



Serving the Towns of Alford, Great Barrington, Lee,
Lenox, Monterey, Mount Washington,
New Marlborough, Otis, Sheffield and Stockbridge

"The mission of the Southern Berkshire Public Health Collaborative is to leverage partnerships in order to provide quality public health services that directly improve the health and well-being of the entire community."

SBPHC Meeting Minutes

March 11, 2022 @ 9AM

Great Barrington Conference Room, 334 Main St., Great Barrington, MA

w/ Remote Option via Zoom

Present (In Person): Rebecca Jurczyk (GTB, Vice Chair), Jim Wilusz (TTH), Ellie Lovejoy (Mt Washington), Jayne Smith (ALF, SBPHC), Jill Sweet (PHN), Amy Hardt (PHN),

Present (Zoom): Mike Hugo (MAHB), Diane Romeo (LNX), Brandi Page (OTS), Juliette Haas (EGR)

1. Administrative Items

- a. **Review and Approve February 11, 2022 Minutes:** Ellie L made a motion to approve the 2/11/22 minutes. Jim W. seconded the motion. Motion approved unanimously.

2. Topics for Discussion

- a. **Intermunicipal agreement - Talking Points and Next Steps:** Jim W. explained that Lee has signed the IMA after making small changes addressing liability. The signed IMA has been sent to all the representatives. It is suggested that the document be distributed to each Select Board first so they can send it to their Town Council before being ratified by the Board of Health. There were some questions about the scope of the IMA. Mike H., Jim W., Jayne S. and the SBPHC PHN are available to attend any select board meetings. Jayne S. asked that members reach out to her and let her know when the IMA will be on their town's agenda.

Scott M. had some questions about the scope of the IMA and whether additional contracts are covered under the grant. He also had questions about what exhibits A and B are. Exhibit A contains the individual town's approved minutes where the IMA was approved and signed. Exhibit B contains the terms of the PHE grant. We will continue to track activities and expenditures on a town-by-town basis to fairly apply costs. All towns will receive outreach and additional services outside of the actual grant.

- b. **Quarterly Training Topic:** Jayne S. asked the group what kind of quarterly training topics would be helpful for the Collaborative BOHs. She suggested included a food training on sanitizers/sushi rice/thermometers, how to write housing orders or others. One training that will be provided in the future is a first responder/health agent training on how to handle housing situations that involve opioid and other addictive substances so that we are providing meaningful help and not making the situation worse for the family and person affected by substance misuse.

Suggestions for trainings included soil evaluator CEUs, CPR bloodborne pathogens training (UMass Lowell) and housing/hoarding training. Jim W. mentioned that the SBPHC be a resource, as needed,

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on housing, septic plan review, etc. Anytime member towns can bounce ideas off each other it is positive because it will continue to build relationships with each other and ultimately increase our regional capacity. We are talking about a list-serve and sharing of documents as a resource to learn from each other.

We are hoping to get information on trainings that Fairview may be offering, which may include chokesaver, bloodborne pathogens, etc. COVID halted many training opportunities. Amy H. will continue to reach out and see if we can collaborate with Fairview and/or BHS in general.

Jim W. discussed the importance of the soil evaluator course to Western MA. There are limited slots for health agents and even if we are able to get a slot for staff, it is an incredibly long day for Berkshire County inspectors. Further, the towns have to cover the costs. Mike H. reminded the group that the grant can cover costs associated with trainings, especially when they are far away. There is a lot of ARPA money being used for training coming down the pike, including for online permitting software and required equipment. Jim W. reminded the group that our IMA is centered around public health nursing.

