

BOARD OF HEALTH
Virtual Meeting using Zoom
April 9, 2020

Board of Health members participating: Steve George, Nancy Gilbert (Chair), Maureen Millea, Timothy Randhir, and John Tobiason.

Staff member: Health Director Julie Federman; Ed Smith, Health Inspector / Code Enforcement Officer

The meeting opened at 5:01 PM.

Review and Receive

1. Minutes of March meeting

Minutes of the March 12 meeting were approved as drafted.

New Business

1. Ceiling height variance, 15 Blue Hills Road

As part of renovations, the owners of 15 Blue Hills Road asked for ceiling heights in 3 rooms to be lower than the 7 ft. normally allowed (6'9, 6'11", and 6'11.5" respectively before finishing, with finished heights an additional 1" – 2" lower). Mr. Smith provided pictures of the rooms and said he saw no health or safety issues with the lower ceilings. Mr. George moved to grant the variance; it was seconded by Dr. Millea, and **VOTED 5 - 0**.

2. Well application, 200 Leverett Road Lot C

The owners wish to build a new home on this property, to be served by a drinking water well. The lot is not served by town water. The site plan shows wetlands on the property, with the wetlands boundary located more than the 200 ft. required minimum distance from the proposed well. Inspector Ed Smith recommended approval. Mr. Tobiason moved to grant the application; Mr. Randhir seconded the motion, and it was **VOTED 5 - 0**.

3. Well application, 846 A East Pleasant Street

This property on which a new house is to be built is potentially served by town water and sewer. However, the water line is on the far (i.e. west) side of East Pleasant St., and the street was recently re-paved. Construction costs to extend town water to the building site would be high. The house will connect to the town sewer line as required. Ed Smith recommended approval. Mr. Tobiason moved to grant the well application, and Mr. George seconded the motion. It was **VOTED 5 – 0**.

4. COVID-19 discussion

Julie Federman reported in detail on how town staff are responding to the pandemic, and she answered Board members' questions. A team consisting of the Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, Police and Fire chiefs, Public Works director, and the Finance director convene 7 days a week using Zoom to discuss the situation and actions to be taken. The town COVID-19 web page is maintained by the Public Affairs director; the Health Department page is maintained by Jennifer Brown, the Public Health nurse, who is also doing contact tracing. Each Tuesday and Thursday at noon, a "community chat" takes place online; residents can call in with questions.

In response to requests from residents, the town web page now lists the number of people living in Amherst who have had COVID-19 disease confirmed by testing (currently 10). This number is less than the actual number who have been infected, since some people have been clinically diagnosed but not tested so far because of the limited number of available tests. Also, it is likely that others have contracted the virus but have had only mild symptoms or none at all. Ms. Federman said the Health Department is committed to continue contact tracing and advising about quarantine and isolation even if the incidence of COVID-19 increases locally. This effort can be aided by school nurses, since schools are not in session, and by a statewide contact tracing program that is now being set up.

Although Amherst and Hampshire Colleges and the University of Massachusetts have ceased in-person classes for the rest of the semester and have expected most students to leave campus and return home, exceptions have been made for some students. Currently about 180 are still living in dormitories at Amherst College and 500 are at UMass. Julie Federman praised the way the institutions have dealt with these student populations. Several thousand UMass students live off-campus in town, and it is not known how many are remaining here. When town police see any groups gathering, they inform them about the need for social distancing.

Hampshire College has generously offered a dormitory to house homeless people and others who are sick but not hospitalized and also not able to remain at home. The state is working on providing other temporary housing. To assist the homeless during the day when the Craig's Doors shelter is closed, the town has placed portable toilets and a sink in the Gray Street parking lot and behind Craig's Doors at First Baptist church.

At 6:00 PM the meeting was paused to change to a different Zoom meeting number because of a conflict with another town board meeting. The Board of Health meeting resumed at 6:11 PM.

Ms. Federman said that a recent state order limits grocery stores to 40% of the normal maximum occupancy in order to ensure social distancing. The two large grocery stores in town will be reminded of this requirement. She noted that the state of Massachusetts has one of the best infectious disease infrastructures in the U.S., including MAVEN (the Mass. Virtual Epidemiologic Network) run by the state Department of Public Health; it reports on disease investigation and surveillance for about 90 infectious diseases, now including COVID-19.

Topics Not Anticipated by the Chair 48 hours prior to the meeting

Maureen Millea said she has been working on the revised tobacco sales regulations and will send members a copy of her current draft.

Julie Federman said that the High Horse restaurant is now closed, including for take-out or delivery. The Board was to have decided at this meeting about whether to extend the restaurant's license past May 31, but under the circumstances this decision was postponed.

The next meeting of the Board, presumably virtual, will be on May 14.

The meeting adjourned at 6:47 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve George