

**Town of Needham
Select Board
Minutes for March 13, 2020
Needham Town Hall
Select Board's Chamber**

5:15 p.m. A special meeting of the Select Board was convened by Chair John A. Bulian. Those present were Maurice P. Handel, Matthew D. Borrelli, Daniel P. Matthews, David Davison, Assistant Town Manager, and Recording Secretary Mary Hunt. Select Board member Marianne B. Cooley participated by phone. Town Manager, Kate Fitzpatrick was not present. Denise Garlick, State Representative also attended the meeting.

Mr. Bulian said Dan Gutekanst, Schools Superintendent, Tim McDonald, Director of Health and Human Services and other individuals working on the current COVID-19 situation will give an update as it relates to the Town of Needham. He said questions from the general public received by email will also be addressed.

Dave Davison said this meeting is an opportunity for the Select Board and Needham residents to hear the steps the Town and School Department have taken to address COVID-19. Also in attendance was Rebecca Ping, Needham's Emergency Management Administrator and members of the School Committee.

Tim McDonald explained the current situation and plans for Needham and in the Commonwealth. He gave a brief background of COVID-19 saying it is a respiratory illness, spread by droplets. He said the groups most at risk are elderly and people with underlying health conditions including heart and lung disease, and diabetes. He said for many people who do contract COVID-19, 80% of the cases are mild, 20% are acute, and for the high risk groups death is possible. Mr. McDonald showed a PowerPoint presentation. Currently 120 cases are in Massachusetts, a handful being confirmed and the remaining presumptively positive. He commented current testing takes 24-72 hours for a case to be confirmed. Mr. McDonald said the Department of Public Health guidance suggests a quarantine for 14 days for people returning from China, Japan, South Korea, Italy, and Iran. He said commercial testing became available on March 6, 2020 and the Centers for Disease Control is pushing to test as many people as possible. Mr. McDonald said the message to understand is people can do many things to prevent the spread of the virus, including washing hands frequently and social distancing (referring to cancelling non-essential meetings and closing of schools). He said the Town is partnering with schools, religious organizations, non-public schools, private schools, daycare centers, and school nurses. He said school and Town building cleaning is underway with frequent cleaning of high contact surfaces (door handles, railings, faucets). He said Needham has initiated the emergency management structure, working closely with Rebecca Ping, Needham's full time Emergency Manager. The incident command system allows the ability to pull people from their day to day responsibilities to focus

exclusively on responding to COVID-19. He commented on the incident command structure.

Mr. Bulian asked who should people call to get tested? Mr. McDonald said people should contact their primary care physicians who will assess the situation, and not go to emergency departments. He said there is concern the health care systems could be overwhelmed with too many people looking for testing that is in short supply.

Dr. Robert Partridge, Needham Board of Health concurred people should call their primary care physicians. He said as of today there have been changes in testing, as the criteria have been relaxed so more people can be tested. Dr. Partridge commented on levels of patient care.

Mr. Bulian asked what people should do if they test positive for the virus? Mr. McDonald said currently the state considers someone cleared of a confirmed case of COVID-19 if two tests show a negative result. He said it is a challenge as there are not a sufficient number of tests available. Mr. McDonald said for someone with confirmed COVID-19 a mandatory quarantine is in place, enforced by the Public Health Division, and if necessary the Chief of Police. Mr. McDonald said no one has resisted following medical advice.

Mr. Borrelli asked for information on the one positive COVID-19 case in Needham. Mr. McDonald stated it is a balance between protecting public health and protecting medical privacy. He said the infected person is observing the quarantine and in very good health, and fits into the category of someone not able to get tested to prove the illness has passed. Mr. McDonald reiterated there is no known risk of infection from this person to the schools or Town buildings.

Mr. Borrelli asked how the national declaration of emergency, declared by President Trump today, helps the state of Massachusetts and Needham? Mr. McDonald said the keys to containing the spread of infectious disease are strong governmental measures to enforce social distancing, limiting gatherings, cancelling meetings, and reducing travelling, combined with an effective testing regimen. He said these measures help identify people infected, who can then be quarantined. He said more available tests will allow the health and medical system to work to actively contain the virus. He concurred the declaration also releases money to cities, towns, and the Commonwealth.

Mr. Handel said it was also announced today that drive-in testing will become available, noting Target and Walmart have offered space in their parking lots. Mr. Handel asked if the Town could do anything to supplement the availability of space for patient care should the hospital be overwhelmed due to its physical limitations?

