



OBSERVER REPORT

Board of Health: 1/05/21 LWVM Observer Tom Krueger
Members in Attendance via Zoom: Andrew Petty, Todd Belf-Becker, Sec. Andrea Flaxer, Michelle Gottlieb, Helaine Hazlett

Meeting Posted 48 hours in advance
Meeting held in a Handicapped Accessible Location - not applicable
Public allow to Participate in the Meeting - yes via Zoom.

COVID UPDATE:

Andrew reported a series of meeting (12/30/20, 1/4/21) convened by the mayor of Salem, Kim Driscoll, including mayors, town administrators, health directors, etc. from the surrounding communities (including Gloucester, Peabody, Beverly, Marblehead, Salem, Swampscott, Nahant, etc.) to discuss the possibilities of a regional approach to “roll backs.” This is in response to the surge of COVID cases and impending lack of availability of hospital beds. The presidents of Northshore (Salem) and Beverly Hospitals reported that their ICU’s on 12/30 were at 93-95% capacity with Beverly having 62 patients and Salem 60 patients in ICU beds. (Salem has been able to transfer some of the sickest COVID patients to Boston hospitals, but these hospitals will soon be at capacity.) The hospitals are at their breaking points, and this affects or will affect the care for conditions other than COVID. The towns need to change behavior so that the hospitals can run smoothly. Not all the regional towns are in the same position so that some advocated for extreme roll backs (restaurants, schools, etc.) while others are not. A letter was drafted (paraphrasing) saying what the current conditions noted above are, with worry about the future, and at this time not advocating a regional roll back, but will continue to monitor and revisit the situation. Andrew asked the board if they would like to sign this letter (it is not an option to edit.) After brief discussion the Board agreed they would sign the letter, and Andrew separately will also sign.

The plan is to continue all COVID safety messaging, although without a special plan for doing so. Andrew said that during the regional meetings above there was much discussion. Lynn has already rolled back to Phase 2 Step 2. Others wondered if this was enough of a roll back. Andrew pointed out that for all those interested that the statistics for cases, hospital beds, hospital capacity, etc., this information is all available on the website, [mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov).

The Board discussion continued with a question about what's the plan if the hospitals are at full capacity. Andrew reiterated that as of 12/30 Salem could still send some patients to Boston hospital but didn't know how long this could continue. Mayor Magee of Lynn had reported that Lynn had 145 cases in one day. Andrew said the hospitals are working on a plan, but said that people going to hospital for other reasons might not get the care they would expect.

In MHD the case count from 1/4 was 735, (12/18-558, 12/24-653), active case 121, confirmed deaths 31, with the distribution spread across all ages but the largest increase in 0-19 years of 34. The number of tests in the past 14 days was 4047, with a 3.98% positive rate, in raw numbers representing 20% of the population of Marblehead. Why? Possible reasons are symptoms, travel, or plans to be a loved one. Andrew repeated that all need to stop and think about how their actions might affect others. At this point the average incidence rate for MHD is 51.8/100,000, a RED zone number. The percent of test positives at 3.98% are still in the yellow zone. Most of the surrounding towns are now in the red zone.

In MHD, the health department has been dealing with huge case load as well as working on vaccinations. A regional cadre of nurses and health workers will be operating clinics for vaccinating first responders. The CARES act ran out on 12/31/20 and department spent most of the money but has some funds for overtime work.

Regarding vaccinations, they have begun and will include first responders (fire, police, EMT) new week. The vaccination rollout will be phased, see [mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov), as to the phase 1-3. (If one feels as though they may not be in the correct phase, one appeal this.) Andrew reminded all that just because vaccinations are beginning, we can't give up on all the other practices: masking, social distancing, hand washing, limiting contacts, etc. The vaccine rollout will be along the CDC guidelines. It is likely that one will be required to sign up on line.

In regards to the new COVID variant, first identified in the UK in mid-December, it was probably already in the US because of extensive travel between the two countries. It has been identified in a number of states (Colorado, Florida, etc.) We are still trying to understand how it is spread, clinical implications, etc; what we do know is that it is much easier to spread. Yet, another variant of COVID has been identified in South Africa; we don't know much about that yet.

Andrew reminded all about the wealth of information on [mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov) about COVID from case and hospital dashboards, to information for business, employees, etc.

In a question and discussion period after Andrew's presentation, 1) a board member wanted to remind residents that if they have a health emergency, they SHOULD go to the hospital. She opined that perhaps calling 911 would be better than just walking in. 2) In the phase stage for vaccinations, a person will need a doctor's note stating they have a comorbid condition. 3) As far as who will administer vaccines, these include boards of health, hospitals, and anywhere you have previously received, say the flu vaccine. 4) Regarding contact tracing in MHD, the HD is getting assistance from the state CTC (contact tracing collaborative) and will be shifting more to them as vaccination needs increase. One board member asked if there were "cracks" in the CTC calling, and Andrew responded that in November there were but since then the program has been ramped up - now in 85-93% range. In answer to whether there is standard set of questions that the CTC asks, Andrew said that there is. Andrew said that residents do need to answer the phone because the CTC may be calling and number may not be a familiar one. Separately, there are no more funds for testing in MHD.

REOPENING COMMITTEE

Helaine reported on the most recent meeting (1/4) where Dr. Bucky reported that all went well starting back. There was concern with the winter sports. Only 2 household members of an athlete can attend for any indoor game. Whether or not a game will be played is contingent on where (what town) the game is to be played at. For hockey, if a player is COVID positive, the entire team must quarantine. For the other sports (swimming, basketball, gymnastics, etc.) a positive team member will initiate contact tracing. (Basketball is being reviewed and might require quarantining.) One board member expressed some concern about indoor sports continuing with this surge of cases, etc., understanding the mental health benefits of playing but noting other clubs/groups also have mental health needs.

The committee also discussed a document that Dr. Bucky about some schools (Cambridge) reducing social distancing to 3 feet (in February) from 6 feet. He wished feedback but not was not comfortable with this at this time.

Other issues discussed were quarantine rules, possible change of metrics, what other surrounding towns most of whom are in the RED zone and doing, etc.

OTHER

Andrew reported that one can safely get a new transfer station sticker. He reminded everyone that holiday wrapping paper is NOT recyclable. In the future one might use alternative paper (brown bags, construction paper, etc.) all of which can recycled for wrapping. A recycle smart flyer was included in the town clerk envelope residents receive. A website, recycleopedia.com can easily be accessed to find out what can be recycled.

Christmas tree pickup from the curbside will continue until 1/15/21, M-F. There will be NO Christmas tree burning; the trees will go to the transfer station and be ground up by the end of the month.

The meeting was adjourned with the next scheduled for 1/12/21 at 7:30 pm via Zoom teleconferencing.