

**Board of Health
Meeting Minutes
April 13, 2020**

Present:

Sarah Thompson, Chair
Anita Raj, Co-Chair
Bea Brunkhorst
Ann Kiessling – arrived late
Susan Schwartz

Staff Present:

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

Others Present:

Dorothy Bergin, *Bedford resident*
Meredith McCulloch, *Bedford resident*
Elizabeth Hacala, *Bedford Free Public Library
Trustee*
Ryan Doucette, *Bedford Citizen*
Karen Dunn, *Finance Committee*

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM. Ms. Thompson chaired.

BOH Reorganization

The BOH members decided to table this discussion until all BOH members were present.

BOH Meeting Minutes and Transcripts

Ms. Raj moved to approve the minutes from the March 10, 2020 meeting; Dr. Brunkhorst seconded the motion. The vote was 4-0-0 to approve the minutes.

Ms. Raj moved to approve the transcript from the March 19, 2020 BOH emergency conference call; Ms. Schwartz seconded the motion. The vote was 4-0-0 to approve the transcript.

Vote: March 19, 2020 Declaration of Public Health Emergency

Ms. Porter reminded the BOH that the Declaration of Public Health Emergency was approved by the BOH during the emergency conference call on March 19th. Town Counsel has since reviewed the Declaration and made some recommendations of changes to the document. One change was to cite the specific section of Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 11, Section 104, which gives the BOH the authority to declare such a public health emergency. Another change to the Declaration was to change the effective date of the public health emergency to March 10th, the same date that Governor Baker declared the State of Emergency for Massachusetts.

Ms. Raj asked if these recommendations were the ones made by Town Counsel. Ms. Porter replied in the affirmative.

Ms. Raj made the motion to accept the Town of Bedford Massachusetts Board of Health Declaration of Public Health Emergency as updated as of April 13, 2020. Ms. Schwartz

seconded the motion. The vote was 4-0-0 to accept the amended Declaration of Public Health Emergency.

Director's Report and COVID-19 Response Update

Ms. Porter reported that she and her staff have been very busy addressing the response to COVID-19. After the declaration passed during the March 19 conference call, personal service establishments and houses of worship were contacted regarding their closure. Other orders from the State level were also followed, including the ones regarding essential services. Once this order was given, only essential services were allowed to remain open and BOH staff reached out to establishments offering one-on-one services (skating lessons at The Edge, for example) informing them of this closure order. The Police Department helped the BOH staff with informing establishments of the essential services order.

More recently, an order limiting the occupancy of essential service establishments was given to promote social distancing. A trend of visiting essential service establishments for non-essential items caused an increase in occupancy to these establishments and the order to limit the occupancy was declared to counter this increase. In Bedford, grocery stores were most affected by the order as they are only allowed 40% of their occupancy, including employees and deliveries. Ms. Porter commented that some stores have created one-way aisles as well.

Ms. Dagle added that there was a lot of discussion with Stop & Shop and Whole Foods as well as other stores with food products to help determine their 40% occupancy. Signage was also given to these establishments to declare their limited occupancy numbers. Ms. Dagle believes most, if not all, of these establishments have installed plexiglass dividers at their registers. These establishments have also worked on methods to keep good social distancing practices while patrons wait in line. Business owners are making sure personal protective equipment is available to their employees, with some establishments requiring their employees to wear the equipment. Managers are also encouraging their employees to wash their hands frequently, some requiring a hand-washing break once an hour.

Ms. Porter added that the currently used Federal Food Code includes parameters for control of communicable diseases, which includes a review and education regarding employee health. Employees are not supposed to work if they are sick and sign a form asserting that they understand the requirements to stay home if sick. Some establishments are doing active monitoring of their employees to watch for symptoms instead of waiting for their employees to self-report an illness.

Ms. Thompson asked about the limits of occupancy for Stop & Shop and Whole Foods. Ms. Dagle replied that it is limited to 40% of the maximum occupancy. For Stop & Shop, she thinks that is around 303 and Whole Foods is around 255. That includes customers, employees, and vendors. Whole Foods is choosing to only allow 140 people in their store, which results in about 50 customers in the store at any one time.

Ms. Thompson commented that the last time she visited Stop & Shop the store seemed crowded. Ms. Dagle commented that the occupancy is calculated based on retail floor space and as such, the store has a higher occupancy limit than Whole Foods. It was recommended to Stop & Shop

to lower the occupancy limit similar to how Whole Foods did, but it is up to the individual store. Ms. Dagle added that Stop & Shop is counting patrons and starts to limit entry when the occupancy reaches 250.