- c. **BOH Training Inventory/Needs Assessment:** Jayne S. will be conducting a needs assessment for all towns for all the different areas. Rebecca J. suggested that a column should be added to assessment to identify what they have to offer other towns. The group agreed that was a great idea. Mike H. asked that we also give towns heads up to health agents to start to gather a complete list of what staff has and doesn't have as far as training to share with the MHOA who will be conducting a training assessment of all public health staff and it would be good to gather this information at the same time as doing our assessment. Jayne S. will follow up with Dawn Sibor (MHOA) to get the scope of information that is needed. Brian Murphy will be pulling together this project state-wide. Jim W. mentioned that we should also get information on the PHN. Jayne S. mentioned the Incident Command System (ICS) courses for board members as well.

3. Public Health Nursing Updates

- a. **COVID Update:** Amy provided an update on COVID. Infection rates remain low after an uptick following February school vacations. The Public Health nurses have been hearing from people that there is a lot of anxiety and a lot of vulnerable people left behind. To ensure that the elderly and vulnerable have access to masks, SBPHC has procured masks to be distributed at over 30-sites in the Southern Berkshires (food banks, senior centers, libraries, etc.). The public health nurses will be distributing them next week with information on who should continue to wear masks. They have also prepared a survey for district parents to see if there is interest in KN95 masks or guidance for children who are, or live with people who are, at higher risk for serious illness. There are no state resources for KN95 masks that fit kits and the ones online are about \$.50 each, which could be a barrier for families.

Testing: The State has decided to not extend the Stop the Spread sites in Berkshire County. This impacts the uninsured and the PHN will be looking to identify what barriers there are for uninsured and insured people. They are also trying to navigate which insurances can be used for tests and what other resources exist for education and test providers. Jim W. has been speaking to Rep. Pignatelli and Rep. Barrett to try to see if we can keep a Stop the Spread site open for Berkshire County residents, especially since the inequity of eliminating Berkshire County sites is stark and the decision seems to be based on number of tests and not percent positives.

The public health nurses are looking at options to best use the free test kits that were sent earlier, including travel and offering rapid antigen testing for town meetings or events. Ellie L. mentioned

that there is an issue with people not being able to get the QR code that is required for travel. The nurses can make corrections under MIIS so people can then access their electronic vaccine record. They are also considering offering rapid antigen testing for town meetings or events and having office hours at the Tri-Town Health Department site in Lee. They are focusing on identifying ways the Collaborative can use resources to strengthen protections at this stage of the pandemic.

Rebecca J. recommended having this be an agenda item going to forward. The Town of GB is getting an allotment of individual tests as a town that where a Stop the Spread site is being closed. Rebecca is going to suggest to the GB Board of Health give the tests to the SBPHC nurses to ensure the test kits get used to create spaces where vulnerable community members will gather (such as senior centers, town meetings and even contra dancing).

Sewage Testing: Rebecca J. also mentioned worries that reduced testing options will result in less information on what is going on in the community. If using hospital rates, we won't know that a wave was upon us until the hospitals are impacted. Public Health is tasked with being preventative and we need to know. Amy H. mentioned that having biobot technology in the wastewater treatment plants is a good early warning system for not just COVID but other diseases as well. Pittsfield has been tracking that for about a year. Rebecca J asked if we could ask treatment plants in our region, like Great Barrington, to see if they would be willing to implement testing, possibly through ARPA funds. Knowing whether there are grants to supplement the testing efforts and also provide talking points for the selectboard would be helpful. Scott M. agreed that this would be a great service for all wastewater treatment plants to have. What is the cost associated with the testing? They pull samples anyway. Dr. Brown (DPH) said she would be providing more information regarding the testing. Pittsfield's information doesn't seem to be on the Pittsfield web site any longer. Jayne S. will reach out to Ricardo Morales, Pittsfield's Commissioner of Public Works.

Jim W. suggested seeing if there is a vendor selling KN-95 masks on the state contract so they can invoice us vs. Amazon which makes things more difficult since we don't have an account.

Annual and Quarterly Reports: There was discussion of what members wanted to see on their quarterly and annual reports. Jim asked for feedback so we can be sure to give the towns the information that would be helpful.

