

Holyoke Board of Health
 Monday, November 1, 2021 at 6:30 P.M.
 Holyoke, MA 01040
 ZOOM
Meeting Minutes

Attendance: Patricia A. Mertes, Chair
 Dr. Esteban A. Del Pilar-Morales, MD, Vice Chair
 Dalila Hyry-Dermith, Clerk
 Sean Gonsalves, RS, Health Director
 Acting Mayor, Terrance Murphy
 Deborah Schaier, PHN
 Beatriz Colon, Head Clerk
 Jean Pao Wilson, Public
 Amanda M., Public

RECEIVED

MAR 28 2022

**Holyoke City Clerk's
 Holyoke, MA**

Patricia A. Mertes, Chair called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Acting Mayor, Terry Murphy requested that the BOH repeal the current mask mandate in Holyoke. People have approached him with concerns and want to know what the city's comparison to the surrounding area is. Covid numbers are good and vaccination rates have gone up. If the numbers increase the mandate can be re-established. The request is based on the numbers in the city, but he will support whatever decision the Board makes. He still encourages people to wear masks in public places.

Mr. Gonsalves has consistently met with the Mayor and has kept him updated on COVID numbers. Currently, 55.3% of Holyoke residents are fully vaccinated. 62.2% have received the first dose. These numbers do not account for the new eligibility of the 5-11 year age group. The metrics are generated in two-weeks increments. These are the numbers bi-weekly of the average daily incident for the week of September 30, 2021. Holyoke 18.3%, Chicopee 18.5%, West Springfield 19%, Springfield 21.2% and Westfield 21.4%. Our overall vaccination rate increase has been less than 4%. This increase has accounted for the reduction in cases.

There's been several complaints from local businesses with concerns about wearing masks. These have been addressed but no tickets were issued. The BOH has taken more of an information and education role.

The state implemented an extension on the public school mask mandate until January 2022. Mr. Gonsalves suggested rescinding the Holyoke mask mandate to an advisory. Guidelines will follow to control and reduce the spread of COVID-19. Dr. Del Pilar suggests the BOH should make a statement recommending wearing masks. The Mayor encouraged to continue reviewing the statistics and following vaccination numbers. Precautions will be taken, and numbers considered; if they go up, the city will go back to mask mandate. He thanked the Board for all the work they do. Mrs. Schaier agrees with repealing the mask mandate, but her concern now is the flu season. People still need to be diligent and be aware of it. A press release will be written. There will be continued emphasis on vaccination in the community to prevent further action and follow good BOH guidelines. Ms. Mertes asked what the procedure will be in the schools for election day. Schools will be closed, and voters will need to wear a mask. Ms. Mertes proposed to transition from mask mandate to advisory with all language from mask mandate as recommended. Seconded by Ms. Hyry and Dr. Del Pilar. They suggested for it to be put in effect Wednesday, October 6, 2021 at 12:00am.

COVID-19 Updates. Mr. Gonsalves read metrics. These are in two-week increments. Week of October 7; 6,354 tests, 250 cases and 5 deaths. 5.07% positivity. Week of October 14; 5,591 tests, 184 cases, 1 death, 4.2 % positivity. Week of October 21; 4,992 tests, 116 cases, 0 deaths, 3.15% positivity. October 28; 4,843 tests, 104 cases, 1 death, 2.79% positivity. Tests have gradually declined and there has been a decrease in cases.

BHN and Holyoke Health Center continue to offer vaccine clinics for the community. Pop-up clinics continue. Mr. Gonsalves anticipates a demand on youth vaccination. Administration should start within the next two weeks. The state will continue at home vaccination to adults and children with special needs. There will be no mass vaccine clinics for children; they will be done thru pediatricians and doctors' offices and health clinics. He does not see a demand to open clinics in spring. There's been a steady flow of people getting flu vaccines and COVID vaccine boosters at CVS in Whiting Farms Road.

Amanda M., Easthampton and Jean Pao Wilson present at the meeting thanked the Board for all their work. No further comments were made by the audience.

In October a student of HCCS passed away due to COVID-19. After the child left the school to isolate there was a significant increase in case counts. The BOH along with Mrs. Schaier, PHN and the school met with the Department of Public Health. Mrs. Schaier and Ms. Giraldo spent three full days assisting the school nurse. A record of the chronological order of the spread was provided to the state. The breakdown included the classrooms affected and how clusters began. These grew fast. The school did not close due to the student's passing but after discussions with the state, they closed to stop the spread. HCCS has a strong remote system and are prepared for the switch. The students attending are not only from Holyoke but come from other communities like Springfield, Westfield, Palmer, Chicopee and West Springfield. After five days of exposure the contact has to get tested. If the result is positive contact cannot return in 10 days. If person is not able to test, they need to quarantine for fourteen days. Before returning to school students and staff need to provide a negative test result. The majority of students and staff will be tested tomorrow. Not everyone was exposed. Students will return to school October 8, 2021. He expects everything will be ok.

Mrs. Schaier visited the school Tuesday of last week and spoke with the school nurse. She and Ms. Giraldo did a walk-thru and saw all the students wearing their masks properly and using sanitizers. They were very impressed. She provided a spread sheet of close contacts to EPI. Mrs. Schaier is only able to view Holyoke cases in MAVEN and when received she notifies all pertaining schools. When Springfield receives cases, no calls are being made to Holyoke. HPD will be doing a traffic detail in the corner of Dwight and Maple streets in anticipation of higher volumes of testing. HHC is also prepared. HCCS provided a walk-up testing site at the child's wake at the school.

ARPA funding-American Rescue Plan Act. There is money coming in from federal and state sources to communities. The emphasis will be on COVID recovery and infrastructure. BOH partnered with DPW on a \$4.5 million bid for improvements in 6 municipal buildings. Some of these include the Children's Museum, City Hall and City Hall Annex. Each building has different needs. The work will involve the repairing of roofs, leaky skylights, windows, carpets, ducts, and a variety of other projects. The bid was approved in the first round and will have different allotments. DPW will oversee the project. City offices will move to a temporary location and when the work is done, they will move back. This will be

labor intensive and lengthy. Due to the pandemic some of the supplies are scarce. Mr. Gonsalves is looking forward to it and believes it will improve the health of city employees.

CARES Act funding. This funding will be used for Veteran's lunch program and transport food for the elderly and disabled improving the quality of the lives of Holyoke residents. There's \$75,000 for the building a trailer. This will be used to assist during emergencies.

We received the Best Value Grant from the state. This money is for covid initiative, for vaccine administration. The ASG COVID-19 outreach for the community contract in Massachusetts ended and the vaccine outreach to Holyoke businesses will be done.

Mrs. Mertes adjourned meeting at 7:31p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Daiita Hyry-Dermith, Clerk

RECEIVED

MAR 28 2022

**Holyoke City Clerk's
Holyoke, MA**