

Manchester Board of Health

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, February 10, 2022

Virtual Meeting

Members present:

Paula Filias

Peter Colarusso

Joan Cottler

Dr. Martin Hahn

Dr. Tonya Colpitts

Members absent:

None

Paula Filias called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m.

Ms. Filias asked Nurse Crehan to provide a Covid report.

Nurse Crehan reported the following

Total cases to date:557

Active cases: 6

February 1-9 cases: 7

Full vaccinated: 83% age 5 and up

Ms. Filias stated that given the case numbers and metrics, she proposed that the Board talk about removing the mask mandate, while recommending masking for those not boosted or at risk.

Dr. Hahn agreed that the mask mandate metrics have been met and that he would support removing the mask mandate. He suggested voluntary masking in crowded spaces and suggested caution as new variants come along. He supported increased booster clinics.

Ellen Lufkin and Nurse Crehan stated that one booster clinic was held in February and clinics would be held on the 1st and 3rd Mondays of March.

Mr. Colarusso stated that the State is diluting the data on cases as at home testing is not part of case counts. He reminded the Board that Elizabeth Holmes is going to jail. He added that he would support coordinating with the school department.

Ms. Cottler agreed with Mr. Colarusso.

Dr. Colpitts agreed but said it is not always possible to be in sync with the schools, noting that the State kept schools in masks in the past. She encouraged the Board to make their decision guided by the metrics.

Mr. James Brown, local businessperson agreed with Dr. Colpitts and the Board. He suggested the Board should be leaders and drop the mask mandate as soon as possible.

Resident Chris Reed stated that he wanted the Board of Health guidance, to please provide. He asked that the Board be quick when things change.

Ms. Filias supplied that the Boards metrics had done exactly that.

Dr. Colpitts said that we cannot predict new variants and what is coming. She said that if a new variant were to arrive, the Board would have an emergency meeting and put mandates back in place if warranted and in keeping with C.D.C. and D.P.H. guidance.

Dr. Hahn said that the State decision is not in, noting that if on 2/28 the masks are off in schools and the vax rates in schools are good enough to remove masks. He shared that the concern is for those under age 5 and unvaccinated. He acknowledged that home testing does limit watching for outbreaks and hoped that increased home testing allows for decision making by patients.

Mr. Bodmer-Turner shared that schools, especially elementary schools are close contact settings. While noting that teachers develop immunity quickly, that is not the case for kids. He felt that schools should take the 3 c's into consideration and that schools may wish to consider extending making. He expressed concern regarding enforcement of masking and hoped that there is a strong recommendation for masking in closed spaces.

Mr. Brown asked the Board to lift the general mask mandate as soon as possible, adding that masks are unhealthy. He asked that the Board not wait for the schools.

Resident Robert Coyne agreed with the removal of the mask mandate by February 28th in line with D.E.S.E. He expressed concern about parents and kids not doing the same things, adding that masks are unhealthy and asked the Board to unmask as soon as possible.

Resident Matt Gibbs of 9 Lincoln Avenue shared that he had kids of different ages. He noted that the vaccinated are still getting ill and that parents are now commuting to work. He noted that the realities are outside of this and that we need to face those realities. He felt that the data is no longer accurate, due to home testing. His opinion was that the community is done with masking. He said that while some will still be concerned, the community has done well and thanked the Board for their service.

He felt that outside of the controlled environments, people are done.

Mr. Colarusso supported the other Board members and recommended that the school consider their unique environment.

Dr. Colpitts made a motion to drop the mask mandate, to recommend wearing a mask when necessary and to use common sense. Additionally, that the Board would reconvene if there is a new variant.

She noted that Education Commissioner Reilly did not take the school mask decision lightly, that his decision was made taking all information in to consideration.

Dr. Colpitts repeated her motion as follows:

To drop the mask mandate as of noon today

To strongly recommend masking if persons choose, if persons are high risk, or if they test positive

Dr. Hahn seconded the motion.

Ms. Filias amended the motion to give 24 hours' notice, making the motion effective at noon on February 11th. Dr. Colpitts agreed.

Dr. Hahn seconded the amended motion. Members, by roll call vote were unanimous to pass the amended motion:

Ms. Filias, in favor

Dr. Hahn, in favor

Mr. Colarusso, in favor

Ms. Cottler, in favor

Dr. Colpitts, in favor.

