

Holyoke Board of Health
Thursday, May 19, 2022, at 6:30 P.M.
Holyoke, MA 01040
ZOOM
Meeting Minutes

Attendance: Patricia A. Mertes, Chair
Dalila Hyry-Dermith, Clerk
Sean Gonsalves, RS, Health Director
Deborah Schaiier, PHN
Beatriz Colon, Head Clerk

Ms. Patricia A. Mertes, Chair called the meeting to order at 6:42 p.m. Seconded by Ms. Hyry-Dermith. Dr. Esteban A. Del Pilar-Morales, MD, was absent.

Dangerous Dog Hearing-This item does not require action from the Board. A Dangerous Dog hearing was scheduled on May 26, 2022. A dog off leash was killed by a dog on a leash. The verbal command section on the leash law was amended by City Council. Verbal command is no longer acceptable and removed the clause. This was due to a dog that was on leash was killed by an off-leash dog while being walked by his owner. In June 2020 a Pitbull named "Stink" attacked and killed the chihuahua. The owner said the dog was under voice command and had no leash on. Euthanasia was not ordered. However, the family moved, and the owner was instructed not to bring the dog into the city again. This constituted a violation of the leash law in the city ordinance. The Board decided that the Dangerous Dog Hearing Appeals Board be composed of three members from the BOH and a city attorney. Ms. Mertes asked what alternatives to euthanasia are there? Some of the alternatives are muzzle orders every time the dog is out of the house. Obedience training, owner putting up a fence, or confinement. Euthanasia would be the last result. Muzzle orders are supposed to carry throughout the state of Massachusetts. If the dog moves the order goes with the dog but we don't know if all the communities are notified. Dog and animal bites are reported to the BOH via fax. We receive about 2-4 a week from veterinarians and hospitals. They don't always result in a hearing. Owners are ordered to quarantine and isolate their animals. These don't always result in a hearing but corrective action and advise are given. If the animal is not up to date on immunization, then the animal is ordered to be in confinement.

Graffiti-There is a lot of graffiti throughout the downtown Holyoke and the back alleys of Commercial and Main Street. Mr. Gonsalves has been asking the city to be more proactive on this issue. The current Mayor expressed interest in finding a more efficient approach to this issue. Mr. Gonsalves proposed the city purchase a graffiti removing equipment which the Mayor approved. CDBG funds will be used normally if a business owner gets their property vandalized the BOH will order them to remove it at their expense. If not removed in a timely and satisfactory fashion a fine will be issued. The people that we are dealing with are already a victim. Rather than fining an owner who is already dealing with a defaced property and the cost of removal, the city can purchase all of the materials and machinery and charge a flat fee for the job. This idea was proposed back in 2018-2019 but nothing was purchased. The city of Springfield purchased similar equipment and does graffiti removal free of charge. However, property owners need to sign a liability waiver exempting the city of any damages done to during the work. These services are paid out of Springfield's Community Development Block Grant. Holyoke can use CBDG and ARPA Funds through Community Development to purchase the machine. To do this, the city needs to justify the use of such funds tied to public health for graffiti removal. There are

two ordinances that mention graffiti as being harmful to the city with enforcement of removal falling under the BOH. One is in the solid waste ordinance and the other is on the blight ordinance that speaks on the well-being and health of the city. Graffiti can bring down the value of neighborhoods and properties. Buildings become deteriorated and defaced. Acceptance of it will lead to more incidents and soon becomes normal. A formal declaration by the Board in the minutes will help to justify the use of the funding source for the purchase of the machine. Ms. Alicia M. Zoeller, Community Development Director will write the grant to apply for public health funds and a contract will be signed with CBDG. Reports of deliverables will be submitted to Ms. Zoeller. This funding was also used during the Pandemic when businesses closed their bathrooms to the public. Port-a-potties were placed throughout the city for the transient population to use. The job will either be assigned to DPW or the city can contract with a company on behalf of the BOH. DPW currently has the necessary equipment, vehicles, and storage to do the work, but it has not been delineated yet. This will not be done by a sanitarian. Ms. Mertes made a motion to declare graffiti a public health nuisance in the city. Seconded by Ms. Hyry-Dermith. All in favor.

