

4Advisory Council on Public Health | Meeting Minutes

Location:	Zoom Meeting Link to recording ACPH – September 20 Meeting Related Files
Date:	Wednesday, September 20, 2023
Time:	5:30 – 7:00 PM
Attendees:	Charles Homer, MD, Chair Rosemarie Roque Gordon, MD, MPH, Vice Chair Andy Epstein, RN, MPH Leonard Jokubaitis, MD, MPH Natalia Linos, MSc, ScD Peter Moyer, MD, MPH, Affiliate Member James Perrin, MD
Absent:	
Attending staff:	Sigalle Reiss, MPH, RS/REHS, Director of Public Health & Human Services John Kleschinsky, DrPH, Assistant Director, Programming & Policy Roland Lankah, PhD, Assistant Director, Chief Sanitarian Elizabeth Bennett, MSN, RN, CARN, Public Health Nurse Darlene Johnson, MS, Community Health Manager

The mission of the Advisory Council on Public Health (ACPH) is to preserve, protect & promote the physical, mental, and environmental health of the Brookline Community. We collaborate with partners to reduce health inequities and respond to emerging public health challenges.

A hybrid meeting of the Advisory Council of Public Health (ACPH) was held on September 20, 2023. It began at 5:37 pm and was presided over by Dr. Charlie Homer, Chair of the ACPH.

Agenda Items

Announcements

No announcements.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Approval of minutes

A motion to approve the minutes for June 21, 2023 is made by Dr. Perrin, seconded by Dr. Jokubaitis. The motion to approve the meeting minutes from the previous meeting passes unanimously, with all members in favor.

Solid Waste Regulations Public Hearing

Commissioner Reiss presents proposed changes to the Solid Waste Regulations. She provides an update on the Rodent Action Plan. In October 2022, the Departments of Public Works and Public Health and Human Services developed the Rodent Action Plan as a comprehensive and collaborative approach to reduce the impact of rodents in Brookline. Since then, the Town has allocated \$200,000 of ARPA funds to towards various contracts and big belly purchases to improve solid waste, reduce contributing factors, and test control measures. Additional funds were provided in the 2023 override, as well as some trash fees, to support vehicle purchases and staff for enforcement and solid waste collection.

Commissioner Reiss gives an update on a list of items in the action plan:

Big Bellies – 7 have been purchased, 5 have been placed in parks and open spaces, waiting on the delivery of 3, and another 12 – 15 are expected to be purchased. There are plans to include additional purchases in the capital improvement plans for FY25 and beyond.

Berger Food Safety Consultants – conducting pest control inspections in Brookline food establishments, both internal and external contributing factors which lead to rodent activity, and data displayed by precinct identified as hotspots and compliance rates on the Public Health [website](#).

Modern SMART System - in December 2022, the Town signed a contract with Modern Pest Control to monitor and track rodent activities using a combination of boxes as well as pipe systems in the sewer system. The data is also displayed on the website (linked above) and there is a map displaying overlapping modern pest control data and complaints. To date, there have been 623 catches in the system.

BrookOnline complaint tracking and processing - complaints are being funneled to this data tracking system to make sure complaints are directed to the proper department for response.

Article 18 supporting an increase in enforcement fines was approved at Town Meeting in May and is currently under review in the Attorney General's office. Additionally, public awareness is a component of the action plan and the department is implementing the use of door hangers to notify residents of rodent activity and that staff is monitoring the area.

The department has been approved to hire additional staff through the override increasing the capacity for response. DPW are in the process of hiring for a new position to support additional solid waste collection and are going to the review process for approval.

The regulations are a major component of the action plan. It is part of a multi-pronged approach. View the [draft solid waste regulations](#). The goal of the updated regulations are to allow for more effective enforcement, quickly identify violations, combat rodent issues, and improving overall clarity and organization of the regulations, aligning it with state regulations. Director Reiss outlines and briefly describes the updated sections: section 4 on dumpsters, section 11 on solid waste haulers, and section 12 on enforcement. Feedback has been provided from the Solid Waste Advisory and Small Business Advisory Committees, and there will be more considered from tonight's hearing. Residents can also share written comments by emailing phcommissioner@brooklinema.gov.

Dr. Roque Gordon asks about big bellies, where they are located.

Big bellies are solar-powered, rodent-proof receptacles that are placed in both parks and on the streets in commercial areas throughout town. Five have already been placed in the park and two more will be delivered soon.

Dr. Homer asks about Director Reiss' mention of specifying the distance of dumpsters from lot lines because the language states "sufficient distance from the lot line to avoid interference".

