

**Board of Health
Emergency Conference Call
Transcript
March 19, 2020**

Present:

Sarah Thompson, Co-Chair
Bea Brunkhorst
Anita Raj
Susan Schwartz

Staff Present:

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

Absent:

Ann Kiessling

Others Present:

Karen Dunn, *Finance Committee*
Sabatha Rajagopalan, *Bedford resident*

Ms. Porter: The first item on the agenda is to call the meeting to order and then to reorganize. Sarah, as Vice Chair, would you move forward with that for us?

Ms. Thompson: Yes. I'd like to call the telephone meeting to order. It is the 19th of March at 12:07 pm.

BOH Reorganization

Ms. Porter: Thank you. And then next on the agenda, are we prepared to reorganize at this point? Or do we want to wait for a full board? Ann is not on the call.

Dr. Brunkhorst: Does it matter?

Ms. Porter: No, it is just an opportunity as a first meeting of the board. I wanted to provide it as an opportunity for you.

Dr. Brunkhorst: I don't know. I'd rather, myself, wait until Ann can come, as long as it is not needed.

Ms. Porter: Sounds good. So Sarah, as Vice Chair, would you chair the meeting?

Ms. Thompson: Yes, I will.

Coronavirus Update

Ms. Porter: Our next item up is coronavirus update, which I can briefly go into if you would like.

Ms. Thompson: Please go ahead.

Ms. Porter: I am sure most, if not all, have been receiving the Town Manager's daily updates, which are consolidated activities and tasks that have been accomplished, typically within the last 24 hours since the previous one was written. We currently have the four presumed positive cases yet to have been confirmed by CDC. As of yesterday, we have three persons under investigation

and those are people who have been tested, exhibited symptoms and got tested, and we are waiting for the results to come in. They may or not be a contact of one of the known cases. They may just be other folks in Town. We don't quite know at this point because we don't do their follow-up until they become positive, until at which point they become positive.

Ms. Thompson: When do you expect the results back?

Ms. Porter: Usually, I mean it's been varied. It was really slow for a few days. Now that the contracted labs are working, we actually had our first result back from a contracted lab, it came back within like 36 hours, so it was really quick. But then we heard yesterday that Lahey was turning folks away. They didn't have enough kits. So that is clearly going to be the slowdown in getting timely results back.

At this point, we know all schools are closed. They have been closed since last week. We did have a case related to one of the schools, so we did a lot of outreach to school community members, everybody related to those initial cases. Actually all four of our cases relative to Bedford, folks who are contacts, have been contacted at this point and put into quarantine. Actually our first three cases are out of quarantine at this point, believe it or not. They had been identified as positive, gone through the illness, had no symptoms for the period of time that they had to have no symptoms, which is now three days, and it had been seven days since onset, so they have been released from quarantine.

With the restaurants, they have closed service, on-site service, many of them are available for take-out only. We have that great website that's been posted for folks to know where to go in Town. We have been doing a lot of outreach to the restaurants to make sure that they are indeed complying with the social distancing and keeping, really trying to keep people doing curbside pick-ups and such. It is a regular reminder. Everyone has been really, I would say overall really good and compliant. Folks will call us and let us know if they see otherwise. When we are not out and about in the community, the residents will definitely let us know.

We have spent a lot of time over the past few days establishing the food bank. The pantry closed suddenly last Thursday. They didn't have staffing for the pantry and the community dinner. We had closed the community dinner, but the pantry closed quite suddenly so we became anxious about being able to get food to folks in need, the vulnerable populations and kids. The Town Manager worked exclusively with, I should say extensively, with the School Superintendent to get this project off the ground and getting food supplies in. We are going to have a big truck load delivered today, prepare a bunch of bags for those folks who have been outlined in our daily updates relative to vulnerable populations, seniors.

Ms. Thompson: What is the number that you anticipate feeding?

Ms. Porter: We are prepared for about 500, right around there.

Ms. Thompson: How are you doing this weekly? I am just curious because other communities I've talked to are doing daily.

Ms. Porter: The daily that they are doing is the daily lunches they are providing, which is based off the school lunch program for free and reduced lunch numbers, the students in their jurisdictions

that receive those services. So we are actually providing lunch and dinner for seven days in one bag for those students who are identified. I'm sorry, breakfast and lunch and then we are providing some dinner items for the whole family. So we are meeting the same, we are accomplishing the same goal with once a week distribution.