4. Program and Grant Updates

- a. **FDA Grant Update:** New Marlborough, Sheffield, and Tri-Town (which included Otis and Monterey) all got individual grants and there will be follow up on that this coming month. We will be purchasing forms and supplies. There are food training opportunities as well.
- b. **SB Opioid Working Group Update:** Jayne S. discussed the goal of expanding sharps disposal within Southern Berkshire. Alford is looking into starting a sharps collection program at their transfer station. We need to find a way to ensure that there are not individual sharps dropped off in kiosks, including having indoor kiosk and good training and instructions. Perhaps having more places to drop off will reduce issues. Any decision to expand services at transfer stations will need to include discussions with transfer attendants. Ellie L. reminded the group that the harm reduction van will accept sharps monthly and dispose of them at no charge.
- c. **SB Vaccine Equity Grant Update:** Not sure of long-term goals, but this year it is thought to offset cost of camp registration for families. Amy H. is not sure what that will look like. In the future it may be applied to a longer-term project to collect data on the long-term effects of COVID. It was agreed that working families were disproportionately affected by COVID.
- d. **Shared Folder Update:** Still looking at platforms; we may try a couple of different platforms. Jim W. will be getting an external hard drive to get Jayne S. files for each of the topics. Mike H.

mentioned SharePoint as a potential platform. Jim W. has used it for the Mass in Motion and it worked well. Rebecca J. thought that maybe ARPA money could be used to purchase SharePoint.

- e. **Community Partner Updates:** Jayne S. mentioned that Sandisfield had approached SBPHC to see what it would take to be part in our public health nursing. Questioned the group as to what the process would be for towns in south county to join the collaborative. Discussion included that future joining is one thing and that there are some issues with diluting PHN services. There are no issues with having towns at the table to benefit from our extracurricular offerings but we need to achieve a balance.

Mike H. interjected that the state is looking to have all towns be part of a PHE program. Tyringham is not associated with any grant and Mike H. has been tasked with them to get them incorporated into a PHE grant and that there would be possibly be funding to incorporate Tyringham. Tyringham is part of the Lee-Tyringham school district and so it makes a lot of sense for the collaborative to be covering Tyringham but we need to be sensitive that they are very independent and that we all need to be sensitive about letting them make that choice. Amy H. shared that it was very difficult to have gaps in the MAVEN data in South County, especially for towns in the same school district (like Tyringham). She felt it makes a lot of sense to have a regional approach so that the PHN can address an issue as it comes up and have all the information. This works well with West Stockbridge, part of the Berkshire Hills School District, now that the Alliance has absorbed them. We are trying to build a comprehensive system. **There will be an expectation, as well, that participating towns also are active participants around the table.** (Bolded per Rebecca J.'s request).

We need to figure out what makes the most sense regionally without diluting services. Pat L. feels strongly we need to get away from the approach of just reallocating VNA money and assuming that it will cover what we are trying to do. It isn't enough.

Jayne S. asked whether the state would be open to providing additional funding to create a regional approach. Mike H. feels like they would. Mike talked about his history on this process and let us know that he/MAHB are here at the table to represent us and are very sensitive to not erode the independence of the local Boards of Health. Once the ARPA funding comes (\$200 million) there needs to be a conduit for all towns to get the money.

The group discussed whether there could be a stepped process to ensure that there is funding so that we don't dilute the services. An item will be placed on the next agenda to ratify a process for towns that want to join us and what the expectations would be. Jim W. asked if Mike H. would be willing to sit down with the Collaborative and Alliance to discuss this.

Discussion ensued regarding the current crossover between the Collaborative and Alliance, including executive board members. Scott M. is less worried about diluting services and more interested in the natural shift over time toward the best system that works geographically.

5. **Adjourn Meeting:** Ellie L. made motion to adjourn. Jayne S. seconded. The meeting adjourned at 11:10am.