Ms. Dagle reported that signage was handed out to gas stations to be placed near the pumps to remind people to either wash their hands or use hand sanitizer after pumping gas.

Ms. Schwartz asked if the BOH was providing the plexiglass dividers for the establishments in addition to the signage. Ms. Dagle replied the BOH is not supplying the dividers. Each establishment has installed the dividers on their own.

Ms. Thompson asked if the employees working at the deli counter are required to wear masks. Ms. Dagle replied that by Food Code, those employees are not required to wear masks. However, she has noticed that Stop & Shop, instead of the deli counter taking individual orders, deli items are pre-sliced and placed in a refrigerator case. Ms. Porter added that based on data, deli counters are considered low risk for COVID-19 transmission by the FDA.

Ms. Porter wanted to discuss community-wide face covering use with the BOH. On April 10, Governor Baker issued an advisory regarding the usage of face coverings and cloth masks. Ms. Porter has heard interest from Bedford employees to request that patrons wear face coverings while shopping. Ms. Dagle commented that one of the food establishments requires their employees to wear face coverings and as such, the employees are asking management to require patrons to wear face coverings as well. Ms. Porter added that the BOH is highly promoting the advisory for residents to wear a cloth mask or face covering in public, including a message in the daily update. Ms. Porter asked for thoughts from the BOH members.

Ms. Raj commented that while shopping after the advisory was given that she was in the minority of not having gotten a mask or face covering yet.

Dr. Brunkhorst expressed concern that making the wearing of a face covering or cloth mask mandatory may cause burden, specifically for the owners/management of essential service establishments. Ms. Porter was considering the general public and thinks that many people have face coverings already. She added that if there was an increase in cases similar to more densely populated cities, the BOH would consider ordering the use of face coverings. Currently, the BOH supports the advisory for their use.

Ms. Schwartz agreed with the current action of supporting the advisory for people to wear face coverings.

Dr. Kiessling asked Ms. Porter for clarification regarding the wording of the advisory, specifically that the advisory recommends use of face coverings if social distancing could not be accomplished. She is concerned that if people wear face coverings, they may feel that they can get closer to other people. Ms. Porter replied that the advisory is to wear a face covering and maintain social distancing and that the use of the face covering is important in situations where social distancing is difficult. Ms. Dagle commented that she has heard from grocery stores where employees have had to remind patrons to social distance. Ms. Porter added that in the

daily updates the guidelines given include social distancing, wearing of face coverings, use of sanitizer, and frequent hand washing.

Ms. Thompson agreed that wearing a face covering should be strongly recommended. She also thinks that it is fair that if employees are required to wear face coverings then the public visiting the establishment should be required to wear one as well. Some people may not have access to a mask or face covering, which is the problem with mandating their use.

Ms. Thompson asked if wearing a face covering is needed while riding a bike or taking a walk around the block. Dr. Kiessling didn't think it was necessary. Ms. Porter brought up the situation where many people are using the bike path and social distancing may not be possible. Ms. Thompson commented she expects to be around many people while grocery shopping, but not as much while walking around her neighborhood. However, she doesn't want to see multiple messages given out regarding face covering use as that could create confusion. Ms. Porter added the important point that wearing a face covering is to protect other people from you if you have the virus but are asymptomatic.

Ms. Porter will keep the usage of face coverings in the guidelines in the daily update. The switching of language from mask to face covering was also important as masks are needed by the front line professionals. Ms. Porter commented that the language in the daily update can be changed to reflect the strong recommendation for following the advisory, as well as for people to stay home as much as possible.

Another point Ms. Porter wanted to discuss with the BOH members was the data. As of today, there are 56 reported positive cases in Town. Ms. Raj asked how the cases were broken down between the Town, Hanscom Air Force Base, and the VA. Ms. Porter wanted to talk about this, specifically how far down should the data be broken down before being released to the public. The data that is reported to the BOH is only seen by Ms. Porter and two other staff members. Ms. Porter would like the BOH members' opinions on if it is important to know how many cases are in the Town versus Hanscom versus the VA.

Dr. Kiessling thought that any cases reported from Hanscom and the VA was important to know since people travel to and from those places. Ms. Porter commented not many people are currently traveling back and forth between these locations and Town.