Ms. Thompson: I think that is efficient use of resources. I just, I applaud the weekly versus the daily.

Ms. Porter: Yeah, I think it is a lot of activity and a lot of work in one day, but then we can refocus the rest of the week on other tasks at hand.

Ms. Raj: It is also a pain for people to have to go out every single day to get one day's worth of food. How are we, I mean I know we have opened it up to the METCO kids, but, you know, that's a schlep. Is there anything that we can do to help get the food down to Boston?

Ms. Porter: The Superintendent is definitely managing that component of the project. I will say, initially, there was some food that was provided. We brought it to them and I think from now on, Boston, it was brought to the METCO Director and now the Boston schools are going to be managing and distributing food to those students because they are indeed residents of that community, so understanding that these kids are, you know, they are going to all different communities in the area. They are going to focus the distribution from Boston.

Ms. Raj: Okay, great. Because I did see a map and they have feeding stations literally like every other block.

Ms. Porter: Yeah, I know. There is a lot in Boston. They are really providing a lot of resources on a daily basis, for breakfast and lunches.

Ms. Raj: Yes, if they are going to cover our kids, that's great. I just wanted to make certain those kids were taken care of.

Ms. Porter: Can I just interrupt one quick second? I probably should have started the meeting by saying if you could identify yourself simply because we do have others on the call, before you speak, that would be super helpful. And also to let you know that any resident can be on this call. It is a public meeting. It was posted. Although it was posted emergently we have one resident on the call so there may be more. And Margaret is indeed doing a transcript.

So as far as other items, I mean, I think it has been business as usual. We are still issuing burial permits, the Town is taking in tax money and generating invoices, sorry, paying invoices. Our inspectors are still doing inspections in the community to the food establishments. From the Bedford Board of Health perspective, we're still operational. Clearly our focus has been on this response and ensuring we do the follow-up to prevent, to mitigate the spread. That's our goal. That's why our messaging includes the social distancing, the regular cleaning, the washing of hands. We started saying it weeks before this uptick and the declarations, but, which was good, I mean, I think we got some early messaging out there and got people thinking about it really early. I think we had a good jump on it, for sure.

Ms. Thompson: I just have one thought. Have we considered using the term “physical distancing” instead of “social distancing”? Have you heard anything?

Ms. Porter: No, what do you think about that? Tell us about that.

Ms. Thompson: I know that “social distancing” has more of a connotation of isolation when we really want people to be physically distant, you know, in proximity from each other. And that the term “social distancing” may have other meanings where people are told they can’t connect in a different way. I don’t know. The hospital, there was a head of the Mass General that said he doesn’t prefer the term “social distancing”, that he prefers the term “physical distancing”. I know that we want to socially keep people apart from each other and not have large group congregations, but I didn’t know if there is a difference between the two and one could be used interchangeably from the other or do you specifically recommend the term “social distancing”.

Ms. Porter: That is the language that has been used. So in an attempt to be consistent across the board and I hear what you are saying. I may even like that term better. But I think at this point, because our messaging, we were really attempting to be consistent with our partner communities and with the CDC and DPH, that is the terminology that has been used. I think maybe moving forward as a country, if we can reconsider that, if we can be consistent together.

So any questions? I mean, there has been a lot of information that’s put out there. Before we get to the bulk of our meeting, I just wanted to know if anybody had any thoughts or questions.

Ms. Schwartz: I just had a question. It goes towards what Sarah was saying about social distancing. One concern I have is people feeling isolated and I just wondering if Chris and the Board of Health in general are getting more calls from a mental health component and do you need any help with staffing for that?

