

**Meeting Notes from an Emergency Meeting of the Peabody Board of Health,  
Regarding the Covid-19 Pandemic, Held remotely via Zoom Video Conference, Friday, March 20, 2020 4  
pm.**

**Participating in the Virtual Meeting: Mayor Edward Bettencourt, Chairman Bernard Horowitz, Dr. Leigh Ann Mansberger, Thomas J. Durkin III, Health Department Director Sharon Cameron, Public Health Nurse Chassea Robinson, School Nurse Leader Brenda Wolff, and Public Health Nurse Katherine Cameron.**

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**Subject:** Meeting to be called to order by BH at 4:00 pm.

**Discussion:** BH called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm and explained that this emergency meeting of the BOH was being held in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and to discuss steps to take as a Board of Health. He asked Sharon Cameron to give a rundown of the situation and where the City was on these issues.

## **BUSINESS**

**Subject:** Covid-19 Pandemic

**Discussion:** Ms. Cameron reported that she has been speaking with all the Public Health Departments on the North Shore and they are trying to collaborate on a unified approach in the region because that helps people and helps communities to respond in a coherent way. They have been preparing to issue a declaration of Public Health Emergency, adding that the Board is probably aware that the Mayor had issued a public health emergency declaration earlier this week, but the Board of Health in doing so has its own powers so there is still a benefit to the Board of Health declaring its own Public Health emergency. The directive she is asking to be issued would close down some of the businesses that have not been encompassed in the governors directive, including personal care businesses, as the health department has been receiving calls from both customers and business owners who are concerned about their ability to continue to do business safely. These businesses includes hair salons, nail salons, body art parlors, etc - those sort of businesses where you really cannot provide the service while maintaining the six foot distance which would be needed for appropriate social distancing. The two items before the BOH today are a general declaration of emergency and a specific directive for those type of personal care businesses to close down as of Sunday morning March 22, 2020 through April 6 2020, and that time frame is consistent with the Governor's directive for schools and restaurants, unless local conditions warrant an extension of that timeframe. Another type of establishment that would be affected would be in-person gatherings of religious congregations with more than ten persons at a time. Many congregations have already modified their practices so that they are not congregating in large groups, but it is important to include them in case some religious communities that have not yet taken that step. Those are two of the documents you have before you today. Another piece of information to share with you is that as of today we have confirmed our first presumptive positive case of COVID -19 in our community. This is not a surprise, we have expected that we would have positive cases, there are positive cases in Massachusetts communities, including other North Shore communities, so it was expected that we would receive a report of a case here as well. The consensus of the Public Health Directors of the North Shore is that we would announce the first case in our community, and not to continue to issue public announcements for subsequent cases identified. The reason for that is to reinforce for people that a case has been identified here and that to remind them to take social distancing measures very seriously. Before you is a draft press release that they have prepared, and obviously they will need the Mayor's permission before releasing a statement like this to the press.

Mr. Horowitz asked if Ms. Cameron would read the draft press release for the record. Ms. Cameron read the Declaration of Public Health emergency attached to the meeting minutes, in its entirety.

Ms. Cameron further explained that this document has been reviewed by the City Solicitor and he is fine with the legal form of it.

Mr. Horowitz asked the members of the Board for their opinions on the release. Dr. Mansberger replied that she was in agreement with it. Mr. Durkin said that he had read it and that he too was in agreement with it. Mr. Horowitz said

that he too was in agreement with it. Mayor Bettencourt said that he is in full support of this emergency order going out, adding that he has been in regular contact with several mayors in the area, and added that the Mayors of Salem and Beverly are taking this action as well this weekend, with Beverly making their order take effect as of 6:00 p.m. tonight, and said that he feels that we are right on track with doing this. He added that he wants to thank the Board and said that it gives him a great deal of comfort, and knows that our residents also take great comfort to know that we have such a great team working on this, and feels that we are out ahead on a lot of things, and he takes comfort in knowing that we are taking the appropriate actions to protect the safety of our residents. He said that he will also be making another public announcement to let people know that we have our first case since prior announcements have mentioned that we did not have any cases in Peabody yet, and that he will provide appropriate context. He closed by saying that on the current action he is 100% in support of this press release going out to announce the first case.