Dr. Brunkhorst commented that she thought a clinic had been opened at the VA for COVID-19 patients. Ms. Porter commented the Town numbers jumped when that clinic opened as the state assigned the cases to Bedford. She added that the way the State reports data to the BOH includes any cases on Hanscom even though the residences on the base are located in Lincoln.

Dr. Kiessling asked what is the concern or the reason for reluctance to separate out the data for the VA cases. Ms. Porter replied that from a HIPAA perspective, giving out such data could be considered further identifying information. Such information is supposed to be protected, which is why Ms. Porter doesn't separate out how many cases are in Carlton-Willard or the various group homes or apartment complexes.

Dr. Kiessling followed up by asking why the data isn't broken down and reported by location. Ms. Porter replied the location data is for the BOH to use to help in the tracking of cases, and to determine if more help is needed in a location. However, she doesn't believe the public needs to know the details.

Dr. Brunkhorst asked if the HIPAA Law provides any guidance to the BOH for this situation. Ms. Porter replied that the BOH has to protect the privacy of the people reported to the BOH as positive cases.

Ms. Raj commented that the one separation that may be helpful is to separate the Town from the VA when reporting cases because the VA is going to handle their patients.

Ms. Thompson asked for clarification regarding what is being done at the VA. Ms. Porter replied that there is a COVID-19 ward at the VA currently. Ms. Thompson then asked if the positive cases at the ward are then reported with the Town cases. Ms. Porter replied in the affirmative. She added that COVID-19 cases from across the State are being brought to the VA, causing the increase in case numbers reported.

Dr. Kiessling commented that a goal is to provide the Town with accurate information to the community. She thinks it is important for residents to know that there is a COVID-19 ward at the VA that accounts for a large number of the reported cases in Town. Ms. Porter replied that a periodic reminder to the public regarding the VA ward is a good idea.

Ms. Thompson asked if the VA staff that have tested positive would be recorded with the Town numbers. Ms. Porter replied that the VA is attributing them to their numbers, and when they were tested they indicated their location as Bedford so the employees were entered into the Bedford caseload. Since the VA does not break their numbers down between in-patient, out-patient, and staff, it was too confusing to try to differentiate cases when reporting the total number of cases in Town. Ms. Porter also commented that if the cases were broken down demographically, there would be largely skewed since so many veterans, typically older males, were testing positive for the virus.

Dr. Kiessling commented that separating out the VA cases when reporting case numbers in the daily update would also be beneficial as the way that the VA system is set up, there is the possibility that some cases are being double counted. Ms. Porter commented that while it is possible for double counting to occur, the list she receives from the State includes the person's name and age, reducing the chance of such errors.

Ms. Thompson asked about the veterans living in the apartment complexes at the VA and how they would be counted. Ms. Porter replied that they would be included in the VA case number since they live there and would likely be moved to the COVID-19 ward should they test positive.

Ms. Schwartz commented that the reason to report the case numbers is to keep the public informed. She would break out the VA numbers from the Town numbers and report them separately.

Ms. Thompson commented that at the hospital where she works, the number of positive cases are reported as well. However, staff want the numbers broken down more into the number of doctors, nurses, cleaning staff, etc. in order to see where the biggest number of cases is located. Ms. Porter commented such information is useful to the infectious disease control, but not to the general public. Ms. Thompson commented that breaking out the VA case numbers could give an explanation to the general public on why the Town case numbers are increasing.

The BOH members concur to break out the VA numbers. Ms. Raj commented that doing so could explain the increase in numbers. Dr. Brunkhorst commented that it makes sense since the VA has a COVID ward. Dr. Kiessling commented on the need for accurate information. Ms. Schwartz agreed with Ms. Porter on the point that the veterans are part of the Town, but when the ward was opened and patients were brought in, the relationship changed and the numbers were concentrated.

Ms. Dunn commented as a resident who, upon seeing the increase in numbers, assumed that since the number of cases at the VA had increased, her risk was not increased since the patients at the VA were not able to travel around Town.

Ms. Porter asked for the BOH's opinion on other demographic information and its importance. The BOH members did not see the need to release any other demographic information. The most important information is the number of positive cases. Ms. Porter agreed with their opinions.

Ms. Porter is planning on attending the Selectmen meeting on Wednesday and informed the BOH members in case any of the members were also interested in attending. The topic of data will be discussed.