Director Reiss clarifies they did not want to set specific numbers because there are tight lots, particularly in North Brookline where they need to fit dumpsters into space. They want to keep it open to judgement, case by case.

Dr. Homer also asks about plastic bags not being allowed for municipal collection. It was not clear if plastic bags other than purple bags are not allowed, and if it is not allowed for private haulers.

The intent is to not have any plastic bag sitting at curbside. There is an exception for the purple overflow bags. Director Reiss wants to work on the language in this section to make it clear that everything has to be stored in a container except those overflow bags.

Dr. Homer also mentions the collaboration between Public Health and Public Works is wonderful, but sometimes it creates confusion around who to contact or who should respond these issues.

This is an issue that Director Reiss has discussed with Commissioner Chute. She wants to adopt the regulations and work on a standard operating procedure that can provide detail about. BrookOnline has been helpful with collecting complaints. The division of response will vary with some joint inspections or separate inspections from each department.

Public Comment

John Harris, TMM, Precinct 8

Mr. Harris became involved in the rat issue because his precinct has significant hotspots and his constituents approached him with complaints. He wants to make a suggestion

for section 4 on dumpsters because in his experience these are the hotspots within the hotspots. When he toured the area, he noticed the dumpster lids made of light plastic. He suggests adding language that dumpster lids be constructed of metal or other material heavy enough to prevent rodents from slipping underneath, instead of replacing the entire dumpster on the webpage. He goes on to note that this will be of modest cost to the commercial establishment and allow inspectors to investigate and cite accordingly during regular work hours.

Fran Perler, TMM, Precinct 8

Ms. Perler begins by thanking Director Reiss and Commissioner Chute for working on this. She agrees with Mr. Harris about the dumpster lids. She gets phone calls and emails from constituents complaining that the town isn't doing anything. She feels the communication from BrookOnline is not adequate and makes people feel as though nothing is being done. While she understands that the town cannot respond to every complaint, she wants better communication (i.e., that staff will monitor hotspots and trash overflow). Ms. Perler wants inspectors to be firmer with enforcement. She states that regulations need to be enforced strongly.

Discussion

Dr. Linos asks if the data shows any changes with seasonality and changes that can be made to the regulations around this. She also asks what to do with dead animals.

If a dead animal is in a public way, you should contact Public Works. Commissioner Chute adds that if you have a dead mouse in a snap trap or rat, you can throw them in your trash. The language in the regulation is related to dead domestic animals. They will make it more clear in the regulations.

With regard to the first part of the question, Commissioner Chute states that they have found that the challenge is around access to food sources. Director Reiss adds that they do not have the data yet and are currently trying to gather data for yearly comparison. Anecdotally, they see the changes seasonally based on BrookOnline complaints.

Commissioner Chute goes on to talk about how beneficial the collaboration between her department and Public Health & Human services has been. She also takes onus for the BrookOnline app, reminding listeners that her staff has received over 625 complaints between January – August without the new staff. She states that the portal is used for them to receive information and they do not have the resources to use it as a communication portal. They will work on making the system better.

Dr. Jokubaitis asks if there is a way to mandate changes in pick-up frequency in areas where there are hotspots.

Both Director Reiss and Commissioner Chute respond by stating that this is possible. Public Works has been doing this situationally, particularly with larger buildings.

Director Reiss and Commissioner Chute will be revising the regulations based on the feedback they received tonight and during the two previous meetings. The regulations will then go before the Select Board for consideration and approval.

Dr. Perrin makes a motion to support the regulations, which is seconded by Dr. Jokubaitis. All members are in favor and the vote passes unanimously.

Biosafety Regulations updates

Consultant Rebecca Caruso presents updates and feedback received at the community meeting during the summer on the Biosafety Regulations. The plan is to regulate biological agents used in level 1 or 2 laboratories only, restricting any work that fall under levels 3 and 4. The regulations will be finalized this winter and the Council will assist with oversight. Each company will have an institutional safety committee and Director Reiss and the Department will provide input. The BBAC will consist of 5 – 7 members (Advisory Council Chair or designee, Director of Public Health or designee, a representative from the Fire Department, and 2 – 4 Brookline residents).

