

**Board of Health
Meeting Minutes
Remote Participation Conference Call
March 21, 2022**

Present:

Susan Schwartz, Chair
Maureen Richichi, Vice Chair
Bea Brunkhorst
Anita Raj

Staff Present:

Heidi Porter, Director of Health and
Human Services
Katharine Dagle, Assistant Health Director
Margaret Root, Recording Secretary

Others Present (based on Zoom ID):

Scott Brawn, Bedford resident
Margot Fleischman, Select Board
Steve Hagan, Bedford resident
Additional Unidentified Bedford residents

Dan Carroll, Bedford resident
Julie Genova, Bedford resident
Emily Mitchell, Select Board

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 PM. Ms. Raj chaired the beginning of the meeting. Ms. Richichi moved to open the meeting. Dr. Brunkhorst seconded the motion. A roll call vote of 4-0-0 opened the meeting.

Ms. Raj made a statement: “Pursuant to a bill signed into law by Governor Baker on June 16, 2021, continuing suspension of certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law through July 15, 2022, this meeting of the Bedford Board of Health will be conducted via remote participation. Persons who would like to listen or view this meeting while in progress may do so by Zoom or by phone. This meeting will also be recorded and the recording will be available on the Board of Health website alongside the minutes. All votes taken by this body shall be by roll call vote.”

Ms. Raj commented that this is the first BOH meeting after the Town election and congratulated Dr. Brunkhorst on her re-election. After the public comment period, the BOH will choose who the Chair and Vice Chair will be for the next year.

Public Comment

Ms. Raj opened the meeting to any public comments.

As there were no public comments, Ms. Raj closed the public comment portion of the meeting.

BOH Reorganization

Ms. Raj asked which BOH members were interested in being Chair.

Ms. Porter read a statement from Dr. Kiessling, who could not attend the meeting: “I would like to be considered for Chair of Bedford’s Board of Health this year for the following reasons: 1) This is my sixth year as a Board member and may be my last as I am not certain I will run again next Spring and I have not as yet been Chair. 2) Three ongoing health projects, the bus stop shelters, tick proofing the athletic fields, and bringing Bedford schools start time in compliance with the AMA and AAP, were all initiated by me, as well as upgraded parks and play areas. I would like to

continue to shepherd those as Chair. 3) Bedford residents elect Board members with expertise in the area under the Board's purview and I have the most public health and infectious disease expertise and experience on the Board. 4) The newer Board members will have an opportunity to be Chair after they have had another year or two years of experience serving on the Board. Please consider taking advantage of both my years of Board of Health experience and my decades of expertise in the area. Although some of my positions during the COVID-19 pandemic seemed controversial in the past months, as time goes by and the data settle, those positions are proving to be reliable. I welcome the opportunity to serve as Chair during what will probably be my final year on the Board of Health. Most sincerely, Ann."

Ms. Schwartz also expressed her interest in serving as Chair. She first thanked Ms. Raj for her leadership and partnership while serving as Chair over the past year, especially as the BOH had to make some difficult decisions. Ms. Schwartz repeated her comment from last year before being chosen for Vice Chair that her passion is health and wellness and her work background is facilitating meetings. Ms. Schwartz commented that the Chair role involves a lot of meeting facilitation, listening to each other, and driving collaboration while keeping the BOH mission in mind. Listening to the community is also an important aspect. Ms. Schwartz commented that she was given the opportunity over the past year to facilitate some of the BOH meetings. Ms. Schwartz added that she would like to continue in that role, leveraging the different areas of expertise of the Board members so that collectively, the BOH can achieve its mission. The BOH helps residents be healthier, have better wellness, and the BOH can weigh-in and help the community. Ms. Schwartz looks forward to the opportunity.

Ms. Raj moved to nominate Dr. Kiessling for BOH Chair. Ms. Richichi seconded the motion. A roll call vote was called and Dr. Brunkhorst, Ms. Raj, Ms. Schwartz, and Ms. Richichi voted against the motion. The motion was defeated 0-4-0.

Dr. Brunkhorst moved to nominate Ms. Schwartz for BOH Chair. Ms. Richichi seconded the motion. Dr. Brunkhorst, Ms. Raj, Ms. Schwartz, and Ms. Richichi voted in favor of the motion, passing it 4-0-0. Ms. Schwartz was voted the next BOH Chair.

Ms. Raj asked if anyone was interested in being Vice Chair. Ms. Richichi expressed interest in the position.