Ms. Schwartz asked if the number of hospitalizations are reported to the BOH. Ms. Porter commented that there are no official reports as some people may report that they went to the hospital, but some don't report. There are also cases where people went to the hospital, were discharged, and then re-admitted a few days later.

Ms. Thompson asked a hypothetical question regarding if there is someone you know showing symptoms, but does not want to get tested, and your responsibilities. Ms. Porter replied that there have been many cases where people do not have enough symptoms to be tested and are told to stay home. Since they are not deemed sick enough, some people disregard guidance. The guidance given is to contact their doctor.

Dr. Kiessling reported that the Bedford Research Foundation has been released from symptom-only testing. However, they are not equipped to collect the specimens, just to run the tests. Ms. Porter asked who is paying for the testing. Dr. Kiessling replied that some people pay out of pocket, some funding was provided by a task force, and some donations have been received to cover the costs of testing.

Ms. Raj asked if there has been any effect seen yet with the lack of funding for testing. Ms. Porter replied that the lack of testing kits has been a problem since the beginning.

Ms. Thompson asked if Ms. Porter thinks there will be a surge in cases after the Easter holiday weekend. Ms. Porter replied that is likely to happen since people will visit family, but any increase will be difficult to discern since the State is in the midst of the surge of cases.

Ms. Dunn asked if there are enough tests to test everyone who wants to be tested. Dr. Kiessling replied that there are not enough tests as the reagents are pre-packaged and there aren't enough of those materials. Most of the reagents are made in China.

Ms. Raj asked about the status of the food pantry and how much food has been handed out. Ms. Porter replied that there is a combination of food for students and food for families. The need is there and this past week several hundred bags were given out. The first couple of weeks, the food was purchased from the school district's distributor and more recently, the Bedford food bank has worked with the Greater Boston Food Bank. Captain Daniels of the Fire Department has taken the leadership role in organizing the weekly food bank.

Ms. Thompson asked if students can volunteer for the food bank. Ms. Porter replied that only Town staff and the Citizen Corps can volunteer for the food bank to protect vulnerable populations and to allow for social distancing.

Ms. Thompson asked about the frequency of the food bank food distribution as some communities are handing out food every day. Ms. Porter commented that partly the frequent distribution is due to reimbursements from the FDA for the school lunch program. Another reason Bedford can hold the food bank weekly is the type of food being distributed, such as shelf-stable food that can be used over the course of a week.

Ms. Porter commented that her staff is doing very well. The social workers for the COA and the BOH are both working very hard, reaching out to families in need, helping families who can't go to the food bank get their food delivered and reaching out to those staying in the hotels.

Ms. Thompson asked if the hotels were still open. Ms. Porter replied that they are considered essential service for those first responders who need housing, as well as for people who are homeless or are on the verge of homelessness. Ms. Dagle reached out to the hotels to explain the conditions under which they are allowed to remain open as part of an essential service.

Ms. Porter reported that Mr. Waksmonski, the Community Nurse, is handling the contact tracing of the people who test positive for COVID-19. He is working with the school nurses and some previous members of the BOH.

Ms. Dunn asked if the contact tracing information could be used in other ways. Ms. Porter replied disseminating the information could be very difficult as not all the contacts of a patient are in Bedford. Also, the contact information could be considered protected information. The main use of the data is to inform people who were in contact with the patient so they can take the appropriate action.

Dr. Kiessling asked if Ms. Porter has enough staff to handle the contact tracing. Ms. Porter replied that while the BOH will no longer have a summer intern, there is a program using the intern program participants as volunteers to help with the contact tracing, should more help be needed.

Ms. Porter reported that the BOH staff is also taking care of regular business, as well as tracking possible reimbursement opportunities.

Ms. Porter reported that emergency cell phones were acquired for the school nurses and social workers helping the BOH to help with communication.

Ms. Porter is on a daily call with the COVID Task Force, as well as weekly calls with the DPH, MEMA, CDC, and the local emergency preparedness branch. She focuses on calls that provide information relevant to Bedford.

Ms. Porter commented that the DPH is continuing to work on other health issues, including the coming of tick season. Ms. Dagle prepared an article regarding ticks that will be coming out soon. While going outside is encouraged, precautions must be taken.

Ms. Porter commented that April is Autism Awareness Month. An article was prepared that includes resources that may help address concerns regarding COVID-19 and autistic children.

Ms. Porter reported Jon Mattleman will hold a virtual meeting on April 20 regarding tween and teen stress and anxiety. The presentation will include coping methods, as well as time for questions from attendees.