COVID Updates. Daily average incident: 5/18/2022, 62.6%. 866 persons hospitalized statewide. 277 were primarily due to COVID. 74 in ICU, 26 intubated. Hospitalizations, deaths, and serious illnesses are down. If you catch COVID you can do a telehealth-visit and if eligible doctors will prescribe Paxlovid an oral COVID-19 treatment and it will suppress severe symptoms in qualified persons or high-risk patients or with other circumstances. The impact is less but the case count is growing significantly. Baystate has recently updated their visitor policy. Only one visitor allowed for non-COVID patients. Mrs. Schaier read that patients treated with Paxlovid had reduced symptoms but once treatment was completed the symptoms reoccurred 2-4 weeks after. There is one individual that took Paxlovid is in the hospital with symptoms. Numbers for May are 451 positive cases. 180 are 18 years and under. In those of 5 years and under, 35 cases. May 18, 2022, update on their 180 school days; 1,913 cases. Of 1,499 Students and 418 staff. Total cases in past two weeks from May 4-18, 140 (85 students and 55 staff). These numbers are reported to Cynthia Carbone by the school nurses and then to the state. The prior two-week period was 103 cases by the end of April. Today she received notice there were two second grade teachers positive and four children. An advisory will be sent out for the children to mask up in that classroom. Ms. Hyry-Dermith asked how the numbers are reported? They are gathered from parents and guardians. In the BOH when Mrs. Schaier gets cases she and Ms. Giraldo will reach out to the school nurse supervisor and go over the list of children to see if any of them is in our school system. She's also been in contact with Ms. Carbone about flu because there are a lot of cases. Flu cases are not required to be reported but they keep each other updated.

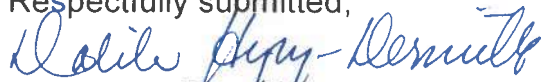
On May 12, 2022 we received a call from a woman living at the Budget Inn, 579 Northampton Street. She was complaining about not being able to pay her rent and wanting to be relocated. A non-profit agency placed her there and paid her rent for a year. The BOH had previously received reports that she was breeding cats out of the hotel room. Animal Control Officer, Erick Velez tried to work with this situation, but she was not cooperative. That activity is illegal. On May 13, 2022 Mrs. Schaier, Timothy Rivers and Officer Sustache went to the property. After a long conversation on the phone with Mrs. Schaier, she finally allowed them inside the unit. This is a unit consisting of one 12x14 room and one bathroom. The Department of Mental Health was called. After doing a crisis intervention, she was placed in their psychiatric care. They may keep her for 72-hours. Nine cats removed and are under the care of Thomas J. O'Connor Animal Shelter in Springfield, Massachusetts. Cats are in a good condition, but the apartment is not. The

BOH is working on finding a more fitting placement. She was in a similar situation in Agawam about three years ago where she was living in a trailer in a trailer park. There were cats, cries for help, and poor living conditions. The lack of basic utilities resulted in a condemnation and her being displaced from the property. We don't believe the hotel was aware of the severity of the issue. They are trying to evict her for non-payment and there is an active case in court. MDH has been notified that the hotel room has been condemned and she is not able to go back in. That places the person into a priority list on most of these agencies. We want this pattern of going community to community breeding cats, selling them and living in those conditions to stop. If MDH does not determine she is a risk to herself she can sign herself out in 72 hrs. MDH was informed she cannot go back to the hotel room and if she allowed to leave the hospital she has nowhere to live. They responded that if she stays, they can find her accommodations but if she chooses to leave, they cannot keep her. Because the cats are her property, she can claim them from TJO. She also doesn't have means of transportation. Mrs. Schaier said she doesn't know the exact numbers, but the hoarding situations keep coming up. While living in Agawam, the occupant was evicted and kept sneaking in day and night trying to care for the cats and get her belongings. She was trespassed and had a court case in that city. According to an individual a DMH worker was there to pick her and bring her to an appointment. Mrs. Schaier doesn't think anyone was checking up on her. Mr. Gonsalves has seen this situation before with a gentleman a few years ago. The care workers would come in to do their work and the property was not being maintained. The department of mental health was contacted.

The new Sanitarian will begin her job May 31, 2022.

Meeting adjourned at 7:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Dalila Hyry-Dermith, Clerk