Ms. Raj asked if Dr. Kiessling had expressed interest in the Vice Chair position. Ms. Porter replied that Dr. Kiessling hadn't expressed interest, but she could be nominated regardless.

Dr. Brunkhorst moved to nominate Ms. Richichi for Vice Chair of the Bedford BOH for 2022 to 2023. Ms. Schwartz seconded the motion. Dr. Brunkhorst, Ms. Raj, Ms. Schwartz, and Ms. Richichi voted in favor of the motion, passing it 4-0-0. Ms. Richichi was voted the next BOH Vice Chair.

Ms. Schwartz and Ms. Richichi thanked the BOH and commented that they look forward to working together.

The BOH members thanked Ms. Raj for her service as BOH Chair.

Liaison Assignments

Ms. Schwartz asked each BOH member to state which liaison assignments they currently hold and if they would like to keep those assignments or change them.

Dr. Brunkhorst commented that she is on some Institutional Biosafety Committees in Bedford.

Ms. Richichi commented that she is the liaison for the Healthy Bedford Committee and the School Start Time Initiative. She would like to continue both liaison positions.

Ms. Raj commented that she would be interested in being the liaison for the Fiscal Planning Committee (FPC). Ms. Porter commented that there is a new Finance Director. She added that she wasn't sure if the FPC meetings were required or were more informational for those boards and departments not under the Select Board. Ms. Porter will look into the status of the FPC meetings.

Ms. Raj commented that she is also interested in youth mental health issues and how those issues are addressed in Bedford, from the Superintendent to the Social Workers. She is also interested in informing residents of available services to help address these issues. Dr. Brunkhorst requested that Ms. Raj keep the BOH informed on the subject, which Ms. Raj said she would. Ms. Richichi commented that when the goals for the year are discussed, youth mental health will be one of the BOH's priorities.

Ms. Schwartz asked if Dr. Kiessling was still involved with the Hanscom Restoration Advisory Board (RAB). Ms. Porter replied that she is and there are two RABs, one for each Superfund site in Bedford.

Ms. Schwartz commented that she is the liaison for Youth and Family Services (YFS), as well as for the Council on Aging Board. She would like to continue with both assignments as she can cover two different age groups. Ms. Schwartz added that with Ms. Raj's interest in youth mental health, they could work together on the YFS liaison.

Ms. Schwartz commented that it seems the BOH members are keeping their liaison assignments for now. Ms. Raj offered to help with the YFS liaison assignment if Ms. Schwartz needs help now that she is Chair.

Ms. Schwartz gave an update from a YFS meeting, which was focused on youth risk, including the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Topics at the meeting also included mental health, anxiety, and alcohol use.

Ms. Richichi commented that the School Committee is still focusing on the pandemic, but once more attention can be brought to other subjects, she expects discussion to begin on school start times. In the meantime, Ms. Richichi is doing research and gathering information to be ready, hopefully either early summer or the fall. Ms. Schwartz commented that the School Committee reorganizes based on the school year.

Dr. Brunkhorst asked about the goals for the year and when they would be discussed, in particular a playground area on the other side of Route 3. Ms. Porter replied that the goals are usually discussed in the spring. With the busy agenda for the April meeting, Ms. Porter suggested discussing the goals at the May meeting. The previous year's goals can be reviewed, and new goals can be added and prioritized.

Ms. Raj commented that Mr. Shawn Hanigan on the Select Board is also interested in adding a playground to Bedford. Ms. Schwartz commented that Ms. Richichi's work with Healthy Bedford and looking into intergenerational spaces all ties together.

Discussion of Future Meeting Frequency and Schedule

Ms. Schwartz commented that with COVID-19, an extra BOH meeting was scheduled each month. While COVID-19 is still present, Ms. Schwartz wanted to know if the BOH members wanted to keep the extra meeting each month since conditions have improved. Ms. Schwartz commented that if conditions worsen, the additional meeting can always be brought back.

Dr. Brunkhorst commented on the BA.2 variant and how it is still unknown how that will affect people. There are still disruptions when people test positive. Dr. Brunkhorst thought the extra meetings should be kept for now, but hopefully in May or June, they could be dropped.

Ms. Richichi agreed that she would like to see what happens with the BA.2 variant and the extra meetings should be kept through April. Hopefully in May or June, the extra meetings could be dropped. If conditions call for it, the extra meetings can be brought back.