Dr. Hahn noted that the schools will be held to their own mask decision.

Annual Town Meeting

Town Moderator Alan Wilson came before the Board to discuss plans for the Annual Town Meeting.

Mr. Wilson provided an overdate on the meeting plans to date, noting that he and Dr. Hahn had been discussing possible meeting options. Both Dr. Hahn and Dr. Colpitts suggested the meeting be separated in to 2 meetings, one for the school voting in April and the remainder of the items at a June meeting. Mr. Colarusso suggested waiting for 10 weeks following unmasking. Mr. Wilson said that he would reconvene later with both Dr. Hahn and Dr. Colpitts.

Dr. Colpitts said it was important that the school follow the D.E.S.E. decision on masking. In terms of events, she suggested they be taken on a case-by-case basis for reviewing large town events. For those who are at high risk, she recommended masking. Mr. Bodmer-Turner asked if the Board was recommending Town Meeting be masked or unmasked. He agreed with the suggestion for a split town meeting and asked what the metrics are for masking in this case.

Dr. Hahn noted it was impossible to predict April. He suggested looking two weeks prior to the event and that is case numbers or up or there is a new variant mask indoors / if not that masking may not be necessary.

Mr. Gibbs noted that it will be confusing to residents if they are unmasked, but then have to mask at Town Meeting. He suggested providing a space for people to be safe and comfortable or to allow technology to be used. He said that there is an emotional moving forward with science and suggested that the Board stick to their mask mandate metrics and make accommodations for those who are uncomfortable.

Dr. Hahn replied that there have been science-based decisions that have had to change. He agreed to moving forward but noted that modifications may be needed in future, based on science. He noted that the Board is aware of the emotional impact of masking.

Mr. Eli Boling suggested a review of past Town Meeting decisions. He felt strongly that the Town does not want to disenfranchise participants, and that attendance at Town Meeting is different than other activities like shopping.

Both Members Colarusso and Dr. Hahn, noting the Deer Island sewage testing for Covid shows case numbers have decreased, suggested that the wastewater testing is a good measure of virus activity.

Moderator Wilson noted that the location and time of Town Meeting is under the jurisdiction of the Board of Selectmen, while the conditions of the meeting are up to the Moderator. Mr Bodmer-Turner suggested that an emergence of a new variant and hospitalization data be considered. Dr. Hahn agreed and added anything of significance, including a return of the current variant. Moderator Wilson stated that Town Meeting is different and can be 2-3 hours long. Ms. Filias noted that talking about large town events is the exception and not the rule.

Water Quality Task Force

Mr. Colarusso shared that the Water Quality Task Force had been divided in two working groups, one for paper flow and one to review the Manchester Essex Conservation Trust proposal. Mr. Colarusso, as B.O.H. representative to the task force, recommended that the Board of Health wait to vote on the M.E.C.T. proposal. Ms. Filias agreed the Board can wait to vote.

Mr. Bodmer-Turner and Mr. Colarusso reviewed information on P.F.A.'s, including noting that Manchester is testing for P.F.A.'s in the water but is not at a level of mitigation. Mr. Bodmer-Turner sated there were no known contaminants and no problems with the testing. Mr. Colarusso noted that there are 3-4,000 P.F.A.'s and Manchester is testing for 6. He added that the State, Town and DPW are aware and if testing exceeds levels and mitigation is needed, the Town will do that. Mr. Colarusso noted that the P.F.A.'s fall under the task force. Mr. Colarusso added that a proposed development in Hamilton for >50 may affect the Manchester water. He asked who had the oversight regarding this, the Planning Board or the Boards of Health.

Minutes

Dr. Hahn made a motion to approve the minutes of January 27, 2022, as presented. Mr. Colarusso seconded the motion. Members, by roll call vote voted in favor of the motion to approve the minutes:

Ms. Filias, abstain

Mr. Colarusso, in favor

Dr. Hahn, in favor

Ms. Cottler, in favor

Dr. Colpitts, in favor

At 9:38 a.m. Ms. Filias made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Hahn seconded the motion.

Members, by roll call vote were unanimous to adjourn the meeting:

Ms. Filias, in favor

Mr. Colarusso, in favor

Dr. Hahn, in favor

Ms. Cottler, in favor

Dr. Colpitts, in favor

As submitted,

Ellen D. Lufkin

Administrative Assistant