



CITY OF AMESBURY, MA
BOARD OF HEALTH
MEETING MINUTES
01/20/22

RECEIVED
By City Clerk at 12:27 pm, 6/21/22

Approved 6/16/21

Meeting called to order at: 6:31 pm

Roll Call Attendance: Matt Steinel, Chairman; Kaitlyn Zeigler, Vice Chairman; Dan McQueen, Secretary; Robin Beeley, Ann McKay.

Staff: Deb Ketchen, Health Agent; Vincenzo Tirone, Dir. of Insp. Services; Ken Berkenbush, Dir. of Public Health/Fire Chief; Nick Wheeler, City Councilor President; Donna Lickteig, Adm. Asst.

Meeting Minutes of 12/16/22: Motion by Ann McKay to accept, seconded by Dan McQueen, Unanimous vote.

NEW BUSINESS – Citywide Mask Mandate

At the City Council meeting held on 1/11/22 the City Council introduced **Bill No. 2022-012 - A Resolution in Support of Extending a Temporary Mask Mandate to All Indoor Spaces to Support Ongoing Public Health and Safety Needs**, sponsored by Councilor Steven Stanganelli, and asks for the Board of Health to convene, formulate, adopt and enforce this policy effective through February 1, 2022.

Ann McKay has drafted a response to the Council which includes statistics from various agencies regarding COVID numbers and the Omicron variant. In short, Ms. McKay feels that the mask mandate is not necessary at this time based on those statistics and feels that Amesbury is following all protocol recommended by the CDC, and Amesbury has a very high fully vaccinated population at around 67%.

Kaitlyn Ziegler is a nurse practitioner working in schools and in her opinion, feels that masks are the best shield and is in favor of masks.

Matt Steinel feels that we are past the peak of the variant and if the mandate would be until 2/1/22, there is insufficient time to implement/inform/enforce a mandate. In addition, according to the City by-laws, the Board is not given authority to enforce such a mandate and questions who will enforce and what are the repercussions for non-compliance legally.

Chief Berkenbush stated that mask mandates were introduced in March 2020 due the outbreak of COVID because at that time there were no vaccines available, along with a shortage of sanitizing products. Since there are no shortages of masks, vaccines, sanitizing products now, he feels compliance rather than enforcement is the City's best option. He also states that the City cannot enforce a mandate that is unenforceable. Presently, there is a mandate for City staff which he feels is correct to prevent residents from being affected by staffing shortages should they contact the variant. He also feels that if such a mandate were to take place, it should have happened at the start of the Omicron variant in December and at this time it is too late. Chief Berkenbush also states that he does believe in the effectiveness of masks. In addition, he adds that the vaccine will not prevent you from catching the variant, but will decrease the severity of the symptoms. It is reiterated again that he feels the public should do what is best for them and their situation, and the City should continue to inform residents about the effectiveness of masks and vaccines.

Robin Beeley is a front-line worker in a hospital and she stated that there is not a surge in cases due to unmasked people, but rather a surge from people who are unvaccinated. Ms. Beeley feels there is no real data to prove masks are helping, but agrees that masks should be worn in hospitals, schools, and feels our efforts should be towards promoting vaccination.



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PUBLIC COMMENTS

During the public comment period a resident phoned in and stated that she is opposed to the mask mandate. She questions the constitutionality of the mandate and according to data she has read, she is hearing people who are vaccinated are being affected most by the variant.

Vincenzo Tirone, Dir. of Inspectional Services, received an email from a resident in favor of enforcing a mask mandate.

BOARD OF HEALTH MEMBER COMMENTS

In closing, Matt Steinel explained that after the City Council deferred to the BOH, he requested more information/data to bring to the Board to see if the Board could vote on imposing a mask mandate. Information was not provided to the Board. Matt feels that due to late start, there isn't a feasible possibility for the Board to formulate, implement, and enforce a by-law and again, questions the legality of said mandate.

Matt Steinel puts the enforcement of a mask mandate through 2/1/22 to vote:

Ann McKay – no.
Robin Beeley – no.
Dan McQueen – no.
Kaitlyn Ziegler – yes.
Matt Steinel – no.

4 opposed, 1 in favor – A vote to enforce a temporary mandate is DENIED.

CLOSING

Dan McQueen recommends further mask advisories be uploaded onto the Board of Health City website. There is presently information updated frequently, specifically "COVID 19 RE-OPENING FOR BUSINESS" which lists best business practices, and Dan feels that this information should be also transferred to the BOH page on the website.

Lastly, Matt has assigned Ann McKay to formulate a comprehensive COVID information guide regarding masks, vaccines, statistical data, etc. which will be viewed by the Board and uploaded to the BOH website.

The meeting adjourned at 7:28pm