



OBSERVER REPORT

Board of Health- Date - 2/23/21 LWVM Observer - Thomas Krueger

Members in Attendance via Zoom - BOH : Andrew Petty, Todd Belf-Becker, Sec. Andrea Flaxer, Michelle Gottlieb, Helaine Hazlett

Meeting Posted 48 hrs in advance

Meeting held in a Handicapped Accessible Location - not applicable

Public allow to Participate in the Meeting - yes via Zoom. (Including the BOH, HD, secretary, there were 40 people at this meeting.)

Marblehead Counsel Center (MCC)

Benjamin Day, head of the MCC, was invited to talk about the center's work during the past year. He thanked the BOH for the \$60,000 the center receives from the Board, and added that MCC was able to raise an addition \$55,000. In the past year the center served 371 MHD residents with 3800 visits (~ 10/person), via individual, couple or group therapy. They were able to hire a psychiatrist in March to assist with medication, who served 28 patients for 86 visits. In February 2020, the center closed for face-to-face visits and went to Zoom or other platforms. They had hired two more therapists, one full and the other part time, for a total 40 clinical hours/week. They are currently advertising for three more therapists because of the demand. In addition to counseling the center's social service program helped 60 families in the areas of rent, medical visits, utilities, etc. Over the holidays this rose to 74 families. Ben noted that children and adolescents have been helped less because they are reluctant to use Zoom with the lack of privacy that often happens at home. Ben was questioned about out-of-town patients and he responded that MHD patients take preference, but they do not stop therapy for someone out of town who was already in therapy. The wait list for children who will do Zoom therapy is about 30 days. Ben noted that even when COVID is more controlled, that it is likely the trauma of the past year may persist.

One board member told Ben that at many BOH meetings parents are asking the BOH what can the board do to help with the ongoing mental health crisis. Clearly a large skill set is needed, and there has been discussion of forming a town wide task force to address the issue. The board member suggested a task force membership might include a member from the BOH, one from the Board of Selectman, school administrator, school mental health professional, a mental health professional, a

member from the COA, as well as two citizen representatives. The exact goals and realistic interventions would be decided by the task force. Ben said he would happily be a member of such a task force. This entire topic will be discussed at the next BOH meeting.

COVID UPDATE

Andrew reported on the latest statistics for MHD regarding COVID. (This can be seen in detail on marblehead.org, information alert..., town updates, February 19, 2021.) In brief the total cases =1146 (an increase of 36 from 2/12/21), active cases = 35, death (to date) =31. The average daily incidence = 28.1/100000; total tests in last 14 days = 3775, positive rate 2.23%. All of these numbers are trending in the right direction. The most cases are in the 0-19 age group; this is also true across MA. Hospital capacity continues to be high, as there are now more admissions for non-COVID reasons. Andrew noted that there is most concern for “active cluster settings” which typically occur in households, restaurants, child care, etc.

The health department is splitting its time between case coordination and vaccinations. There are currently two clinics a week as MHD works with four other surrounding towns. Vaccine is limited and is being given equitably. 51% of those 75 or older have gotten vaccinations, 60% with the first dose. The eligible groups now include those 65-74 and those with two or more comorbidities. This is a very large group, and the state is only getting 139,000 doses per week. There is heighten anxiety about getting the vaccine which has overwhelmed websites and flooded 211. The current state strategy for vaccinations is to favor megasites with less for local health departments or hospitals. This has been very contentious and the governor will testify to the legislature this week about the roll out. Locally, this week there will be a congregate care clinic on Tuesday, and anyone in Phase 1 on Thursday at the Salem State University setting. The next priority will be those in MHD housing..

Further comments about COVID: 1) in MA even if you are fully vaccinated but have contact with a COVID positive case, you still need to isolate. 2) many questions remain about how long COVID vaccination immunity will last 3) some talk of a combined flu/Covid vaccine in the future.

The CDC has released new K-12 school mitigation recommendations that still relies on the four zones (blue, yellow, orange, and red) of COVID prevalence in a community AND that each have different mitigation steps. (MHD is currently in the “yellow zone”). In yellow zones it suggested that schools can return full time but encouraged to maintain 6 feet of separation and continued mask wearing. Sports and extracurricular activities should be with mask and physical distancing of 6 or more feet. The BOH has been advocating CDC guidelines and voted to send these recommendations to the school department/committee.

OTHER

The MHD waste contract is nearing its end, and needs to be renewed. MHD's waste unlike other towns include both residential and commercial, and this requires it to only go to specific landfills. The current vendor, Waste Management, has a site in Keystone, NH that uses methane capture which is then sold to UNH for heating. Andrew presented the statistics for cost for the current tonnage - 2019 12,470 tons at \$97.38/ton. This is offset to some degree by the revenue that is charged to commercial users, \$185/ton. When these costs are compared to those of other towns, MHD costs are much less. Andrew, therefore, presented four bids - 3 year, 5 year, 7 year, and 10 year - all at different price points, but all increasing at 3.5-4% per year. He favored the 5-year contract as that would also coincide with end of the JRM contract and could open more possible options at that time. The board agreed and voted and passed the proposal.