Dr. Partridge said a number of hospitals are setting up satellite areas next to their emergency departments so patients can be tested. Mr. McDonald said he spoke with the CEO of Beth Israel Deaconess, Needham who expressed concern for testing capacity and a flow of concerned citizens who are anxious about the disease who may not have symptoms to meet the criteria. He said the volume of people may overwhelm hospitals and other emergency medical/surgical functions that must occur every day. He said the concern most heard was about testing capacity and how the Town could potentially support the hospital in expanding capacity. Mr. McDonald said the Town does not have doctors and support staff for care at a hospital/ambulatory care setting on the payroll, but there is a medical corps of volunteers who can provide some support. He said it is not a simple thing to accomplish. Mr. Handel reiterated it is not just manpower, but the physical space. He asked if potential public space is being identified? Ms. Ping commented as part of emergency management, plans are continually reviewed for sheltering needs and emergency dispensing sites. She commented the Red Cross came to Needham about a month ago to walk through facilities to identify sheltering needs. She noted that the Medical Reserve Corps supplemented health staff to run the flu clinics, where flow and dispensing issues are practiced every year. She acknowledged this scenario is challenging and would require extra resources in planning. She agreed it is best for people who test positive to stay home and work through the illness for as long as their health condition allows.

Mr. Bulian asked what precautions can people take when living in a home with a family member who has tested positive and are quarantined? Mr. McDonald said in some instances a quarantine would be recommended. He said it is important to remember that while COVID-19 is very different from the flu, the method of transmission is the same. Dr. Partridge commented people shed the virus before they clinically know they are ill, so it is likely the virus will spread if you are living in the same house. He said for COVID-19 it is not clear how long shedding occurs before symptoms present.

Mr. McDonald showed a chart indicating the Town and school response thus far. He noted the timeline of the response plan was drafted in February as the issue was identified early on that COVID-19 might be a challenge. Mr. McDonald said Needham has been gearing up its response and is very fortunate to have Ms. Ping, a full-time Emergency Management Administrator. He said the Town and schools have been taking this disease very seriously for a while. He noted planning meetings held with the school superintendent and the decision on how and where to limit, cancel, or recommend restrictions for large gatherings, events, and non-essential meetings.

Dr. Gutekanst thanked Dave Davison, Mr. McDonald, Barbara Singer, Schools Health Services Director, and Alan Stern, School Physician who have all been collaborating on the necessary appropriate steps. He said the community should know that in this instance, things are beyond his expertise, so he has relied on the expert health professionals in Needham, the Centers for Disease Control, and the

World Health Organization for guidance. He commented the Massachusetts State Department of Public Health has not been as helpful as Needham's DPH. He said locally, Needham is in great shape. He acknowledged the work of Rebecca Ping and Cyndi Roy Gonzalez, Public Information Officer who have provided the structure and process in order for the school system to respond to the crisis. He thanked the School Committee and staff. Dr. Gutekanst said this is not the first time Needham has closed schools due to flu, noting schools closed in 1918 for 12 days because of the Spanish flu. Dr. Gutekanst said suspending school impacts people in many ways, particularly special education students and students who are on free and reduced lunch. He said the loss of learning, social, emotional, and nutritional support is of concern. He said on Monday, March 16, 2020 planning with staff, in person and virtually, will take place. He commented on Monday, March 23, 2020 staff will provide some opportunities for students to be connected to teachers and counselors online and in a variety of different ways. He noted school will not be in session, but teachers want to connect with their students and give opportunities of learning, engagement, enrichment, and development. He said the Emery Grover Building and all school buildings will be closed until Monday, March 30. Access to an electronic device or a child's backpack will be available at the schools on Monday, March 16. He said student medication will be returned. Dr. Gutekanst said key staff will continue operations, but staff who are able to work remotely will do so. He said school nurses will work with the Department of Health to volunteer, and nutrition services is working to make sure service is available. He commented building maintenance will be cleaning and disinfecting, asking for the support of Town resources from the Select Board. Dr. Gutekanst commented on the difficulty in practicing social distancing, and discouraged families from having large gatherings. He said the School Committee will meet on Tuesday, March 17, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. to provide an update to the community via live broadcast. He said further updates will be sent to families in the next couple days with plans on how to continue to work together to support children and families.

Mr. Borrelli asked about the school schedule and how to make up the days, referring to possible loss of the April vacation. Dr. Gutekanst said he is certain that the last day of school will be June 25, 2020. He referred to the April break, commenting he would be extremely disappointed to go to all these efforts to keep children safe and keep the virus from spreading only to find hundreds of Needham families are getting on airplanes for vacation. He said right now there are no plans to change April vacation; however the situation is fluid and changing day by day. He concluded that all options are on the table.

Mr. Bulian asked about the status of high school spring athletic programs. Dr. Gutekanst said tryouts have been postponed, however conversations are occurring among the Bay State League schools who are considering cancelling the entire sports season. He said no public events will occur for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Bulian asked about playgrounds and whether they will be open? Mr. Davison commented cleaning playgrounds is not a priority, as efforts are focused elsewhere. He suggested anyone concerned about using a playground should not use it. Mr. McDonald said the best advice for concerned parents is to refrain from using the playground.