Ms. Raj commented that the extra meeting could be dropped now and the BOH can trust Ms. Porter and Ms. Dagle to inform them if the extra meetings need to be reinstated. It was pretty easy to add the extra meetings, so it shouldn't be difficult to do so again if needed.

Ms. Porter commented that the Select Board was going to be discussing the remote meeting policy. Currently, Governor Baker's Order allows for remote meetings until July 15th. Ms. Porter added that one option is a hybrid meeting using special technology allowing for an in-person meeting of the BOH with remote public participation. If the BOH opts for this meeting type, BOH meetings will only be able to be held in the Select Board's room. Ms. Porter commented that BOH and Select Board meetings often conflict, so the schedule would have to be looked at to avoid that conflict.

Ms. Schwartz commented that the agenda already announces the second meeting in April. If the BOH decides to discontinue the extra meetings, Ms. Schwartz asked if the BOH still has to hold the second April meeting. Ms. Porter replied that meetings are always officially posted within the required time period, and that is the official announcement of a meeting. While the meeting schedule has been posted, the meeting is set once the official posting is made.

Ms. Richichi asked what Ms. Porter and Ms. Dagle thought about the need for the extra meeting each month. Ms. Dagle replied that COVID-19 discussions have decreased in the office and the Department has been hearing from residents and businesses a lot less. Ms. Dagle thought that removing those extra meetings wouldn't have a negative impact. Ms. Dagle added that either she or Ms. Porter can always inform the BOH if conditions change or if a meeting is necessary for updates. Ms. Porter commented that normal Health Department business is becoming more common than COVID-19 related issues. Ms. Porter added that the DPH is considering changing their weekly conference calls to a monthly call. The immediate need for response is not there at this point, but conditions are still being monitored. Ms. Porter added that with the dates on the schedule, BOH members have already put aside time for those meetings. If the extra meeting is needed, Ms. Porter would inform the Chair who would then call for a meeting.

Ms. Richichi asked, to be clear, if Ms. Porter and Ms. Dagle would feel comfortable having only one meeting in April. Ms. Porter replied that she would be comfortable with one meeting in April. Ms. Dagle agreed with Ms. Porter.

Ms. Richichi made the motion that the BOH return to a monthly meeting schedule starting the month of April 2022. Ms. Raj seconded the motion. A roll call vote of 4-0-0 passed the motion for a monthly meeting schedule starting next month.

Ms. Schwartz reminded Ms. Porter, Ms. Dagle and the BOH members to comment if anyone sees concerning conditions and another meeting can always be called. Ms. Porter commented that part of the monthly discussion could include discussion on the need for an extra meeting. A second meeting could also be necessary if the BOH is really busy.

COVID-19 Response - Data Evaluation, Mitigation Review, and BOH Discussion

Ms. Porter commented that she has continued evaluating the data previously used in the decision-making process regarding the mask mandate. Most of the data continues to trend downward, with a stabilization in ICU occupancy and beds, which is also dependent on staffing levels. Incidence rates and case counts have significantly decreased over the month, so much so that the contracted contact tracers are no longer needed. The numbers are low enough for the Community Nurse to monitor the cases.

Ms. Porter commented that Bedford is very close to 80% vaccination rate with a slight increase over the past month. Bedford has a higher vaccination rate than the State. If the census numbers were used instead of the State numbers, Ms. Porter expects Bedford to have already achieved the 80% vaccination rate.

Dr. Brunkhorst asked what the definition of vaccinated is, given only 43% of Middlesex County has received their booster shots. Ms. Porter replied that she hasn't heard that the definition will change to include the booster shots. She added that discussion on the subject may start if/when a fourth booster is approved.

Ms. Richichi asked if there was booster shot data for Bedford available. Ms. Porter replied the data is reported by County, but that she can pull that information from weekly vaccination reports for the next meeting.

Ms. Schwartz commented that the BOH guidance encourages residents to get the series of vaccinations as recommended by their physician, so it will be harder to define fully vaccinated given that different people will have different recommendations as to the number of vaccines and boosters they should receive.

Ms. Schwartz commented that she has received positive feedback on the changes Ms. Porter has made to the Dashboard. Ms. Porter commented that she is also planning on adding a portion of the spreadsheet she presents to the BOH each meeting to the Dashboard. The Dashboard is now including the wastewater data. Ms. Porter commented that she and Ms. Dagle had a meeting with DPW, the Town Engineer, and the wastewater treatment operator, Mr. Jason Raposa. Since Bedford is part of MWRA, Bedford doesn't treat its own wastewater, so there is no Bedford specific data. Wastewater data is expected to be tracked over the long-term as an indicator for the need of potential actions on the local level.