Ms. Porter reported that some residents in need were given gift cards in order for them to purchase non-food items like diapers and prescriptions.

Ms. Porter has been working with funeral homes. Under current conditions, funeral services, since they are considered large gatherings, are not possible at this point. There can only be 10 people at the burial site and social distancing must be followed, even during such a difficult event.

Ms. Porter reported that funds were received from the State to cover some of the extra expenses related to the COVID-19 response.

Ms. Porter commented the Biosafety permittees were given an extension until mid-May to submit their permit renewal. Dr. Brunkhorst commented that the IBC meetings will need to be rescheduled. Ms. Porter added that the yearly inspections of the biosafety permit establishments will also be postponed. Based upon previous interaction with these businesses, Ms. Porter is confident the postponement will not be problematic.

Ms. Porter reported that there is a vacant space within one of the biosafety permittees and the company has asked about turning that space into a COVID-19 testing lab. Ms. Porter does not believe such a lab would require an additional permit.

Ms. Thompson asked if all the restaurants are doing take-out. Ms. Porter replied that not all the restaurants are offering take-out. There is a current list available online of which establishments are offering take-out and delivery and their contact information.

Ms. Porter reported that an employee at a Bedford food establishment tested positive for COVID-19. Everyone in close contact with the employee was quarantined. No community members had exposure. The establishment cleaned and then closed for a short time for another cleaning. Staff now have health checks at the beginning of each shift and have become drive-through only. Ms. Dagle added that the employee illness policy has been updated to include COVID-19 symptoms and employees must sign a form stating that they are not experiencing any symptoms and have not been in contact with anyone exhibiting symptoms. The establishment also adjusted their hours to allow for more cleaning and have allowed employees not comfortable working time off. Ms. Porter added that other Bedford businesses have contacted the BOH with similar concerns.

Ms. Dagle reported that she has been in frequent contact with Bedford establishments to make sure they are aware of the current orders from Governor Baker as they apply to the establishments. There has been a lot of educational outreach to the community as well.

Ms. Dagle was in contact with the FDA who has provided guidance documents, which she forwarded to the food establishments. It included information for FAQs regarding what to do if an employee tests positive. However, there still is a period of time between when a person may think they are ill and when they are tested and receive the results which is an uncertain time on what to do.

Ms. Dagle received some calls regarding establishments that were possibly still operating even though they were not deemed essential. Ms. Dagle reached out to The Edge to make sure no lessons were being given. Ms. Dagle also reached out to Learning Express Toys. While the store was closed, employees were still filling online orders. However, the establishment did not meet the e-commerce conditions to allow it to do so. Both establishments were given Cease and Desist Orders.

The BOH also received a complaint that the Bedford Motel was still renting out rooms and not reserving them for essential workers. Ms. Dagle and the Police went to the Motel to give the owner a Cease and Desist Order, as well as to check the residents of the Motel to make sure they were there under the conditions allowed under the essential services order. The other two hotels in Bedford have residents staying as allowed under current orders.

BOH Reorganization

The BOH members were in agreement to keep the Chair and Vice Chair positions. It was decided at the last BOH reorganization that the current Vice Chair, Ms. Thompson, would become the new Chair. Dr. Kiessler moved that Ms. Thompson becomes the Chair of the BOH. Dr. Brunkhorst seconded the motion. The vote was 5-0-0 for Ms. Thompson to become the BOH Chair.

Ms. Raj volunteered to become the Vice Chair. Dr. Kiessling made the motion for Ms. Raj to become the new Vice Chair of the BOH. Ms. Schwartz seconded the motion. The vote was 5-0-0 for Ms. Raj to become the BOH Vice Chair.

Ms. Schwartz asked if the BOH members needed to decide on who was going to take over Ms. Seymour's liaison assignments. Ms. Porter replied in the affirmative and stated that Ms. Seymour was the Youth and Family Services (YFS) liaison. Ms. Schwartz volunteered to become the YFS liaison.

At 9:06 pm, Ms. Raj moved to adjourn the meeting of April 13, 2020. Dr. Brunkhorst seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

Town of Bedford Massachusetts, Board of Health Declaration of Public Health Emergency
Director of Health and Human Services Report

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

Sarah Thompson, Chair

Beatrice Brunkhorst

Anita Raj, Vice-Chair

Ann Kiessling

Susan Schwartz