



# Northeast District Department of Health

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NDDH Board of Directors Meeting Minutes  
Date: January 14, 2021 – 3:00 PM

Location: Zoom Video/Phone Conference

## 1. Commencement/Roll Call

This meeting was called to order at 3:05 pm by Board Chair David A. Griffiths.

David A. Griffiths asked for a Motion to amend the agenda to include, under New Business, letters of concern from the community with discussion and possible vote. Motion made by R. Kerr; seconded by R. Grindle. R. Andrews deferred all voting to G. Dickinson for the Town of Woodstock. Vote 14-0-0. Motion carried.

Present: Robert Kelleher, Brooklyn; Luther Thurlow, Canterbury; Christopher Lippke, Canterbury; Paul Torcellini, Eastford; Robert Grindle, Hampton; Heidi Clifford, Killingly; David A. Griffiths, Killingly; Donald Gladding, Plainfield; Rob Kerr, Plainfield; Ann Hinchman, Pomfret; Joseph Nash, Putnam; Lana Salisbury, Sterling; Orla McKiernan-Rafertry, Thompson; Nathan Swift, Union; Gail Dickinson, Woodstock; Robert Andrews, Woodstock

Heidi Clifford joined the meeting at 4:00 p.m.

NDDH Staff: Susan Starkey, Director of Health; Melissa Nichols, Finance/HR;  
Linda Colangelo, Education and Communications Coordinator

## 2. Citizen's Participation – none.

## 3. Minutes: November 12, 2020

Motion was made by L. Salisbury to approve the minutes of the November 12, 2020 meeting. Seconded by R. Grindle. R. Kelleher, L. Thurlow, D. A. Griffiths, D. Gladding, R. Kerr, A. Hinchman, L. Salisbury, O. McKiernan-Rafertry and N. Swift in favor. 11-0-3. Motion carried.

G. Dickinson, J. Nash, and P. Torcellini abstained as they were not present for the November meeting.

#### 4. Communications

There were no online questions received for discussion.

Introduction of Joseph Nash, new Putnam Board representative. Board welcomed Joe to the Committee. D.A. Griffiths noted that every town currently has a representative.

#### 5. Reports

##### A. Executive Committee

D.A. Griffiths advised the Board that he signed off on the Union Contracts that had previously been reviewed and voted on.

D.A. Griffiths requested a moment of silence for the passing of Russell Gray, who had been the first selectman for the town of Sterling. R. Gray had always been a strong supporter of the NDDH.

##### B. Finance Committee

- a. YTD Financial Report: O. McKiernan Raftery advised that the Finance Committee met on December 22, 2020 and several things were discussed. They are being shared in items b-e today.
- b. Per Capita Estimate: Upon review of the Capita Report there was a discussion regarding the proposal of an increase per Capita. The recommendation was an increase of \$1.25 which would be equal to \$7 per individual per Capita. It is currently \$5.75 per individual.

There was much discussion regarding the hardship to each town as everyone is struggling since the COVID-19 pandemic. Several Board members indicated it would be a hard sell to the towns. NDDH was asked to explain why they were requesting a significant increase.

S. Starkey explained that this year we had to renegotiate our Union contract because we were underpaying staff. We need to make certain that we have enough people to do the work. We need to pay employees fair wages and we want qualified individuals on our team. We do not want employees to get their credentials and then leave us for another town because the pay is better. One of our biggest assets is the staff. In addition, as with anywhere, prices have risen on rent, electricity, gas, etc.

NDDH has recently added on staff, changed some part-time positions to full-time, all in an effort to get our much-needed work completed. The increase will help to

pay for salary, wages, and fringe benefits. S. Starkey asked that Board members go to their town officials and tell them that we are still the best bargain going. We have the best health department and our money is well spent. We are responsible for every penny.

L. Salisbury asked where we stood in the state with regard to per Capita.

M. Nichols explained that we are currently fourth from the bottom (bottom being the lowest per Capita rate). The increase would bring us to mid-range.

D.A. Griffiths asked if the state was anticipating a new round of money from the federal government. S. Starkey said that the state will get some money, but it is not clear if money will be going to hospitals or public health. She asked the Board to keep in mind that the \$1.25 is an estimate only. It may go down. The towns can call us and complain. Their responses will be taken into consideration.

D.A. Griffiths questioned whether the estimate letter asks for comments.

M. Nichols explained that the letter is written asking the towns to let us know what their plans are on the per Capita rate. We usually send the letters in the middle of January and towns use it for their budgeting. D.A. Griffiths asked if the letter states that we would be happy to meet with town officials to explain the Capita increase. S. Starkey said that Thompson is the only town that invites her.

D.A. Griffiths inquired about how much money will be left in the undesignated fund balance. S. Starkey said that our goal would be to keep 25% or more in the fund.

Various Board members discussed the strain that COVID has already placed on their towns and schools. They are concerned that the increase of \$1.25 will be a true hardship for many.

