

**Town of Needham
Select Board
Minutes for March 20, 2020
Needham Town Hall
Powers Hall**

3:00 p.m. A special live televised meeting of the Select Board was convened by Chair John A. Bulian. Those present were Maurice P. Handel, Matthew D. Borrelli, Daniel P. Matthews, Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager, and David Davison, Assistant Town Manager. Marianne B. Cooley, Select Board member, Denise Garlick, State Representative, and Rob Partridge, Board of Health participated by phone. Recording Secretary Mary Hunt joined the meeting via Facebook.

Ms. Fitzpatrick commented a lot has happened since meeting last Friday, March 13, 2020. She said Needham has set up its emergency operations center at the Rosemary Recreation Complex to make sure information is conveyed to the public and to plan for the emergency.

Health & Human Services & Emergency Management COVID-19 Presentation

Tim McDonald, Director of Public Health noted the practice of social distancing and that listening by phone are Tiffany Zike, Public Health Nurse and Rebecca Ping, Emergency Management Administrator. He said the pandemic is a fluid situation, and information is different from his presentation last Friday. He said a federal disaster declaration has been made by President Trump. He explained the virus is a respiratory illness spread by droplets, noting while the virus is not airborne, being in close proximity to someone with COVID-19 for a period of time makes it more likely to spread, and droplets are spread by coughing or sneezing. He said the number of cases are comparatively low in children, but the elderly and people with certain medical conditions including heart and lung disease, and diabetes are considered high risk. He said pregnant women are also considered high risk based on recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control. He reiterated the incubation period is 2-14 days, noting people are contagious before they are symptomatic. Mr. McDonald said Governor Baker activated the National Guard this morning and a State of Emergency last week. He explained the emergency orders statewide include no on-premise consumption of food or alcohol (only take out service by restaurants), no gatherings above 25 people, and closure of daycares. Mr. McDonald said 328 cases are in Massachusetts, 52 in Norfolk County. He said 7 counties in the state show evidence of community spread, noting it is a cause of concern. Mr. McDonald said town buildings have been closed (with only emergency staff in the buildings), schools, parks, playgrounds, and daycares have also closed. He commented Needham has three cases of COVID-19, less than surrounding communities. He stressed he does not want people to have a false sense of security when hearing only three cases are in Needham. He said people must think in broader terms and know the risk remains high. He stated it is believed the number is off by “orders of magnitude,” and there are people in Needham that

have COVID-19 and may be spreading it. He reiterated social distancing is of paramount importance and people should cancel any playdates, only interact with family members, and modify shopping behavior. He suggested people who know a senior citizen talk by phone and ask to do their grocery and pharmacy shopping as a way of helping during this anxious time. Mr. McDonald said Needham is operating at “Level 4” (suspend non-essential town services) noting the Town and staff are adapting. He said Needham has opened its emergency operations center, and is fortunate to have Rebecca Ping, a full time Emergency Operations Administrator, Tiffany Zike, Public Health Nurse, and Cyndi Roy Gonzales, Public Information Officer. Mr. McDonald said daily updates can be found at needhamma.gov/health, along with guidance from the CDC and Mass. Public Health. He encouraged residents to enroll in “Alert Needham” by texting the word Needham to 67283. Mr. McDonald showed a PowerPoint slide “How Needham is Helping Those in Need,” speaking about the CATH, Community Council food programs, Shine on Needham, Youth Volunteer Program, and the Medical Reserve Corp. He noted the significant shortage of supplies to test for COVID-19 is of concern, stating the number of confirmed cases in the community does not represent the full burden of illness. He stressed people must take social distancing very seriously.

Mr. Bulian asked how many tests have been conducted in Needham and the life span of the virus? He asked about the virus on mail delivered to home.

Mr. McDonald said there is no reliable number on how many people have been tested in Needham and that testing is still “ramping up.” He said information is developing, suggesting the life span varies dramatically on different surfaces. He asked people to continually clean and disinfect surfaces. Mr. McDonald implored people to wash hands and use sanitizer immediately after any activity.

Mr. Matthews reiterated people get the virus when they touch their face after touching something with a droplet. He said the number one thing people should do is to wash hands.

Mr. Handel asked about identifying potential clinical space, i.e. hotels, vacant Avery Manor, schools?

Ms. Fitzpatrick said discussion with the hospital is occurring regarding use of hotels and Avery Manor. She indicated a plan is in place to use Town facilities when the hospital is ready to set up screening. Mr. McDonald said police and DPW will also help with traffic.

