

Harvard Board of Health Meeting Minutes
Zoom Meeting
Tuesday, October 1, 2020
Approved: October 13, 2020

Board of Health Members present: Sharon McCarthy, Chair; Chris Mitchell; Libby Levison.

Attending: Alison Flynn, Clerk, Harvard Board of Health ("BOH"); Joan Eliyesil, The Harvard Press; Toby Bazarnick; Liz Ruark; Shannon Molloy; Dr. Simon Johnson, MIT.

Ms. McCarthy called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

Ms. Flynn read aloud the Remote Meeting Preamble.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Ruark requested the Schools discussion be taken at 6:00 p.m. to accommodate the availability of MIT Professor, Simon Johnson. Ms. McCarthy indicated that the agenda items would be taken in order because of the time constraints of the Board Members.

Ms. Eliyesil asked if the DPH confirmed that cyanobacteria cell count reported as 1 million cells/mL was accurate. Ms. McCarthy stated it was; two species were found totaling 1 million cells/mL. Ms. Flynn will forward Ms. Eliyesil the e-mail from Mr. Bailey confirming the same.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Review of schools discussion regarding COVID-19 testing- Ms. McCarthy advised she was asked what the BOH position would be on use of Mirius, a NY lab offering services to provide pooled COVID-19 testing results of Harvard students. Ms. McCarthy indicated that she reached out to Dr. Katie Brown, of DPH for her guidance and communicated the same to Dr. Dwight via e-mail. Ms. McCarthy stated that Dr. Brown felt the use of Mirius's method, without yet having received approval from the FDA or NY State for usage or a judgement under the emergency use authorization, would be troublesome. Ms. McCarthy explained that Dr. Brown further stated that the three labs that have been approved by FDA to do pooled testing of four or five specimens instead of the twenty-four specimens proposed by Mirius. Ms. McCarthy also noted that with only 70-80% of school attendees willing to participate in the testing, Mirius's proposal would be a useful surveillance tool but that all ongoing COVID-19 precaution protocols must continue. Ms. McCarthy stated that Dr. Brown noted Binax Now, a relatively rapid response, antigen test, is in the process of receiving approval to be used for testing in schools. Dr. Brown indicated that while antigen testing in general is not great, the biases and issues with accuracy are known for this test while such data is not publicly available for Mirius.

Ms. Levison expressed concern that testing would have to be performed almost daily to be really accurate. She indicated that she is not opposed to testing as long as everyone understands that this is a surveillance tool only, and we cannot confirm the Mirius test's accuracy.

Mr. Mitchell expressed confusion as to why Harvard would begin pooled testing. He stated that the current COVID-19 protocols in place by the Schools are good, good management of

environment is the best defense, Harvard's incidents have been low, and while there is a value to testing we do not have a clear understanding of what these results would do for us. Further, Mr. Mitchell stated he does not believe the Harvard BOH should be recommending a method that State leadership is not endorsing. Ms. McCarthy agreed that the Harvard BOH is not qualified to question the expertise of MA DPH.

Mr. Bazarnik offered that behavior management strategies have not been studied for effectiveness, and stated that he observed moments on school property where behavior management strategies, such as mask wearing and social distancing, have been bypassed. Ms. Levison expressed concern with Mr. Bazarnik's observations and her worry that surveillance testing would provide a false sense of security.

Ms. Ruark explained that the consideration for pooled testing is because parents want it. She indicated that the reason that many parents chose the fully remote model is because they do not think the existing precautions are enough, and that 80% of hybrid parents indicated they would participate in pooled testing. Ms. Ruark stated the evidence is clear that social distancing and behavioral management works, and that this testing would be in addition to already existing precautions with messaging reflecting the same. Ms. Ruark further stated that she would be okay with waiting for approval of antigen testing if necessary. Ms. Ruark explained that a consortium of Wellsley schools is currently using individual PCR testing of students, but pooled testing is much more cost effective. She stated that the purpose of the pooled testing is to catch pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic cases before the cases spread.

Professor Simon Johnson, of MIT, indicated that MIT's use of COVID-19 PCR testing of the student body and staff has found that testing keeps participants honest, and provided information about different testing programs that he is aware of.

Ms. McCarthy explained that local boards of health are not in the business of designing studies or approving methodologies that have not already been approved by those with the authority to approve, and the Harvard Board of Health needs to follow the guidance and protocols of the MA DPH. She stated that she has no doubt that Mirius could have an effective method down the road, but the Harvard BOH cannot endorse a method not yet approved by NYS, MA DPH, or FDA. Mr. Mitchell indicated that while the BOH does not have the authority to approve or deny Mirius's proposal, the BOH cannot endorse something that DPH has not. Ms. Levison added that the BOH has not seen the methodology or testing protocol proposed by Mirius, and might consider the proposal differently if that information and data regarding accuracy was available. Ms. McCarthy stated that if the Mirius method had the approval of NY State or the FDA, and if the Schools had 70-80% participation she would be willing to consider endorsement. Ms. Levison volunteered to be involved with discussing or proof reading messaging should the Schools decide to go through with the proposal.

b. Update on algal bloom testing and future planning- Ms. McCarthy stated that an e-mail from Logan Bailey at DPH received on October 1st confirmed that the most recent testing found two different types of cyanobacteria and that the next sampling will be performed after the bloom subsides. Ms. McCarthy confirmed that the toxin level is still pretty low, but her understanding is that toxin levels increase as the cells die. Ms. McCarthy indicated that she asked Mr. Bailey when there would be a spike in the cell count and how to determine when the bloom has cleared, but has not yet heard back.

Ms. McCarthy reported that she attended the *Understanding Internal Phosphorus Loading* webinar hosted by the New England Chapter of the North American Lake Management Society,

and found it very interesting. She stated that she learned that phosphorus is part of the cycle within the lake, and even with ongoing management, it will be very difficult to control.

Ms. Levison noted that the rowing team is still active; Ms. McCarthy stated that they have been advised of precautions, and it is their responsibility to follow the precautions to keep their members safe.

c. Discuss any last minute preparations for Fall Town Meeting- Ms. Levison made a motion to table this discussion as comments are no longer needed on the Planning Board's draft bylaw regarding senior residential housing; Mr. Mitchell seconded. All were in favor by roll call vote.

d. Clerk and Health Agent Update- Ms. Flynn did not offer updates.

ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA- Items for the next agenda were not discussed.

ADJOURNMENT- Ms. Levison made the motion to adjourn at 6:29 p.m.; Mr. Mitchell seconded. All members were in favor by roll call vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Flynn, Clerk

Documents Referenced:

- Agenda