S. Starkey reminded the Board that this is an estimate only, it is what we would like to propose to them so they may consider it. Our best estimate is that this is what it will cost to deliver our many services. By the time we get to April, the Board will have a true budget in front of them.

O. McKiernan-Raftery noted that each NDDH staff member has been going above and beyond. Public health is more important than ever. Thompson invites S. Starkey to present at a meeting and she does a wonderful job of explaining all that NDDH and its staff does. She recommended that every Board member go to their town officials and ask for the option of a visit. It is important that they understand what the health department is doing directly from the Director.

R. Grindle motioned to accept the estimated \$1.25 increase per Capita, to a rate of \$7 per person. G. Dickinson seconded. L. Thurlow voted against. Vote 13-1-0. Motion carried.

- c. Attorney Fee Acknowledgement. M. Nichols and the Finance Committee wanted to let the Board be aware that we have gone over budget on this line item. We will wait until the end of the fiscal year to make an adjustment. S. Starkey explained to the Board that we went over budget due to enforcement laws for COVID, asbestos issues that we are enforcing, and the review of the Union contract. The contract took a good amount of time because this was the first year the contract was reviewed in some time and a lot of the information was outdated.
- d. Purchase of Additional Vehicle. M. Nichols reported that we are hoping to purchase a vehicle. In a phone call yesterday, E. Lippke suggested that we take some money out of the \$18,463 reserve fund to help us purchase the vehicle, using up to \$5000 and financing the rest. We are looking at an AWD, certified used vehicle similar to the Sportage we bought two years ago. We are looking at a price in the \$21,000 range.

There was much back and forth discussion about how to get the most for our money. The Board discussed possibly paying off or paying extra towards current loans, particularly the loan with a 5.99% interest rate.

H. Clifford motioned to transfer \$5000 from the vehicle reserve fund into the vehicle maintenance fund and to finance up to \$16,000 for the purchase of a vehicle. D. Gladding seconded the motion.

G. Dickinson amended the motion. She motioned to pay up to \$9000 from the vehicle reserve fund toward the purchase price of a vehicle, not to exceed \$21,000. A. Hinchman seconded the motion.

Further discussion ensued regarding the purchase of a vehicle and whether this was necessary. M. Nichols explained that we currently have five vehicles being shared by nine employees. If we get a sixth vehicle, that will add one more to our fleet. Employees will still need to schedule their time with a vehicle but there would be another vehicle available.

G. Dickinson withdrew her motion to pay up to \$9000 from the vehicle reserve fund toward the purchase price of a vehicle, not to exceed \$21,000. A. Hinchman withdrew her second of the motion.

G. Dickinson motioned to take \$9000 from the vehicle reserve fund and use up to \$5000 for the down payment on a new vehicle and put the remaining amount on the highest interest loan. Seconded by A. Hinchman.

D. Gladding made an amended motion to transfer \$9000 from the vehicle reserve fund and pay it into the vehicle maintenance budget then spend up to \$21,000 on a vehicle, including purchase by loan. G. Dickinson seconded. Vote 14-0-0. Motion carried.

- e. Fair Fees – 2021 – No Change. O. McKierman-Rafty requested that the permit fee for Brooklyn and Woodstock Fairs remain at \$165.

#### C. Personnel Committee

L. Salisbury reported that there were two scheduled Personnel Committee meetings between the last Board meeting and this one. The January meeting was cancelled as they were not able to pull things together for the attorney regarding the changes to the employee manual. This is on hold.

D.A. Griffiths asked if the Board wanted to go into Executive Session to discuss the DOH evaluation, but everyone agreed they were open to discussing during the meeting and S. Starkey agreed to the same.

- a. DOH Evaluation Discussion. L. Salisbury thanked the Board members for turning in their evaluations. Fourteen were turned in which was an excellent response rate and affirms that we are all behind S. Starkey and interested in what she does. There was a brief note that one of the possible responses on the evaluation form “neither agree nor disagree” seemed to amount to “I don’t know.” We will look at whether or not to keep that on future evaluation forms. There were 244 check marks possible and 242 were in the agree or strongly agree fields. There were only two disagree responses. This was a very positive evaluation.

There was some discussion regarding a possible salary increase for the Director, but S. Starkey said she would prefer to wait and see if there could be a uniform increase that would apply to all staff. While she appreciates the vote of confidence from the Board, she does not necessarily want a raise when other members of NDDH may not get one. If money is available in April to consider bonuses, we can revisit an increase at that time.

D.A. Griffiths thinks that S. Starkey has done a wonderful job and said that NDDH is recognized throughout the state for doing a great job.

- D. Reopening Committee. D.A. Griffiths suggested we defer a discussion on this for the time being as vaccines are being rolled out within the community.

#### E. Director of Health Strategic Plan Update

S. Starkey reviewed the Environmental Health Services report pointing out the many inspections and permits that were done despite the pandemic. The staff deserves a big round of applause for getting so much done.