Mr. Horowitz said that Chassea Robinson the Public Health Nurse was also on the conference and asked for her comment. Ms. Robinson replied that she is in support of closing these establishments. She added that she was on a call with the state health department earlier today and they no longer refer to presumptive positives, and say that a positive is a positive, and suggests we say that as well. Brenda Wolff also said that she agrees with the action. Ms. Cameron told that also on the call with them was Katherine Cameron, who is not related to her, who is a public Health Nurse as well and has been doing an amazing job supporting these efforts, and told that Ms. K. Cameron had been hired under the grant received for providing mental health services to the schools, but she has stepped up in this crisis and has been doing an amazing job. She asked if Ms. K. Cameron had any comments on the release, and Ms. K. Cameron replied that it all sounds good.

Mr. Horowitz called for a motion to put forth the public health emergency for the City of Peabody and to take the appropriate steps and measures as stated in the declaration. Mr. Durkin asked if we are voting on voting on the two documents or just the declaration right now. Mr. Horowitz said just the declaration of emergency. Mr. Durkin said that he was in support of this action. Dr. Mansberger also voted to go forward with the declaration of emergency. Mr. Horowitz declared that the vote was unanimous and that we now have a state of emergency in Peabody declared by the Board of Health. He then asked Ms. Cameron to read the other document that is going to be sent out to businesses. Ms. Cameron said that he does not have the administrative capacity right now to do a direct mailing but since they are doing the press release and posting this on the city website, and since the Mayor will be doing another code red call regarding this, she knows that word will travel to all businesses quickly. Ms. Cameron asked if the code red goes out to businesses as well as individuals, and Mayor Bettencourt replied that he knows that many businesses are on the list but he is not sure if all are, but at least a great deal of them are. He added that the calls he has been receiving most over the last few days had been from people asking about why the mall has not been closed, and it had been mostly closed but now it will be completely, so those concerned employees and owners who had been reaching out will know.

Mr. Horowitz asked Ms. Cameron to read the second notice for the record. Ms. Cameron read the directive ordering closure of personal care businesses, attached to these meeting minutes, in its entirety.

Mr. Horowitz asked if the members of the board had any questions or comments on this. Mr. Durkin replied that he did, saying that he feels uncomfortable telling religious groups that they cannot come together to worship, and asked Mr. Horowitz how his synagogue was handling this. Mr. Horowitz replied that his temple had voluntarily stopped congregating, as had most other temples and churches that he was aware of. Mr. Durkin asked if they could temper the language, perhaps say that the board strongly suggests that religious groups not congregate. Dr. Mansberger stated that she disagrees and feels that the language should remain as written, because if religious groups do continue to meet, even just ten people, then one person could transmit to everyone and it will fan out from there. Mr. Durkin said that he agrees with what Dr. Mansberger says, and understands the reasoning, but is very uncomfortable with interfering with people's religious practices, but is happy to support it as public health guidance rather than as a directive. Mr. Horowitz said that he agrees we are taking a bolder step than the governor by imposing limits on the ability to congregate for religious and social purposes, but added that as a board of health it is their job to take the bold step to protect the people. Dr. Mansberger agreed. Mr. Horowitz said that they are erring on the side of caution and interfering in people's lives, even by saying people can't get a haircut. Mr. Durkin replied that stopping people from getting a haircut was a lot different from stopping them from having religious services, and has seen well intentioned things go sideways in history, and hates to see government stopping people from practicing their

religion. Dr. Mansberger replied that there is a good precedent for this, however, and told that in 1918 during an epidemic there were two cities that handled this in different ways. She explained that one city had gone ahead despite the advice of medical and public health officials, and held its parade to raise funds for bonds, yet in another city at the same time responded to the epidemic by closing and stopping everything, and the death rate dropped, and the curve was flattened, so there is something to be learned there. She added that we know how people behave, we know they are hoarding toilet paper and water, and if you leave it up to them then there is going to be a problem. Mr. Durkin replied that as the others know, his position is to leave things up to people, to allow people to make their own decisions, but in this case he will not belabor the point, but want the record to show that there was an objection and deliberation on the rights of religious groups to freely congregate.