Ms. Porter: Yeah, not an uptick, but it has been pretty steady. We did a nice outreach in our daily update yesterday reminding folks of the services that both of our social workers provide. So, hoping that messaging kind of gets back into people’s minds. We’ve been using Healthy Bedford, our Healthy Bedford Facebook page too, Carla’s been great, even though not physically at work but still doing some work at home, relative, kind of getting some good mindfulness messaging out there, stress reduction messaging, do some exercising, getting access to a lot of the posts about being able to do a tour of a museum. Just different things you can do to kind of still feel connected to society while you hunker down in your home. So, working on that for sure. And just trying to continue to do the reminders to people that they can be connected and that we have resources available to people. Eliot was great. We stayed open at our Youth and Family Services office very specifically to enable folks to continue their appointments there through Eliot. We felt that was an important service to maintain. They converted exclusively to telehealth, which was approved by the Governor so that they continue their services remotely, which was probably best overall, most definitely. But they are being very mindful of the fact that people are being isolated. I am glad that those who are connected are still continuing to get those services and that they didn’t have to end as a result of the restrictions relative to going out and quarantining and such. Thank you for that. We had done that update yesterday and then late last week we had an article that Jessica Wildfong had prepared relative to stress and anxiety, just being mindful of it. So we will continue that messaging. That’s going to be periodic throughout the time. I think some people don’t necessarily recognize the signs and symptoms. Like they are having, you know, whatever,

we were just kind of saying here today “Why are my knees so stiff?”, “Why is my back...?” and you are like, oh yeah, this is like stress incarnate, like it is coming into us and, you know, we’ve been sitting here kind of hunched over our desks and meeting and such. So, mindful to kind of get up and move around at a comfortable social distance. Thank you for that, though, it is important to remember to get that messaging out.

Ms. Thompson: So when people do go out to buy food or go to a grocery store, are we, have we provided tips on how to do that the safest? Like, I have heard a couple of different things, you know, like some people have said “Well wear an old pair of running gloves” and you know, hold the cart with that, or something, and then Purell before and after. What are people saying about that?

Ms. Porter: Well not so much about individuals. We’ve done our outreach how to keep yourself safe from touching items and what you should be doing. Early on, a lot of grocery stores ran out of wipes. I mean, that was just the reality, the supplies weren’t there. So they now have people physically, like a staff member, actually wiping down the carts. We were talking about doing some messaging relative to that, though. We have some, provided the food establishment, the grocery stores with signage because they are corporations and they couldn’t put up individual signage unless their corporate office put them up, but if it comes from us, then they can put it up. So we are being a little bit more mindful of that and ensuring that people keep their distancing when shopping around and the staff as well, reminding them, their employers, to keep their staff separated behind the scenes and when they are working and providing services to the patrons as well as reminding them of the sick policy. It is important, obviously super important, at this point, but they are very, very familiar with that. You know, they don’t, historically and traditionally, don’t want people to be exposed. It is bad business and they are very mindful of that.

Ms. Thompson: Has the criteria, like when you should call your provider, are you saying at least one of the following, like a fever, a sore throat, a cough, shortness of breath, muscle aches? Like, it is any of those, call your provider?

Ms. Porter: Basically it is any flu-like, any component of a flu-like symptom and then listing them out. You know, the curiosity is that a lot of times, anecdotally, we were hearing that folks weren’t getting tested unless they presented with fever. Now folks are presenting with fever, usually mild fevers, like upwards of up to 100 and they are getting turned away for testing. They just don’t meet more stringent criteria and it is of course, the result of the fact that there a fewer test kits. We are hoping, of course, every day we hope that this will be alleviated by the provision of additional kits.

Ms. Thompson: For the flu, it used to be if you had a fever and a cough. It seems to be one of any of the above.

Ms. Porter: And the curiosity, as we are in it now, when we are talking with folks and what their symptoms would be and trying to determine when their onset was, you know, you get the more flu-like symptoms on one day, but the lead up is really curious. Like sometimes it will just be aches, sometimes it is a sore throat, sometimes it is any one of those things and you are like suddenly you test positive three days later for it. So the symptoms are not particular and they are not altogether. And then the people who don’t even have symptoms, which is, we are thinking that is going to happen. The uptick is going to happen, randomly, and the symptoms that are

expressed when you are coming down from this will kind of go the same way. Because we are trying to determine, people when they are three days without symptoms is when they can be released, but if you still have a sore throat, or you still have a headache, we are probably going to hold you in quarantine an extra day to make sure you have those three full days without symptoms. Originally they were requiring two negative tests, but, I mean we can't even get test kits in, so they adjusted the quarantine removal criteria the other day.

Ms. Thompson: So do you want, are there any other questions? Or can we move to the declaration of the public health emergency, which is the next item on the agenda?