S. Starkey noted that the Strategic Plan she shared with the Board in November is not very old. We are still working on some of the same things but reminded everyone that when she prepared the Strategic Plan a year ago, we were only hearing hints about COVID-19. When the pandemic hit, our priorities changed. We went from doing case investigations to finding people who have COVID, to educating schools, towns, health care systems and social service agencies on how to make sure people were safe, that they had a place to live and food to eat. We joined together with hospitals to make sure we could coordinate our efforts to make certain people had PPE and assisted in delivering PPE to medical practices and health care providers. We worked to get testing services up and coordinated within the region, then jumped into contact tracing. We worked with area schools to make certain they knew what to do to get schools reopened and then we took phone calls when they called about cases of COVID within their institutions. In December, we were told that a COVID vaccine was imminent. The state came up with a system to use VAMS internet technology. No employer knew how to use the system. NDDH decided to take care of that by running a clinic and making sure no one would be in a waiting room. L. Colangelo, A. Sanelli and S. Starkey have been meeting with municipalities, school systems and health care providers including non-traditional providers such as funeral directors who need to be vaccinated. We taught them how to use the technology.

The state keeps changing its priorities regarding those eligible for the vaccine, so we are getting calls but do not always have answers to questions. Right now, individuals ages 75 and up are a priority as they are the highest risk. We will be suggesting that people that do not have internet connectivity get assistance to register from family and friends.

Thus far, NDDH has vaccinated over 800 individuals.

L. Salisbury said that some first responders (firemen) have been unable to get appointments for the vaccine. S. Starkey advised that NDDH has sent notes to town first responders to let them know when we are having clinics and suggesting they send people down.

O. McKiernan-Raferly mentioned that she recently volunteered at one of our vaccine clinics and it was very well run. Anyone volunteering to work at the clinic is vaccinated.

A. Hinchman said that she would like to be involved. She completed an MRC form years ago.

G. Dickinson advised that she would be retiring soon and would be available to assist and work as a volunteer at the clinics. All volunteers need to be part of our Medical Reserve Corps.

L. Colangelo described how on January 5<sup>th</sup>, a NDDH COVAX Team made up of 8 individuals who meet three times a week to operationalize how the clinic flow needs

to work had to maneuver when we were informed at the last minute of Moderna handling changes. The vaccine needed to be in a freezer, not a refrigerator. Steve Bousquet's of *Bousquet Appliances* not only had the freezer we needed but was kind enough to donate it to us. At the same time, we procured additional vaccine doses from Bristol Hospital and a team member was deployed there to pick up the vaccine. Of note, the vaccine has very particular handling instructions, it cannot be shaken, cannot be dropped, etc. With the freezer in place and the vaccine on site, the clinic started. While that was occurring, L. Colangelo and S. Starkey were providing education to forty employers that joined a Zoom call and were trained on how to upload rosters of employees into the VAMS system. Meanwhile, the other NDDH employees continued to carry on our other ten essential services. Our little health department has been busy saving lives.

## 6. Unfinished Business

### A. Committee Appointments

- a. Finance Committee: L. Salisbury motioned for L. Thurlow to be on the committee. D. Gladding seconded. Motion carried 14-0-0.
- b. Personnel Committee: L. Salisbury motioned for A. Hinchman to be on the committee. D. Gladding seconded. Motion carried 14-0-0.

## 7. New Business

### A. Letters of Concern from the Community

S. Starkey introduced letters we have received from the community requesting they be excused from paying the permit late fees. In the past, we have not made exceptions. She suggested we deny the request for waiver of the late fee penalty. There is a fee and a late fee and penalty. It is all in the letter sent out advising people that their permit is due.

S. Starkey believes we should remain consistent and apply the rules as we have in the past.

P. Torcellini motioned to decline the request to waive the late penalty fees. H. Clifford seconded the motion. Motion carried at 14-0-0.

L. Salisbury motioned that S. Starkey use her discretion regarding providing a grace period for any payments. G. Dickinson seconded. 14-0-0. Motion carried.

D.A. Griffiths talked about people not wearing masks and asked Board members to call NDDH. S. Starkey reminded the Board that NDDH enforces Sector Rules related to Public Health Facilities as defined in the Governor's Executive Orders; other officials including municipal officials enforce Rules in other businesses and enforce requirements

to wear masks in public. Board members may need to call their chief elected officials or municipal officials if they see members of the public not wearing masks or violations of the COVID prevention rules. We work with those people. S. Starkey stated that one of our new employees has been doing a really great job of going into places, getting them into compliance and working with the people in towns as a partnership.

8. Adjournment – Motion was made to adjourn at 5:17 p.m. by G. Dickinson. L. Salisbury seconded. 14-0-0. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

*Linda Violette Buisson*  
Administrative Assistant, NDDH