



OBSERVER REPORT

BOARD OF HEALTH - 3-24-2025

Hybrid Meeting - Recorded

LWVM Observer: Tom Krueger

Members in Attendance: Andrew Petty, Tom McMahon, Tom Massaro, Helaine Hazlett

Creating a Healthier Marblehead - Dr. Massaro is continuing to meet with groups to get financial support for the proposed study and hopes to report progress at the next meeting.

Bird Flu H5N1

Dr. Massaro presented a slide presentation with the title "Why We Should Care About H5N1". He felt it was important to keep informing the community on a regular basis. He cited a Boston Globe article written by Ashish Jha, a former dean of the School of Public Health at Brown University, in which he warned that only a small number of mutations of the bird flu would be needed to make human transmission possible. The COVID pandemic taught public health people that it is important to "over communicate" about what is happening.

Dr. Massaro proceeded to show slides explaining what viruses are: They are nonliving obligate parasites containing small packets of genetic material that are much smaller than cells. They enter a cell and "take over" the machinery to make multiple copies of themselves. When the cell is overloaded, the cell dies and the viruses are released. From there they can "mutate", i.e., make small but significant changes in their DNA or RNA. He explained how they attach to cells and invade cells. The actual H and N refer to proteins that are on the outside shells of viruses. H5N1 has been a known virus since 1996 but was seldom seen, and so far does not seem to attack humans frequently. A series of slides followed - what we don't know about H5N1, what we should expect.

At this point Mr. Petty related that he works with the MA DPH on a regular basis. If a person becomes possibly infected, they go to their doctor who tests them and the results will go to the state health department and then the local HD. As far as infectiousness of a virus, if it does "jump" to humans, it is not known currently. But, for a sense of possibilities, COVID when it was first discovered had an RO (the reproduction number = the average number of people who will contract a disease from one person) was 2.4. With future mutations this jumped to RO of 3 and to 5 with the Delta strain. (For reference mumps has an RO = 12, and measles RO =18). Mr. Petty went further to explain that wastewater is tested for H5N1 and has recent been found in some samples.

Dr. Massaro talked about sharing the reality of the situation in understandable terms which would help with public debate about possible next steps. Cost and benefit of action or inaction could be debated with consideration of morbidity and mortality, social and economic effects, and the impact on different groups of people.

Mr. Petty finally related that the yearly flu vaccine is formulated by what flu types have been most prevalent and now includes 2-4 different types each year.

Charter Update

Dr. Massaro, who is also a member of the Charter Committee, updated the other board of health members about the recent discussions. The committee is now on draft A, chapter 5 and the discussion concerned the transfer station. The key question is "should it be a stand-alone entity or continue as part of the health department." (A draft organizational chart showed it as separate.) The charter committee seemed to be leaning towards the former, whereas the BOH members and Mr. Petty clearly saw that it should stay where it is. Mr. Petty will likely speak at their next meeting.

Directors Report

Budget FY26 - Mr. Petty reported on the status of the HD budget. The town of MHD is likely to have a shortfall of \$1.7M. Mr. Petty was asked to cut \$340K from the waste department, but this will be discussed further with the finance director. The curbside trash and recycling are paid out of the general fund whereas waste at the transfer station (weigh and pay) generates money that goes to a revolving fund which helps to pay for employees and equipment. Waste disposal cost \$127/ton, but as the year progresses if the town has to "overspend" because of volume, money from the revolving fund is used. But this is all very close. Mr. Petty said that FY26 will be "very close".

There will be a budget hearing before the Finance Committee on 3/31 with the discussion of a possible short fall. At this point the waste disposal budget projection to be presented is for \$2,943,000 (last year was \$2,840,000). The health department, which all acknowledged is lean and underfunded, is \$326,000. (This amount only allowed the BOH to give \$60K to the Marblehead Counsel Center versus \$120K.) Both proposed budgets were passed by the BOH.

Transfer Station Update - Things are moving along with repairs and installation of the new compactor. The commercial use of the transfer station has been closed since January. All commercial and residential trash disposal has required adjustments. Mr. Petty said all need to be patient as improvements are made to the facility.

Regulations (Tobacco, Tattoo/Permanent Makeup) - the final steps are in motion and a public hearing will be scheduled with a 2-week notice when the steps are finalized.

Other - the public health nurse, who has been excellent and worked with Mr. Petty for the past 12 years, has given her notice and will be leaving in one year. Mr. Petty's contract will be discussed in an executive session before the next meeting on 4/8.