

Minutes
Pittsfield Board of Health
Wednesday, October 7, 2020
VIA ZOOM 998 1950 5073 6:00 PM

Present: Chairperson Alan Kulberg; Board Members: Brad Gordon, Steve Smith

Also Present: Health Department Director Gina Armstrong.

Convening

The meeting of the Pittsfield Board of Health was held on Wednesday, October 7, 2020, via ZOOM. Chairperson Kulberg called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Review and Approval of Minutes: The Board reviewed the minutes of September 9, 2020 and they have been approved.

Order to Demolish Request for Approval – 62-68 John St.: Senior Sanitarian Andy Cambi appeared and provided the Board with an overview of the property. Mr. Cambi stated that the code enforcement began on the this property in 2016 when a pipe burst at the property. Mr. Cambi noted that the property was occupied by the owner at that time, however the property was condemned due to no water, no electricity and the furnace was in disrepair. He noted that the repairs were completed and the condemnation was rescinded in March of 2016. Mr. Cambi noted that in 2017 the Health Department was notified of the condition of the roof at the property by Berkshire Gas Company. An inspection was performed in conjunction with the Building Department and the property was deemed as an unsafe structure. He also noted that gas services were turned off and the property was once again condemned at that time. The owner vacated the property at that time as well. It was noted that the property was secured and was being maintained for a period of time. Mr. Cambi noted that communications with the owner came to a halt and that the taxes on the property are \$127,000.00 and rising. He stated that the property continues to deteriorate and the condition of the porch has worsened, the property is overgrown and pieces of the roof are starting to come off. As the owner has continued to be non-responsive and the property continues to be in violation, an approval for an Order to Demolish was requested. A motion to approve the Order to Demolish was unanimously approved after a motion made by Board Member Gordon and seconded by Board Member Smith.

Quarterly Public Health Nursing Report: Kayla Donnelly Winters was unable to attend the zoom meeting due to a power outage.

BHS Healthy Steps Program Update: Sarah DeJesus, the Harm Reduction Supervisor at Healthy Steps appeared and provided the Board with an update as to the Healthy Steps Program. Also joining the discussion regarding the opioid epidemic is Jennifer Kimball, BRPC Public Health Principal Planner and BOAPC Coordinator. Ms. DeJesus noted that she started overseeing this program in March 2020, stating that she previously worked with Tapestry Health for about 15 years. She noted that this program is a harm reduction center that provides active injection drug users with sterile supplies (in hopes of preventing HIV, Hepatitis and other diseases), STD testing, overdose education, Naloxone distribution and education. The testing occurs on a walk in basis, but also at the jail and McGee Unit and other such locations. Numbers for testing are lower for 2020. While the program itself was open, due the pandemic, no testing occurred in March, April and part of May of this year. However, Ms. DeJesus stated that on average approximately 50 people are tested per month both in the office and in the community. She further noted that they see people on a walk in basis and they average about 20 people per day. She noted that the number of syringes taken in and given out from 2019 to 2020, the