Ms. Richichi commented that she is pleased to see the school numbers have remained low after the school break and masks becoming optional.

Ms. Porter commented that outreach regarding testing before indoor gatherings will be put out soon. This will be a good reminder as many opportunities for indoor gatherings are coming up, from religious holidays, graduations, and annual Town Meeting. The outreach will include a reminder that people can be asymptomatic or only have mild symptoms. Ms. Porter added that the final shipment of test kits has arrived and locations are fully stocked. The outreach will encourage people to get test kits and to test before attending an indoor event.

Dr. Brunkhorst commented that she has been approached asking for advice regarding the library having an indoor book sale in late April. Dr. Brunkhorst was going to suggest trying to maintain social distancing, but wanted any further advice from the BOH. Ms. Porter replied that the BOH has made their recommendation already regarding masking indoors. There is also a collection of mitigation strategies and outreach that ask residents to be mindful of this advice, especially for those residents at increased risk from the disease. Ms. Porter added that with the case numbers decreasing, she doesn't see the need for anything more strict than the advice from the BOH that is already in place.

Ms. Richichi commented that this is good messaging to get out, especially before Town Meeting. Residents should be compassionate and caring regarding those who are at higher risk from the disease. With the test kits available, it is wise to have people test themselves before attending Town Meeting.

Ms. Schwartz commented that the mask mandate was lifted at the same time the mask advisory was put into place. There is also the guidance for seniors, as well as the mitigation strategies. This outreach should help people think about their own risk, as well as the risk to the immediate circle and then people in the community. At this point, the numbers don't support anything more severe.

Ms. Richichi commented that it is important to acknowledge the members of the community who still feel at great risk and for some residents, it is still a difficult situation. It is important to do what can be done to help them feel safe.

Dr. Brunkhorst commented that situations are still occurring, like Concord needing to cancel school due to a spike in case numbers.

Ms. Schwartz commented that people are still trying to figure out the virus, so flexibility, empathy, and compassion are all needed.

Ms. Richichi commented that the effects of long COVID-19 and the scale of this public health issue will be determined over the coming months. Ms. Richichi added that a doctor in Boston working on long COVID-19 thinks the number of people suffering from long COVID-19 will be higher than the number of people who died from the disease.

Ms. Richichi asked about the status of Bedford's test kits. Ms. Porter replied that the latest, and last, shipment of test kits has arrived. Bedford has received enough test kits for one per household. Ms. Porter added that not every household has taken advantage of the kits, so messaging will

continue informing residents of the availability of the test kits, including if a household needs a second kit. The kits are available in the library, the Health Department office, Council on Aging, and the Town Manager's office. The library seems to be the most popular place to pick up test kits. Ms. Porter repeated that the upcoming outreach will encourage people to get test kits and to test before attending indoor gatherings.

Ms. Richichi commented that people should also be encouraged to get their booster shots, especially older residents. Ms. Schwartz agreed that people should speak with their physicians to make sure they are up to date on their vaccinations. Ms. Schwartz added that she has seen several places advertising that they have N95 masks available, should people want them.

Ms. Porter commented that a part of the outreach this week will also include encouragement for residents to reach out to their physicians regarding therapeutic treatment availability. Therapeutics work best if they are given early. Ms. Porter added that she is curious about a program through one of the pharmacies that allows for a person to get tested in store, and if they test positive, they are given the therapeutic treatment.

Ms. Richichi asked if Ms. Porter had heard from the State regarding therapeutic treatments and their availability. Ms. Porter replied that the treatments are available, but in limited supply.

At 6:57 PM, Ms. Raj moved to adjourn the meeting of March 21st, 2022. Dr. Brunkhorst seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a roll call vote of 4-0-0.

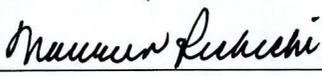
Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

Monthly COVID-19 Data Since August for Bedford, Middlesex County, and Region

The next scheduled meetings of the Board of Health are April 11th, May 9th, and June 13th.



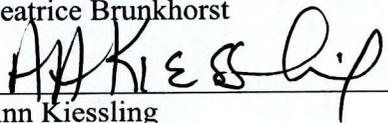
Susan Schwartz, Chair



Maureen Richichi, Vice Chair



Beatrice Brunkhorst



Ann Kiessling



Anita Raj