Ms. Porter: Yeah, that's fine.

BOH Members: Voiced various overlapping agreements.

Declaration of Public Health Emergency

Ms. Porter: Okay, great. So I sent out the Declaration. This is an attorney vetted document that's been utilized by many communities in our area and it just talks about sort of the history about how we got to where we are now. And although decisions can be made outside of this, and they have been made from Town Management and from the Board of Health outside of this, it is an affirmation, and I think, you know, a ratification by the Board that this, these items in doing this public health work is indeed an emergency and necessary. And by declaring this public health emergency, I think it's receiving the support from the Board of Health. It also authorizes, under the direction of the Town Manager, I'll read this last comment because I think it really... Did you want me to read the whole thing? Does everybody have it? Has everyone seen a copy of this?

Dr. Brunkhorst: I have. Just one quick question. Can you maybe highlight the differences of this one, and I'm sorry, I haven't been able to do this homework, versus the other one that we saw at our in-person meeting?

Ms. Porter: It's, the first one actually, just offered my, the opportunity for me to make decisions on behalf of the Board of Health relative to any emergency and quarantine and isolation situation. This is more about the overall response and also ratifying decisions that have been made up to this point as well.

Dr. Brunkhorst: Okay, thank you.

Ms. Porter: So it just kind of gives the history, that we have an unexpected occurrence of COVID, that there has been a declaration by the President of a National emergency, the Governor has declared a State of Emergency, and clearly we are receiving guidance from DPH and scientists and folks within public health that we have a reasonable and imminent danger in our environment and in our communities that require response. And that this declaration is, an immediate action is needed to prevent, minimize, or mitigate danger to public health safety or general welfare of the people of Bedford and/or property that may result from the incidence of COVID in our community. So the meat of it is here:

“Now therefore, the Town of Bedford Board of Health, hereby declares that as of March 20, 2020”

Actually we are going to say it as of March 19. I'm sorry, this wasn't adjusted.

“As of March 19, 2020, a Public Health Emergency is declared to exist by the Board of Health and authorizes and directs, under the direction of the Town Manager, all Town personnel and agents to take action appropriate to respond to this situation and ratifies, confirms and adopts any related action taken prior to the formal adoption of this Declaration by its Director of Health and Human Services and her staff. It is hereby further ordered that Heidi Porter as Director of Health and Human Services shall serve as the agent of the Board of Health to effectuate the intent of this Order. This Declaration of a Public Health Emergency shall remain in effect until notice is given, pursuant to the Board of Health’s judgment and consideration of state and national guidance, that the Public Health Emergency no longer exists.”

So with that, are there any questions? Further questions?

Dr. Brunkhorst: So as an agent, how is that different than, you know, for instance, you just said that the one that we saw at our in-person meeting was really more about quarantining and so forth? What further powers?

Ms. Porter: This is more comprehensive now since we are declaring the emergency. It empowers us to make determination. Because this is such an unusual circumstance, we don’t expect these emergencies to exist and when they do exist, it is issuing that power beyond our usual day-to-day business.

Dr. Brunkhorst: Okay, good.

Ms. Porter: Outside of that, and clearly, I will keep you informed and we will communicate. Even the fact that we had to have this meeting in an emergent manner was one of those things, these things are happening so quickly. Things are changing so quickly and we need to be able to be responsive. Which will further be exemplified by the next conversation that we have relative to the emergency order regarding personal services. We will get into that once we finalize this.

So Sarah, would you be prepared to call for a vote?

Ms. Thompson: Yes. I’d like to make a motion to accept the Town of Bedford Massachusetts Board of Health Declaration of Public Health Emergency.

Ms. Porter: Can you ask for the motion? As Chair, you shouldn’t make the motion.

Ms. Thompson: Oh, okay, I’m sorry. As Chair, I would like to ask for a motion to accept the Board of Health Declaration of Public Health Emergency.

Dr. Brunkhorst: I can make a motion that we vote on accepting the Town of Bedford Board of Health Declaration of Public Health Emergency.

Ms. Thompson: All those in favor?

Ms. Porter: We need a second.

Ms. Schwartz: I’ll second it.

Ms. Thompson: Okay, all those in favor?

Ms. Porter: I'll just have a roll call. Sarah?

