



DATE: April 4, 2022  
TO: Worcester Board of Health  
FROM: Karyn E. Clark, Director of Public Health  
RE: Worcester Board of Health Meeting

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#### *Welcome & Introductions*

Meeting called to order at 6:35 PM

Members Present: Frances Anthes, Khanh-Van Tran, MD, Chareese Allen, Gary Rosen, Jerry Gurwitz, MD

Staff Present: Karyn Clark, Director of Public Health; Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director; Amelia Houghton, Chief of Public Health Nursing

Guests: Athena Haddon, Regional Coordinator for the Massachusetts Organization for Addiction Recovery (MOAR)

#### *Approval of Minutes from March 9, 2022*

Motion made to accept the minutes by Chareese Allen, seconded by Fran Anthes, approved by Board of Health members

#### *Review and discussion of COVID-19 updates*

- Dr. Hirsh had call in with colleges and 2 Community Health Centers. COVID-19 case counts going in the wrong direction. Case numbers went from 10 per day 3 weeks ago to 24 a day last week. Positivity rate for the city is at .7%. Waste water results show COVID-19 is rising. Colleges seeing a rise, however 93% of 35,000 of the Worcester college community is fully vaccinated (not necessarily boosterized). Outbreak at Clark, WPI and Holy Cross stemming from off campus parties; new variant, Omicron BA-2, 50-70% more transmissible than Omicron 1. Hospitalization rate has not risen. Watching United Kingdom for trends, 4-6 weeks ahead of us. Had 5 million cases in 1 day. FDA approved 2<sup>nd</sup> booster to keep immunity going 98% protection 2 days after receiving. New variant Omicron XE found in Denmark, may be more vaccination elusive. Unclear of potential path. Anticipate this being here for the long haul. 62-63% of the population is fully vaccinated and 44-45% boosterized.

#### *Discussion*

- Gary Rosen - question for Karyn Clark. 'Have we let up on efforts to get people vaccinated or boosterized?' Recommended having vaccination available at Polar Park for Woo Sox opening day. KC informed vaccinations are constantly promoted, mobile vaccine equity clinics, Wednesdays and Saturdays at Worcester Public Library, at schools, and with HHS van. A lot of misinformation and mistrust especially in the BIPOC community. Giveaways for kids to encourage vaccination. Dr. Hirsh mentions that many internal medicine practices are not administering the vaccine in their offices, which is leading to patient questioning why it's not available in the practice and making them weary.
- Chareese Allen - suggests informational sessions with BIPOC communities to ease minds of many. KC informed that there have been many organizations in the city who have received funding from MDPH to have sessions provided to BIPOC communities. Asks Dr. Hirsh about crafting a combo vaccine. Best way to stop variants is to get enough immunity.
- Frances Anthes - Asks how it's going with the choice to wear masks in WPS. Dr. Hirsh informs no issues or bullying, no recordable 'Blip' in cases in kids. About 70% of staff faculty and adult staff are still wearing masks. 'So far, so good'. Mentions a study Stanford and University of California conducted relative to a video of Donald Trump saying he was vaccinated in low vaccination areas where the population are Trump supporters, and they saw an increase. What advice is being given to the more vulnerable people? Dr. Hirsh states he is aggressive with encouraging getting the booster as soon as you are eligible.

- Dr. Tran s- concerns about the 60+ population and what are some policies to go into facilities to remind/encourage boosters. Healthcare workers, will isolation policies be the same? Following Europe and China and is wondering what is going on there that is different. Dr. Hirsh informed that that China specifically develop their own vaccination which is not as effective, therefore the numbers are calculated differently than here in the US. Europe.
- Dr. Gurwitz - - do we need a plan for the city should a surge that is happening in the UK happens here? Dr. Hirsh is optimistic saying we have lots of masks and tests, and that we can turn it around quickly. Will put out messages encouraging mask wearing and not gathering closely indoors. It would be a bad blow mental health wise if we need to go back into isolation.

#### Review and Discussion of Board of Health Operating Principles

Dr. Gurwitz– explains that he puts things in buckets. #1 things that the board deals with that are fully vetted and/or endorsed ie: needle exchange program, tobacco sales, medical cannabis licensing and hours of operation #2. Advocacy- align with other entities within the city ie: BOH endorsed and encouraged vaccinations, BOH advocated for in person education for k-12 students, BOH made statements regarding gun violence, racial violence, and institutional racism #3 Things that start off as individual agendas/priorities- these are the hardest to deal with i.e.: Window guards, civilian review boards- these take work, research, extra meetings.

#### Discussion

- Chareese Allen- States that her perspective has changed on some items they would like to deal with after listening to Dr, Gurwitz’s ‘Bucket Process’.
- Frances Anthes- leaning more towards individual agendas may be the place that we’re learning and bringing public health issues to the floor. Mentions ‘are we the right person to be pursuing the next step, or should another group in the city have responsibility and then we can work together’.
- Dr. Tran- mentions educating herself as a resident. Personally, she cares mostly about prevention. Working together as a group is important.
- Gary Rosen- he identifies with bucket #2 Advocacy after being on School Committee and working with Senior Center.
- Karyn Clark- Everything feels like a public health emergency right now. A lot of what we do falls under Community health, so much going on. Overwhelming and exciting because you learn something new every day. As things come up, it is healthy and appropriate to talk about it in this space. Community Health Improvement Plan- goal is racial equity. Would like to work on improving health outcomes for most underserved populations.

#### Review and Discussion of future Joint Meeting of WBOH and City Council Health and Human Services Sub – Committee

- Karyn Clark- Councilor Sarai Rivera is Chair of the Public Health and Health and Human Services subcommittee and is interested in Regular meeting to discuss 2 items, both dealing with health and racial equity. First is the CHIP. The second is REACH CDC cooperative agreement, racial and ethnic approaches to community health, specific to improving health outcomes through specific strategies for the LatinX population. Sarai and councilors are interested in doing a joint meeting to discuss collaboration in order to elevate the projects and outcomes. All members are in support and endorsing the joint meeting. KC will reach out to Councilor Rivera and Jerry Gurwitz to discuss dates and agenda.

#### Additional Topics-

- New place/time for Board Meeting- Karyn Clark explains options between remaining remote, hybrid/in-person at City Hall but on a different week (3<sup>rd</sup> Monday), or hybrid/in-person at Meade St. Does not recommend holding meeting at Meade St. due to the need of Cable Services and them having limited personnel. Gary moved to have next meeting the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month. All agree on fully remote.

- Keeping bus-fare free beyond 12.31.22- Gary Rosen would like to have Administrator of WRTA Board come to a meeting to discuss continuing zero fare after 12.31.22. Frances Anthes recommends putting the discussion off for a couple months.
- New Acting City Manager Eric Batista- Gary Rosen recommends inviting the Acting City Manager to attend a Board meeting. Frances Anthes recommends inviting Edward Augustus to the next Board meeting and invite Eric Batista to the following Board meeting.

*Next Meeting/Topics*

- COVID-19 Updates
- CHIP
- Joint meeting with Sarai Rivera and other councilors regarding the CHIP and REACH.
- Next meeting will be Monday, May 16, 2022 at 6:30 PM via WebEx.
- Appreciation for City Manager Edward Augustus.

*Meeting Adjourns at 8:30 PM*