hamilton) but the boards aggregated both towns so have a larger number. Changes in the learning mode will not be based on just numbers, instead consider trends, time intervals, characteristics of the numbers.

There was a consensus of the boards members to combine the two towns population.

Ms. Bailey, Ms. Ting and Ms. Banios contributed in the discussion that followed.

After a significant throughout discussion the Boards moved to change the numbers and provide an updated metrics/ documents in advance of their next meeting.

VOTE: Mr. Smith moved, and it was seconded, that the Hamilton Board of Health in the document entitled "COVID 19 METRICS FOR HWRSRD" and the accompanying Matrix, which were approved by vote of the Board at its August 26th meeting, be revised effective immediately as follows: (1) Change the 7-day rolling average daily cases per 100,000 numbers to be equal to the numbers specified in the August 11, 2020 DESE "Guidance for Districts and Schools on Interpreting DPH COVID-19 Metrics".

(2) Combine the Hamilton and Wenham numbers as a single community for the purposes of calculating the 7-day rolling average daily case numbers.

(3) And empower the Chairman to make those changes to the document and matrix and note them as "Revised per BoH Vote on September 14, 2020" and submit them immediately to the HWRSRD.

The motion carried unanimously by roll call vote. 3-0-0

Dr. Ting had reservations committing to DESE numbers in the future but asked that the chairs commit to meet quickly in the future to make decisions in a timely manner.

VOTE: Dr. Ting moved, and it was seconded, that the Wenham Board of Health in the document entitled "COVID 19 METRICS FOR HWRSRD" and the accompanying Matrix, which were approved by vote of the Board at its August 26th meeting, be revised effective immediately as follows: (1) Change the 7-day rolling average daily cases per 100,000 numbers to be equal to the numbers specified in the August 11, 2020 DESE "Guidance for Districts and Schools on Interpreting DPH COVID-19 Metrics".

(2) Combine the Hamilton and Wenham numbers as a single community for the purposes of calculating the 7-day rolling average daily case numbers.

(3) And empower the Chairman to make those changes to the document and matrix and note them as "Revised per BoH Vote on September 14, 2020" and submit them immediately to the HWRSRD.

The motion carried unanimously by roll call vote. 2-0-0

- Update from HWRSD leadership, if available

Ms. Banios gave a brief updated that DESE updated the guidance today and spoke in support of continuing to review current information and make changes to the metrics as recommended.

- Review residents' feedback from the September 3rd Public Forum regarding HWRSD Metrics

The boards reviewed a number of questions received at the forum and through emails, phone calls, etc. to address residents' concerns.

- Next meeting - Meetings will be scheduled as needed.

- Adjournment

The Hamilton Board of Health adjourned unanimously by roll call at 9:20pm.

The Wenham Board of Health adjourned unanimously by roll call at 9:20pm.

Respectfully Submitted By

Catherine Tinsley

9.16.2020