Ms. Thompson: Sarah Thompson, in favor, aye.

Ms. Porter: Bea?

Dr. Brunkhorst: Bea Brunkhorst, aye.

Ms. Porter: Anita?

Ms. Raj: Anita Raj, aye.

Ms. Porter: And Susan?

Ms. Schwartz: Susan Schwartz, aye.

Ms. Porter: Fantastic. Thank you all. That's fantastic. That's great. We will get that on the books ASAP.

Ms. Schwartz: And you will change the date to today?

Ms. Porter: Yup. It will be today. That was the only amendment I made was in the text of that last paragraph and then next to everyone's name. And you will sign this and execute this at our next in-person meeting. And we will change, Sarah, in the document, we have you as Chair. We are going to keep you as Vice Chair in the document.

Ms. Thompson: Okay.

Ms. Porter: Okay, just to be consistent.

Ms. Thompson: The next meeting is April 13th?

Ms. Porter: At this point, yeah. At this point.

Ms. Thompson: Okay.

Ms. Porter: Unless we need to meet remotely, as we are today, again. But we're hoping with covering a lot of the information, this declaration and orders today, we should, it should put us in good position.

Ms. Thompson: Okay, and do we have any other orders of business at this time?

Ms. Porter: Yeah, so this one other item is this emergency order regarding personal services. We are hearing more news and information lately, just about, well clearly, we are trying to manage the social distancing and we are recognizing that there are quite a few personal services that really

cannot be executed with maintenance of that six foot buffer. As well as the fact that there are some services where you engage in close contact with folks and there's a lot of either sweat, or emissions from folks' mouths due to exercising and activity, so we are thinking about those types of services where that close contact and those other situations occur. So we have this list and this is the list and this is the Declaration consistent with some of our surrounding communities who are putting a similar order into effect tonight, which is the same time period that we would put it. So those gatherings and service activities that are offered to the public and we're looking to prohibit. It is actually an order of mine since you gave me the power to do this. It'll be based on me, but I want to have a meeting. Obviously I wanted to discuss it among all of us.

Ms. Thompson: I have one question about that.

Ms. Porter: Sure. I was going to go down the list.

Ms. Thompson: Oh, okay, yup.

Ms. Porter: So the list includes hairdressers and barbers, nail salons, massage services, body work services, which are other items other than body works like foot massages or there are some Chinese massage that would be under that line item, gyms, health clubs, athletic facilities, ice rinks and yoga studios, spa type services for cosmetic purposes that are not deemed medically necessary, private instruction classes such as driving and tutoring schools, entertainment venues and houses of worship. Go ahead Sarah, I'm sorry.

Ms. Thompson: Just under the gyms, the health clubs, athletic facilities, ice rinks and yoga studios, what about a boy's pick-up basketball game outside?

Ms. Porter: No, we're not because there can be contact.

Ms. Thompson: Inside or outside?

Ms. Porter: We can amend it to include that. That's a great add, thank you.

Ms. Schwartz: Does that row also cover the karate places, the Barre, things like that? Or do we need to spell those out?

Ms. Porter: There's just so many in Town we couldn't really spell them all out. And because some of the facilities offer a lot of the different types of services, so we were trying to say athletic facilities, health clubs. We kept it pretty generic. That will include The Edge, for instance. It will include Summit, it will include Workout for Women.

Ms. Thompson: Get In Shape for Women.

Ms. Porter: Exactly. That is the intention for all of this. And they will all be notified of this.

Ms. Schwartz: I was looking at what Melrose had done. We definitely have more than they did earlier in the week. And I guess, going back to the mental health component, I am just concerned about the houses of worship and things like that. Going to Sarah's point, they do do things outside. Is that okay, or are we just saying nothing at all?

Ms. Thompson: Well if they have the social distance.

Ms. Porter: Yeah, it is so difficult to social distance. I think from our point of view, if folks want to go in to consult with their pastor or rabbi, the one on one social distancing meetings, we're not going to enforce that. This is not what it is intended for. This is for the large gatherings and I know a lot of churches are already proactive about this. They are doing a lot of remote broadcasting of their services.

Ms. Thompson: Any kind of a number on the gatherings, like is it less than 10 now? Like if two kids came over, played basketball outside.

