**HAMILTON BOARD OF HEALTH**

**MINUTES OF MEETING**

**December 21, 2021**

**5:00 p.m.**

**Memorial Room**

**Hamilton Town Hall**

**Bay Road, Hamilton**

**Members Present**: David Smith (Chairman), Dr. Giselle Perez, and Christopher Small.

**Others Present**: Rachel Lee (Public Health Nurse), Dennis Palazzo (Director of Health) Dr. Jean Ramsey (applicant for future Board of Health position), and Joe Domelowicz (Town Manager).

This meeting was called to order at 5:05 p.m. by David Smith with a quorum established. Mr. Smith announced the meeting was being recorded.

**Review and approve minutes from October 7, 2021.**

Approval would be delayed until the next meeting.

**Director’s Report:**

Overview – Dennis Palazzo announced that he was starting to build out the Health Department. He had been inspecting food establishments until his focus shifted to COVID compliance and distributing COVID testing kits provided by the State. Mr. Palazzo was also the Health Inspector for the Towns of Danvers and Reading. Mr. Palazzo intended on using documents, files, and forms that were used in Danvers and hoped the Town of Hamilton would allow for electronic filing in the future.

Epidemiology and Emergency Preparedness – Rachel Lee, Public Health Nurse.

* COVID Updates – update on positive cases in town and on area wide trends in hospitalizations and deaths. Rachel Lee reported that there were 74 positive cases out of 977 tests completed in the last fourteen days. The total did not include the various tests in the School District. There were currently two contract tracers. Ms. Lee said 67% of new cases were of the Omicron variant, which increased from 3% the previous week. Ms. Lee said that while the variant was very transmissible, it did not appear to make people as sick as the Delta variant. The State had announced that 97% of vaccinated people had avoided hospitalization or death with 99.9% of vaccinated people under 60 avoiding death. Those who did not receive the vaccine were five times more likely to be infected with COVID and 31 times more likely than those who had received the booster shot. Hamilton had experienced several breakthrough cases with boostered seniors who had health issues. Ms. Lee said there were 370 people attending the booster vaccine clinic.
* Updates on COVID vaccinations – town-wide percentages and future clinic plans

Hamilton experienced an 82% fully vaccinated rate for adults and a 78% (out of 619) first vaccine rate for children (5 to 11 years old) who received a first dose and a 57% vaccination rate for children who received a second dose. No information was available for how many residents had received a booster shot. Rachel Lee described the pleasant conditions of the pediatric vaccine clinic.

* Review of the prior official Orders of the Board of Health under the COVID-19 Emergency Declaration, discussion of the need for reinstating any orders, particularly for indoor masking, and possible voting on same

David Smith said many cities and towns were updating their masking guidance to make the recommendation stricter due to the concern over the growth of the Omicron variant and the potential health effects. Rachel Lee hoped people would wear masks and having a mandate would make it easier for people to do the right thing. Dr. Giselle Perez was concerned with resistance and burn out while noting the importance of understanding human behavior. Christopher Small hoped that by mandating masks, compliance would be encouraged. Members discussed that the State gave the power to the Board of Health to regulate a mask mandate not only in public spaces but in the schools as well. Dennis Palazzo said he was an advocate of wearing masks.

David Smith had distributed a draft of the Enforcement Order to members of the Board and asked for their amendments. Mr. Smith noted that hospitals were nearing 100% capacity and the mask mandate might help healthcare workers. One Hamilton resident had died of COVID during the current month and the number of current positive rates came close to the all-time high a year ago. While some residents might resist the mandate, members agreed that having a sunset date might help residents accept and comply with the mandate. Mr. Smith and Dennis Palazzo would work on the document to ensure residents would understand why the mandate was being implemented. The order would take effect on December 27, 2021.

Motion made by David Smith that the Board endorses the plan to issue this order subject to those conditions (effective date December 27, 2021 and that the order would expire in the latter part of January).

Christopher Small seconded.

Roll Call Vote: David Smith – aye and Christopher Small – aye.

Dr. Giselle Perez questioned the Board’s ability to enforce the order. Mr. Smith read the last paragraph of the document, which outlined the warnings and fines – first offense received a warning, second offense received a $100 fine, and subsequent offenses received a fine of $250. Dennis Palazzo recalled that most people complied previously and that he had previously (in another town) closed businesses that did not comply. Mr. Palazzo suggested that an expiration date would give residents hope and that the date could be discussed at monthly Board of Health meetings starting January 15, 2022.

