

HEALTH BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE (BRC) MEETING MINUTES 20April2021

Voting members present: Kathie Lynch (Chair), Ann Birner (Minutes), Kristin Shaw for Kim McNamara, Richard DiPentima, James Petersen

Non-voting city staff present: Stephanie Seacord

Action items below identify name of responsible party in bold font.

Kathie read the approved waiver for remote meeting participation during the pandemic and participants identified location and any others present at that location. A motion to approve the minutes of 13th April was made by Ann and seconded by Rich. The minutes were approved without comment or discussion. Kathie asked for someone to write minutes next week as Ann will be absent and **Stephanie** volunteered.

The dashboard was reviewed by **Kathie**, who will present it at the next Reopen BRC meeting. Small improvements are noted in case numbers and positivity. On the state map, Rockingham County has moved into a more favorable category for new cases. NH hospitalizations are slightly up. Kathie noted that NH's vaccination program leads the nation. Variants are present in NH, with between 151 and 300 documented. **Stephanie** will revise to include dates on the X axis of the NH hospitalizations/Portsmouth infections graph.

Governor Sununu allowed the statewide mask mandate to expire last week. Rationale given was that the most vulnerable populations have been vaccinated, the vaccine program has expanded, and that masking is still encouraged. BRC members are not supportive of this move as herd immunity has not been reached. Portsmouth's mask mandate remains in place and Chamber of Commerce head Valerie Rochon requests strategies to help local businesses maintain safe environments. Stephanie summarized steps already taken to publicize and promote adherence to the City mandate in the wake of the Governor's decision. This group did not have anything to add other than to maintain ongoing messaging to the public: get vaccinated, use masks, practice distancing, keep activities outdoors when possible, etc. The Arts and Nonprofit BRC has developed a pledge that organizations may take and then publicize as reassurance that safe practices are in place. It was noted that the CDC endorses unmasking of vaccinated individuals only in small groups, not in large gatherings; also, that the Portsmouth mandate only applies when a 6' distance cannot be maintained. **Kathie** will share the output of this discussion with Valerie Rochon and summarize during the next Reopen BRC meeting.

It is anticipated that other statewide mandates and guidance documents that currently expire on May 7th will be consolidated into a "best practices" document, with changes expected before Memorial Day. Kristin stated the Portsmouth mask mandate expires at the end of June but current establishment licenses from the Health Department are in place until October. These licenses are based on the NH "Safer at Home" document but not tied to it, meaning they would not change simply because the "Safer at Home" document changes or expires. The Health Department would adjust these only based on the level of COVID-19 presence in the community.

The Ventilation FAQ was revised in draft form after James circulated an "Open Letter to Address the Use of Electronic Air Cleaning Equipment in Buildings". The timing appears to be based on emerging data regarding unhealthful byproducts that can be produced by these devices as well as anticipation of unwise expenditures for such devices based on "slick marketing" if/when the nation's infrastructure funding rolls out. **James** will present this at the next Reopen BRC meeting. **Stephanie** will cross-reference an article on the Open Letter to the currently circulating version of the Ventilation FAQ and will change the wording to clarify that "electronic air cleaning devices" is essentially the same as "ionization" technology and will then circulate to the group. She summarized other changes to FAQs necessitated by changing policy; all members were supportive.

Kathie described her approach to unmasked individuals at Little League games, which is based on quoting details of current guidance. She noted the players are generally compliant but some adults resist, especially post vaccination. Baseball is generally a low-risk activity given minimal contact and outdoor setting.

There were no public comments. Ann made a motion to close the meeting, seconded by Rich, all agreed.