Ms. Caruso talks about engaging stakeholders, community members, and transparency in the process, collecting critical feedback on the regulations. She shares some of the feedback she received:

- Making K-12 schools exempt from the regulations
- Reducing the timeframe for reporting incidents to under 2 days for exposure or release
- Questioning whom approves community members for the IBC
- Clarifying in the regulations that community members appointed for IBC should be appointed by the Director of Public Health
- Expanding the definition to include all biologicals in “regulated biological agents” and flows throughout the document
- Establishing the Brookline Biosafety Advisory Council
- Including RG3 and 4 more explicitly in the restrictions

Dr. Perrin asks what the rationale is for excluding K-12 schools in the regulations.

This is feedback from members of the school department in Brookline. Ms. Caruso is not aware of any other communities that require K-12 teaching labs to register. It is not needed based on the risk. The exclusion will have to be carefully worded to clarify if they are only being excluded from the regulatory process of the Town or if they can use rDNA in a high school lab.

Dr. Moyer asks if there is a distinction between levels 3 and 4.

Ms. Caruso states that there is terminology of biosafety level 1, 2, 3, and 4 labs, which is traditional international terminology in biosafety. It talks about what room, containment, bioengineering principles, administrative and practices used to work on material safely. The regulations discuss building levels 1 and 2 labs in Brookline. There is other terminology about the material used in the labs.

The process is moving towards being finalized after one last public meeting, possibly in December to present the final regulations and receive any final feedback from community members. Once the health regulations are in place, the planning department will discuss zoning.

Dr. Linos asks if there is risk to the broader community or if it is an occupational risk.

Ms. Caruso shares the definitions for BSL-1 and BSL-2 labs. They are very low risk to communities and some risk to personnel, but there is treatment available.

Dr. Homer shares questions from the chat about BSL currently being conducted in town and the lab level at 2 Brookline Place.

She is not aware of any biosafety labs being conducted in town or at 2 Brookline Place. Director Reiss does not believe there are any, but there is no registration process currently. She will do some follow up and investigate more.

Community Health Assessment – Community Health Equity Survey

Dr. Kleschinsky provides a brief update about the 2-year Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan process that the department is undergoing in partnership with Health Resources in Action (HRiA). Currently, the group is promoting the Community Health Equity Survey (CHES), a survey conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MA-DPH), as a source for data. The web-based survey is anonymous and takes 15-20 minutes to complete. There have been 300 residents who completed the survey, but aiming to collect around 600 responses. He shares the department's [website](#), which provides information on the process (currently in phase 1 – community survey), the CHES, and promotional materials for the survey.

Dr. Linos mentions that she has heard from constituents that the survey has some intrusive, possibly triggering questions. She suggests developing appropriate messaging, letting people know the nature of questions when asking them to take the survey, and reminding them that the survey is anonymous and will help us better serve them.

Council members provide other strategies to reach residents through events hosted with community partners, access to surveys in the libraries, and providing incentives to residents in the housing authority.

Educational/Research topics

Dr. Homer proposes discussions on different public health topics over the next year during ACPH. Some of those topics include climate and health. Wendy Stahl of ZEAB has approached him wanting to discuss concerns about the impact of gas stoves on health. She suggests Council to provide educational sessions on the topic. He also talks about aspects of housing – conditions, crowding, cost - and upcoming warrant articles for November's Town Meeting that he would like to hold a hearing to discuss. Dr. Homer wants to public health implications relating to the upcoming warrant articles.

Dr. Perrin likes the idea and proposes the topic of immigrant health issues.

Dr. Linos also likes his proposal, but suggests working with another group specializing in the topic, like ZEAB. She also mentions topics of climate and racial justice, but working with partnership and increasing visibility.

COVID update

Nurse Bennett provides an update on the discontinued use of COVID-19 bivalent vaccines for people 6 months and older in the US. CDC is recommending new approved COVID vaccines, but there is a delay in the rollout. There are versions from both Pfizer and Moderna. Moderna has two formulas based on different age groups; one for people ages 6 months – 11 years and the other for ages 12 and older. Pfizer has three formulas; one for people ages 6 months – 4 years, 5 – 11 years, and 12 and older.

The division is monitoring wastewater data for trends in cases and no longer doing contact tracing. The data is similar to occurrences around the same time last year. There has been some fluctuation, but she is monitoring it closely as we move into the fall months. The school nurses have reported a few cases here and there, but they are keeping her apprised of any changes in the schools.

She stresses personal responsibility when testing positive for COVID-19. The recommendations remain the same to isolate for 5 days from symptom onset, and if symptoms improve, you return to the community with a high-quality mask from days 6 through 10.