Dr. Giselle Perez – aye. Unanimous in favor. The Town Manager would be consulted regarding legal implications.

* Update on discussion on the plans for distribution of Rapid Covid 19 Testing kits provided by DPH.

The State provided COVID test kits, which were distributed but some members of the community found fault with the distribution plan. A public statement had been drafted to explain to the residents how and why the kits were distributed in the manner, which was professional and in accordance with State instructions. Members and the Health Director had no problem with how the materials were distributed but understood that residents were frustrated with not being able to obtain test kits. The Town of Hamilton was given test kits according to the poverty rate in town. Kits were targeted for families in need. It was considered reasonable that non-impoverished families in the town would be able to order test kits on-line or go to testing sites. Target organizations (Hamilton Housing Authority, Accord Food Pantry, Meals on Wheels, Council on Aging, Asbury Grove, the Schools, and Gordon Conwell) were given kits to distribute to their constituency. The Fire Department was provided kits for home bound residents. Wenham’s Enon Village, Essex Housing Authority, and Topsfield Housing Authority were also given kits.

The Town was pursuing low cost kits and Federal kits to distribute to other residents of the town. Rachel Lee was worried about people using the test kits and not reporting the results to the State and hoped that a positive response would be followed up with a professional test. Members agreed that sending out a notice before the distribution might have avoided residential concern. The document would be posted on the Board of Health website along with existing opportunities for testing. The Town had Federal funds to purchase kits. Members agreed that David Smith could alter and post the announcement.

* BOH website.

Dennis Palazzo said the website was very informational but hoped to make it more functional. Once functional, residents could file for permits online rather than coming to Town Hall. It was noted that taxes could be paid online so paying for permits might be an option. Alex Magee would be asked to investigate the possibility.

* Status of our Town Public Health Nurse, Rachel Lee and her successor.

A candidate had been found to replace the public health nurse.

Environmental Health – Director

* Food Protection - Variance request for 15 Walnut

Monica Halestein (Serenitee Restaurants) was present. During a food safety inspection and review of their files, Dennis Palazzo found the Town did not have a copy of the Health and Sanitation Safety Awareness (HASSA) plan on file or a variance for the alternate preparation of rice for sushi. The alternate preparation departed from the Food Code and required a variance. Mr. Palazzo was satisfied with the recent application for a variance. Compliance would be checked four times a year for a level five risk factor. A letter from the Board would be submitted into the files and an annual permit would reflect the variance.

Motion made by David Smith to approve the procedure for the acidification for the production of sushi in the 15 Walnut Tavern in accordance with the set of documents before the Board.

Dr. Giselle Perez seconded.

Roll Call: Dr. Giselle Perez – aye, Christopher Small – aye, and David Smith - aye: Unanimous of in favor.

* Food Protection - Food Trucks

Dennis Palazzo was trying to streamline permitting. Mr. Palazzo noted that a commissary location was possibly forthcoming. The commissary would be an inspected location that rented out space to individual food trucks and caterers. It was noted that the food truck at the Sunoco station was in Wenham.

* Housing.

Dennis Palazzo noted that the Health Department did not investigate mold or rodents. The department could investigate a leak or condensation but if the source of the mold was fixed, the department could not do anything. The same was true regarding rodents. The department could determine if rodents were present but was unable to fix the situation.

* Other

Regional Shared Services Report

The Towns of Hamilton, Essex, Rockport, and Wenham had collectively received a Public Health Excellence grant for a regionalized approach to public health. The grant would be used to hire a regional public health nurse to support the public health nurses in the towns. A regional social worker would also be hired in the hopes of resolving the panic, fear, and anger that had developed due to the pandemic. Hamilton would be the host community for the collaborative.

**Board Business**

* 2022 Goals and Discussion

**Other Board Business (for discussion only) not reasonably anticipated by the Chair.**

**Documents Considered.**

Application for Variance – 15 Walnut Tavern and Kitchen

HASSA plan – 15 Walnut Tavern and Kitchen

Menu – 15 Walnut Tavern and Kitchen

Lab Report for PH testing – 15 Walnut Tavern and Kitchen

Emergency Order for Mask Mandates.

COVID test kit distribution explanation

**Adjournment**

Motion made by Christopher Small to adjourn at 6:50 pm.

Seconded by Dr. Giselle Perez.

Roll Call Vote: Dr. Giselle Perez - aye, Christopher Small - aye, David Smith – aye. Unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted as approved at the January 12, 2021 meeting.

Marcie Ricker