Ms. Cooley said new information she heard was that anyone returning from the CDC Level 3 countries (Europe) will be asked to quarantine for two weeks. She said while not mandatory, it is strongly suggested returning travelers stay home for two weeks. She said testing on a person who is asymptomatic is considered not valid, saying people should not seek testing without having symptoms. She referred to the CDC website. Ms. Cooley said a mobile test station is located outside the Metrowest Hospital. She encouraged people to call their primary care physician.

Mr. Borrelli suggested putting tennis nets up for people who want to get outside but still keep distance from others. He asked for advice on visiting the elderly. Mr. McDonald said people should use caution, as the elderly are a high risk group. Mr. McDonald said the best source for information is the CDC or the Massachusetts Department of Health. He said the Town's Public Information Officer will also be sending out press releases.

Mr. Handel asked how the Town continues supporting seniors dependent on the Center at the Heights? Mr. McDonald said steps are being taken for a version of the travelling meals program. He said social workers are doing virtual meetings with clients. He commented, unfortunately, the robust fitness program at the CATH is on hold, however fitness instructors are working with the Needham Channel to tape segments of low impact exercises people can do at home. He said almost all seniors who attend the CATH have registered emergency contact information with the aging services division.

Mr. Bulian asked about life cycle events and religious activities? Mr. McDonald advised that Governor Baker restricted gatherings of 250 people or more. He said it is challenging, suggesting people deviate from their standard practices, understanding changes are for the protection of public health.

Mr. Matthews asked what the public can expect as far as availability of testing? Dr. Partridge said as of today, the ability to test patients has improved dramatically as criteria have been relaxed. He said people will most likely be able to get tested at a hospital or satellite facilities. He commented independent testing centers and drive thru centers could be available in a week or two.

Mr. Matthews said some people who have the virus are asymptomatic, but some people are predisposed to catastrophic outcomes. He asked about the range in between and what the general public can do to help themselves if they contract the

virus? Dr. Partridge said 90% of patients have fever, 70-80% have a cough. He said people should check with their doctor if they get fever or cough.

Mr. Matthews said as he understands it, half the population will contract the virus at some point. He said efforts are now underway to flatten the curve and stop the virus from spreading. He said the public needs to prepare for a 6-12 month response, until a vaccine or antiviral treatment is available. Dr. Partridge said to think in terms of the situation being longer than two weeks.

Ms. Cooley asked what is happening with the Town's lowest wage workers. Mr. Davison said people should expect services to be reduced as day to day business will be restricted. He said the Town is in the process of figuring out how best to provide primary services.

Mr. Bulian inquired about the Town election on April 14th. He asked about absentee ballots to cut down on the number of people going to the polls on Election Day. Mr. Davison said the Town Clerk will remind folks of the options for absentee ballots. He said more disinfectant will be available at polling locations. He reiterated the situation is fluid and everyday there are changes being made by the legislature. He said more remote meeting participation will be allowed. He said Town Meeting remains as planned as there is nothing to suggest a postponement, however options are being considered for all events in late April, May and June.

Denise Garlick, State Representative spoke with the Board saying she was deeply impressed with the Select Board to hold this meeting on a Friday evening. She commended the work of the school superintendent saying the decision to close schools is incredibly difficult. She also recognized the work of Mr. McDonald and the Board of Health and the robust actions taken in this instance showing residents that their safety is of primary concern. Ms. Garlick offered her service and that of Senators Mike Rush and Becca Rausch as a liaison between the state and town. She commented information is fluid and as a member of the state COVID-19 task force to lead the House of Representatives she is in a position to act quickly for the towns she represents. She said veterans of Needham can be a very vulnerable population, but there are resources to be accessed at the state level and through the Needham Housing Authority. She commented on the number of residents with developmental disabilities, encouraging their needs be considered in emergency planning. Ms. Garlick commented on the senior population, saying actions by the Town will show seniors how valuable and cherished they are. She thanked the Board and offered her services and that of the legislative delegation.

Mr. Matthews asked about next steps and when the public will hear more information?

Mr. Bulian said schools will have ongoing communications, and the Board of Health will put out press releases as needed. He said the town staff work as a team.

Mr. Bulian asked residents to check in on each other and monitor friends and family to make sure everyone is ok. He thanked everyone for attending.

6:35 p.m.

Adjourn:

Motion by Mr. Handel that the Select Board vote to adjourn the Select Board meeting on Friday, March, 13, 2020.

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 4-0.

A list of all documents used at this Select Board meeting are available at:

<http://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=99&Type=&ADID=>