2020 numbers are a lot higher. She attributes this to the pandemic and the DPH being more lenient on how many syringes were allowed to be given out so that interactions/encounters could be limited. This also encouraged people and resulted in people bringing back a significantly higher number of used syringes back into the program. She further noted that the facility is also a disposal site for other syringes used for other medical reasons that do not include addiction. Ms. DeJesus noted that they work with a transient population that they provide multiple resources including mental health & medical referrals and that they are continuing to do so as best as possible during the pandemic and the restrictions so that people continue to seek out some type of care and services. Board Member Smith noted that one of the benefits this program was to provide was to become a gateway into the health care system. He questioned whether this is occurring. Ms. DeJesus noted that health care is being accessed and that the program also helps facilitate care that is beyond their scope. She noted that people are entering detox facilities through this program locally and arrangements are made for entry into detox facilities beyond Pittsfield when beds are available. Board Member Smith questions whether there are less syringes being found in parks and other areas of the city now that this program is in place. Ms. DeJesus noted that there is not a way to track whether there are less syringes being discarded within the community, but she did note that they do have staff that will go pick them up if they are reported and she further encourages these types of reports. She did also state that is rare that they get calls for this. The OEND (Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution) program numbers are on track from 2019 to 2020. She noted that 87 Naloxone doses used are higher than last year with a few months left of this year. Ms. DeJesus discussed the Hepatitis C Treatment Pilot Program. It was noted that most often, people are aware of their diagnosis, but do not seek treatment. She noted that in the past, people who tested positive did not receive care because medical providers required that people abstain from intravenous drug use before treatment could take place. She also noted that most times these people did not have a primary care physician who could provide them with the necessary referrals to obtain treatment. Healthy Steps explains the long term effects of the disease to encourage treatment because people cannot or do not see or feel the infection, they feel it is not harmful. Ms. DeJesus noted that studies show that treatment of Hepatitis C gives these people empowerment and therefore has a domino effect. She noted that they are also working with the Berkshire County House of Correction to have treatment set up for those who test positive upon their release. It was noted that the inmates are not treated while they are incarcerated due to insurance issues. Jennifer Kimball further explained that inmate lose access to their insurance while incarcerated and that although the price of the medication needed has gone down significantly, it is still cost prohibited as far as the House of Correction is concerned. Ms. DeJesus noted that almost anyone with an active Hepatitis C infection is eligible for treatment. She stated that the course of treatment is 8-12 weeks, which can be challenging for the population of people they are working with. Ms. Armstrong noted that this was labeled at a “pilot” program and questioned if it was the hope to continue this program. Ms. DeJesus stated that it is their hope to continue the program. Dr. Kulberg and Ms. Armstrong questioned how many people are affected by lack of insurance. Ms. DeJesus noted that most people do have health insurance, usually MassHealth. Ms. Armstrong questioned whether the wrap around services (ie. Referrals, etc.) provided are tracked in some way. Ms. DeJesus noted that there are certain referrals are tracked, but some are not. She noted that a general categories like “substance abuse services”, “partner services” and “housing referrals”. Things they do not track might include sending people to food pantries or providing food. Ms. DeJesus noted that a lot of people come to them as a “catch all” resource. Ms. Armstrong noted it would be nice to be able to see the data on the other services as well. Dr. Kulberg questioned whether they saw any increase of intravenous drug use or addiction in the community as a result of this program. Ms. DeJesus stated she did not believe so and noted that the number of newly enrolled people has gone down since they opened. Jennifer Kimball provided the Board with and update as to Berkshire Opioid Addiction Collaborative which works in all 32

communities in Berkshire County working heavily on harm reduction. Ms. Kimball noted that the program works with services like Tapestry and provides a lot of education to the community. She notes that the collaborative helped to open syringe exchange programs in Northern, Central and Southern Berkshire County. She notes that they are partnered with other counties in this region and are working on a Young Adult Empowerment Grant which is an opioid use disorder grant for ages 16-25 which is a hard to reach demographic. This grant will allow the Collaborative to look at various types of data to better design how to reach this age group, which may not be otherwise traceable to allow for better informed work across the county. Also working with a federal grant to with Healthy Steps and first responders to work on a Blood Borne Pathogen outbreak plan for Berkshire County. This would be a response to an HIV outbreak as a result of substance abuse. Another grant is with the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition to develop and implement post overdose community engagement for Pittsfield and North. They are partnered with County Ambulance, Northern Berkshire EMS, Healthy Steps, to do planning and development around post overdose engagement teams. Ms. Kimball noted that Pittsfield and North Adams were chosen as part of a national study as part of the Healing Communities Study which for Massachusetts is an \$89 million dollar four year grant and will focus on reducing opioid overdose deaths by 40% by the end of the study. Board Member Gordon questioned whether their youth initiative is connected with the Youth Homelessness Resolution/Prevention Program through Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority that focuses on the under 25 demographic. Ms. Kimball noted that she planned to have Board Member Gordon speak to the BOAPC group to address the housing challenges.

BOH Environmental Tobacco Smoke Regulations: Dr. Kulberg noted that Ms. Armstrong and Board Member Gordon have worked with the city solicitor as well as Cheryl Sbarra, attorney consultant for MAHB with regard to amendments to these regulations which were outdated. Ms. Armstrong and Board Member Gordon review the edits, which include additional language changing “Private Club” to “Membership Association” which, with very specific guidelines, would allow smoking. The term “membership association” is defined very specifically as “a for profit establishment with a defined membership restricted to individuals over the age of 21. Board Member Gordon suggests that he is not comfortable with this change until he is able to secure something in writing regarding the specific language in the statute so that this Board’s interpretation is consistent with its proposed changes. A Motion to table to the vote pending an opinion from the state level was made by Board Member Gordon and seconded by Board Member Smith was unanimously approved.

Health Department Updates:

Gina Armstrong reviewed the monthly inspectional services report.

Adjournment

Upon a motion made by Board Member Gordon and seconded by Board Member Smith, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,
Stephanie Provencher, Clerk

Documents/Materials Distributed at Meeting

- Meeting Minutes of September 9, 2020
- Documents relating to 62-68 John St.
- Spreadsheet from Healthy Steps
- Public Health Nurse Quarterly Report
- Environmental Tobacco Smoke Regulations.
- Monthly Inspectional Services Report