Ms. Porter: Again, it's the social distancing. It's the six feet and close contact, from our perspective, when we are doing our contact traces, it's 10 to 15 minutes. So I think two guys playing basketball in the backyard, that's going to cover, they're going to have close contact. For instance we had someone who was doing some sort of coaching and we had to quarantine the entire team he was coaching because of high fives, because of huddles, because not so much the huddles, but the incidental contact over a period of time and it was close contact. It is really hard when you are doing sports to not have contact.

Ms. Thompson: Right.

Ms. Porter: So we are looking for this to be in effect as of midnight tonight. It will give us some time today working with the Police to do some outreach to just inform folks simply because we can't do all the outreach ourselves and it has to come from a Town official. So we are looking for that to happen today.

Dr. Brunkhorst: In terms of what other area communities are doing. Do you know of adjoining communities starting to have these?

Ms. Porter: Yup, I know my colleagues in Arlington, Wakefield, Melrose, Medford, Winchester. It's spreading. We are right up there with some of our comparable communities.

Dr. Brunkhorst: Great.

Ms. Schwartz: How about the surrounding communities? Like Burlington?

Ms. Porter: We haven't seen anything relayed directly related to this yet, but I will say we are, we were also the first to do everything in this area. So we are close to first and if we weren't working in concert with them, we were the first to do it. So I am sure once this is done, we will see them come and join us in these efforts. I mean, we are trying to be mindful, really, really trying to be mindful, particularly with the restaurants when they were closed, and trying to be mindful of ways to work with them and understand we support them and we're not going to keep this in place longer than we need to. But there have been a lot of the facilities in Town are closed because they don't want to be a location where this thing got spread and folks got exposed to this. So they get it. Most of the places really, really get it. Some places are resistant and this is going to be helpful to have this in place to get them to shut down and do some cleaning and get ready for reopening when that can happen.

So I would appreciate a ratification of this, if you don't mind? Can we take a, would it be okay to take a vote on this?

Dr. Brunkhorst: Yeah, I think that's a good idea.

Ms. Thompson: Yup. So I would like to make a motion that we take a vote on the emergency order regarding personal services.

Dr. Brunkhorst: I'll second it.

Ms. Porter: Bea, could you make the motion?

Dr. Brunkhorst: Oh, okay, I'm sorry. Yes. I would like to make the motion that we vote on the emergency order regarding personal services.

Ms. Raj: I second.

Ms. Thompson: All those in favor?

Ms. Porter: Great. And we will do a roll call, Sarah, for the vote?

Ms. Thompson: Yup, do a roll call for the vote.

Ms. Porter: Sarah Thompson?

Ms. Thompson: Sarah Thompson, aye.

Ms. Porter: Bea Brunkhorst?

Dr. Brunkhorst: Bea Brunkhorst, aye.

Ms. Porter: Anita Raj?

Ms. Raj: Anita Raj, aye.

Ms. Porter: And Susan Schwartz?

Ms. Schwartz: Susan Schwartz, aye.

Ms. Porter: Excellent. 4-0, perfect. That was all I had on the agenda. Any other conversations? Discussions? We are about eight minutes over our time.

Ms. Thompson: I would like to make the motion to adjourn the meeting of March 19th from 12 to 12:38.

Ms. Raj: Anita Raj, second.

Ms. Porter: Anita, could you make the motion? Sorry Sarah, I know.

Ms. Raj: I move to adjourn the meeting of March 19th.

Dr. Brunkhorst: I second the motion.

Ms. Porter: Bea, thank you. And I will just call a roll call so we can confirm it. Sarah?

Ms. Thompson: Sarah Thompson, aye.

Ms. Porter: Bea?

Dr. Brunkhorst: Bea Brunkhorst, aye.

Ms. Porter: Anita?

Ms. Raj: Anita Raj, aye.

Ms. Porter: And Susan?

Ms. Schwartz: Susan Schwartz, aye.

Ms. Porter: Excellent. Thank you all so much

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

Town of Bedford Massachusetts, Board of Health Declaration of Public Health Emergency
Emergency Order Regarding Personal Services

The next regularly scheduled meetings of the Board of Health will be April 13th, May 11th, and June 8th.

Sarah Thompson, Vice-Chair

Ann Kiessling

Beatrice Brunkhorst

Anita Raj

Susan Schwartz