Mr. Handel said testing is not generally available, and until it is, numbers are relatively meaningless. He implored people to be careful and remain vigilant.

Mr. Bulian said the number of cases is from the State information.

Mr. Borrelli expressed appreciation for all the work being done on behalf of the community. He commented on the economic effect on local businesses. He said he understands Mr. McDonald's point completely, referring to the number of cases in Needham. He said town officials did not want to be misleading by giving an inaccurate number and said people should act as if the number is high. He asked residents not to hoard supermarket items as it is not fair to anyone. He spoke about delivery to people over 60 years of age and the need to keep a distance and wash hands immediately. He asked if the timeline has changed, either longer or shorter? Mr. McDonald said the question will be easier to answer once the testing lag in Massachusetts is somewhat resolved. He said people must understand the challenge, knowing daily life has changed and social distancing will be here for a while, weeks or possibly months.

Ms. Cooley reiterated people need to stay home, and to the extent the curve can be flattened it means everyone will be home longer, which she said is a good thing in many ways.

Representative Denise Garlick thanked the health department for their extraordinary work and expressed her confidence in the all town departments. She said she agrees with comments and is trying to model her own behavior.

Kathleen Ward Brown, Board of Health reiterated residents should not have a false sense of security as the number of cases will rise dramatically.

Dr. Partridge pointed out the medical community has been told that by next week there should be a significant ramp up in testing capability, possibly 3,000 patients a day. He recognized that with more testing will come more positive and negative results. He said the number of cases will increase due to the spread of the virus and more testing. He concluded saying people should continue what they are doing in order to flatten the curve.

Ms. Fitzpatrick said Town officials are not focusing much beyond next week because things are changing fast. She said the plan will continue with the EOC open, essential services, limited staff, while also looking long term to figure out how to continue essential services, as well as add services. She asked the Select Board to approve the Declaration of the State of Emergency, which would make funds tied to a declaration available and help to inform the community about the serious situation. She said under the Town Charter, the Select Board has a role in supervising civil defense and declaring emergencies.

Declaration of State of Emergency

Mr. Handel read the Declaration of State of Emergency.

Motion by Mr. Handel that the Select Board sign and approve the Declaration of State of Emergency in the Town of Needham effectively immediately March

20, 2020, remaining in effect until notice is given pursuant to the judgement of the Select Board that a State of Emergency no longer exists.

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

Preliminary Discussion of Upcoming Events

Mr. Davison reiterated that the response to the event will be week by week. He commented on costs incurred to the Town, noting there are some local resources to deal with the immediacy, noting money is available from the snow budget due to the mild winter. He said he expects FEMA and MEMA will also make funds available to reimburse expenses the community may incur. He said key department budgets are being monitored to ensure if issues arise, and a game plan will be enacted, specifically related to public health, police, fire, and emergency management. He told the Board all incurred expenses related to the event are being tracked, so it will be quicker to respond when the opportunity arises to seek funds from the federal government. Mr. Davison said as weeks go on, planning for next year will be monitored, noting certain revenue sources will be hard hit as a result of the closure of various businesses. He anticipates that when things return to normal, some of the revenue streams will improve. Mr. Davison commented on services the Town is providing electronically, such as permitting so that when in a position to respond, it can do so quickly.

Ms. Fitzpatrick commented the state senate will take up a bill, likely next week, to provide flexibility with elections.

Tedi Eaton, Town Clerk said several surrounding towns have received a court order to change the date of their election. She said the state senate will vote on Monday, March 23, 2020 allowing cities and towns to change or postpone elections. Ms. Eaton said she prefers to wait to see what the state senate does before seeking a court order. She commented on voting by absentee ballot and early voting

Ms. Fitzpatrick said the regularly scheduled Select Board meeting is on Tuesday, March 24, 2020.

Mr. Bulian commented on the loss of two prominent community members who passed away. He said Greg Condon, a current member of the Zoning Board of Appeals passed away last week and Dave DiCicco, a current member of the Park and Rec Commission passed away this week. He extended condolences to the families on behalf of the Select Board.

Mr. Matthews pointed out Town staff are working trying to accomplish routine business as well as deal with the extraordinary events. He said he hopes people understand and asked the public to think about the need for prompt action, suggesting people use good judgement when contacting staff in any department. He said everyone is trying their best and asked residents for patience. He concluded saying “we can get through this together.”

3:45 p.m.

Adjourn:

Motion by Mr. Handel that the Select Board vote to adjourn the Select Board meeting on Friday, March 20, 2020.

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote

A list of all documents used at this Select Board meeting are available at:

<http://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=99&Type=&ADID=>