Ms. Cameron offered a comment from a practical point of view, telling the Board that we will not be enforcing this, but if we received a phone call from someone reporting that a religious group continued to meet, they would likely just make a call to make sure that the parties are aware of the risk. She added that many of the churches are doing this themselves, at least the archdiocese of Boston has issued directives like this, so she is comfortable in either case, because it is more about what kind of statement you want to make than a practical matter. Mr. Durkin replied that this was reassuring, and thanked Ms. Cameron for that information. Mayor Bettencourt thanked Mr. Durkin for bringing this up, saying that this was something that he himself had been struggling with, but it all comes down to the phrase everyone is using lately, acting out of an abundance of caution, and said that he is in favor of keeping the language, but thanked Mr. Durkin and said he is glad that he brought this up.

Mr. Horowitz asked if anyone else had any comments, and none responded, so he made a motion to accept and approve the memorandum to establishments regarding the closing of these personal care establishments until further notice. Ms. Cameron asked before the vote was made if the Board wanted her to add language regarding civic and social groups. Mr. Horowitz replied yes, because there are social clubs and groups out there that need to be included as well, and asked if the board agreed, and all did. He then made the motion again for approval of the new directive regarding the closure of personal care and other gatherings as read and amended. All agreed. Mr. Horowitz asked Ms. Cameron about the enforcement of this directive. Ms. Cameron replied that most of these establishments are not establishments that they regulate, and even for those that they do regulate, she does not have the administrative support that will allow her to get a direct mailing out to them, so she will get this up on the city website and it will be included in the code red phone call. She added that she has been receiving a lot of calls on this and many have already closed down voluntarily, and she expects that the information on this will spread very quickly by word of mouth as well. Mr. Horowitz asked if the inspectors are staying home. Ms. Cameron replied that the city had ordered that all city employees who can work remotely should do that. Mr. Horowitz said that obviously the inspectors are no longer visiting establishments. Ms. Cameron replied that only if we were to have an emergency, like a food-borne illness outbreak or an emergency condemnation would they handle those, but pretty much every other routine inspection has been stopped. Mayor Bettencourt said that he had another call and had to step off, but said thank you to the Board and everyone for their work. Mr. Horowitz told Ms. Cameron that the press release and code red will be fine, and warned that the news of the first case is going to elicit some fear, and she will likely receive calls asking about details of who and where which of course she cannot answer, but that she'll be getting those calls. He added that he wants to thank Ms. Cameron for all of her hard work, and knows that she is working lots of overtime on these things and said to keep healthy. Ms. Cameron replied that her nurses and other Health Department staff have been amazing and are also working hard and working a great deal of overtime and said that it has been a group effort, adding that it will be a long haul. She told that the state has released some emergency relief funding, and that the first \$100,000 will be going to the North Shore Public Health Shared Services group, made up of the eight north shore communities with Salem as the host agency, and that the money has already been released and most of it will go toward funding additional public health nursing time since that is where their greatest need is right now. She added that additional funding will be released and that they may have to look at purchasing kits to help people stay at home successfully that would contain things like thermometers and those sort of things, and in the days ahead will be working on mechanisms to expand the availability of information for people who might be isolating at home and support services, so she is working with other agencies on those things as well. Mr. Horowitz asked if the meeting scheduled for next week would be cancelled, and Ms. Cameron replied that she would like to keep it on the books as scheduled. Mr. Horowitz agreed, and said with that if everyone agreed he would adjourn the meeting, to which all agreed and said goodbye.

**Subject: Next Meeting: Tuesday, March 24, 2020 at 4:30 p.m. Meeting Adjourned: 4:45 p.m.**