There are two clinics scheduled with outside vendor, Star Market, in November. The clinics will be hosted at the Senior Center and Town Hall with flu, COVID, shingles, and pneumonia vaccines available. It is possible that the RSV vaccine will also be available. The department's flu clinics are all scheduled for October and these clinics will be available to anyone who was unable to attend one of these earlier clinics. The department completed high dose flu clinic at the Senior Center, vaccinating 60 people. Additional doses will be available at the clinics that follow.

COVID-19 vaccine is no longer available for free. The division is considering ordering COVID vaccine for children under the age of 18, but anyone with insurance should seek appointments at the local pharmacies, Walgreens or CVS. Anyone without insurance are recommended to visit a community health center like Cambridge Health Alliance or Charles River Community Health Center to receive a vaccine.

Dr. Homer asks if the insurance issue is preventing us from providing COVID-19 vaccine at the flu clinics.

Nurse Bennett states that the department had the flu clinics planned since August and the COVID vaccine just became available. In the height of the pandemic, the department hosted combined flu and COVID clinics. It is a huge undertaking because the operation of these clinics relies heavily on the help of our volunteers. There are already 4 different types of flu vaccines to track and adding on the variations of COVID vaccines in a large scale clinic can lead to a high risk for vaccine error. She would want more time to incorporate these kinds of changes. And lastly, any vaccine the department would be

able to order at this stage would be for children and uninsured. These clinics have already been advertised to the community and it would be awkward to be able to offer both to some and only one to others.

Dr. Linos asks if there is a way to use unspent ARPA money to purchase test kits to make available to the community through schools, libraries, etc.

Director Reiss mentions that the department has submitted requests for tests, but the system is difficult to navigate. She also stresses the importance of personal responsibility. She states that the department will look into more resources.

Dr. Linos also asks about the availability of flu mist.

Nurse Bennett states that there is a limited amount of flu mist available. They try to reserve these doses to vaccinate children when an injection is not an option. She is open to other suggestions. Dr. Roque Gordon suggested trying other locations like the pharmacy or pediatrician to schedule the flu mist also.

Director's Report

Director Reiss provides a brief update, starting with personnel changes. New staff will be onboarding in the next couple of weeks.

The department had a kickoff meeting with the Brookline Center for Community Mental Health to discuss some of the bulleted points in their MOU. They discussed working on the Oasis Plan for immigrant families to be prepared to respond if Brookline gets families.

Dr. Homer asks if the town has considered using empty spaces for immigrant families, like Pine Manor dormitories.

The placements are determined by the state, but Director Reiss states that the town has considered the space as an option.

The Youth Risk Behavior Panel is coming up next week, September 27th at the high school. She is part of the panel and will be discussing how the data will be used to inform the Community Health Assessment and the Substance Use & Violence Prevention Team also.

Dr. Homer asks about the shared Metro Public Health Collaborative.

The grant funding this shared arrangement seeks to develop capacity for a regional structure. Currently, there are 3 positions – the epidemiologist, a regional public health specialist, and a shared services coordinator. There was an increase in funding, and they are looking to hire an additional regional public health specialist. The group is trying to figure out a way to provide some regional inspection processes.

Dr. Kleschinky provides an update on the Marijuana Study. HRiA is finalizing the presentation and report for the marijuana study. It will be available internally shortly for review and feedback. Community feedback was collected through the data collection

process and the steering committee. The Steering Committee is meeting on October 2nd and the Moderator's Committee on Recreational Marijuana Policy has also been invited to join for the presentation to provide feedback and ask questions. The final report will be available to the public in early November.

Full report available in the [meeting folder](#).

Division Reports

Reports available in the [meeting folder](#).

Other business

Dr. Homer asks Dr. Linos about the heat issue in the schools.

Dr. Linos spoke with Director Reiss about the issue, but has learned that each school has a heat emergency plan. The plan mentions going to a cool space to cool off, but there is no sustainable plan for how climate change is going to increase the number of heat days. It was flagged at the last School Committee meeting as something they need to pay attention to moving forward. She hopes that the Sustainability Committee will reach out to Public Health and think through a long-term plan. Many teachers were concerned. Rooms with AC units were still registering at 80 degrees. She stresses that this is a School Committee and School Department issue, but looks for support from the Department of Public Health.

Director Reiss agrees that the department can support, but also think about involving Emergency Management and Sustainability in the Planning Department, and a community-wide standpoint. She suggests taking a look at town infrastructure and response to heat, including the schools in the conversation.

Adjournment

Ms. Epstein motions to adjourn, seconded by Dr. Linos. The meeting adjourns at 7:30 pm.

Action Items

Action Item	Owner(s)	Deadline	Status
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