

**HEALTH BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE (BRC) MEETING MINUTES
2SEPTEMBER2021**

Voting members present: Kathie Lynch (Chair), Ann Birner (Minutes), Kim McNamara, James Petersen. Richard DiPentima joined via zoom.

Non-voting city staff present: Stephanie Seacord, Kristin Shaw

Action items below follow name of responsible party (name in bold font).

Meeting was called to order by the Chair and quorum confirmed. Per Kathie, the meeting was called at the request of Mayor Becksted who is seeking guidance in view of rising COVID-19 infections. Aim is to address health and safety concerns by suggesting implementation of public health measures based on defined statistical parameters. Correspondence from Assistant Mayor Splaine (appended) relevant to a forthcoming City Council agenda was circulated to Health BRC members prior to the meeting.

Most recent dashboard was reviewed and all agree that we (city, state, region) are “not in a good place” and return to school and indoor activities in the coming months have the potential to worsen the situation. The bulk of the meeting was dedicated to reaching consensus on our recommendation, key discussion points being:

- Role of the Health BRC in terms of interpreting scientific data and recommending public health measures vs setting policy
- Whether to consider economic concerns, business perspectives, etc. vs leave that entirely to the influence of others e.g. City Manager, City Council, individual organizations and business (some already taking matters into their own hands e.g. Music Hall requiring masks)
- Consensus is that masks are effective and desirable and should be worn indoors but...mandate (not within our power) vs suggest? Parameters for instituting/stopping? – positivity, community transmission (categories such as high/substantial/moderate/low risk), and/or availability of vaccines to age 6 months?
- Data sources and methods vary and in the past we have relied upon CDC (features county level transmission) and DHHS (reports at city level).
- Vaccines are another key to protecting public health – how to encourage? Timeline for most children (down to 6 months)? Possibly early to late winter. FDA will not cut corners, will fully review.
- Confirmed and emphasized – schools are not within the purview of the BRC.

Several statements were put forth and tweaked. **Stephanie** was charged with circulating a statement to include the following or similar language for final review and approval via email ASAP after the meeting. Once approved, the statement will be appended to these minutes and **Kathie** will forward to Mayor Becksted.

“Masks are effective, everyone shall wear them indoors until everyone including children under 12 have the opportunity to be vaccinated and the region reaches “Low” community transmission as defined by the NH DHHS. Usual exceptions for medical reasons or based on age limits of EUA will apply”.

James then walked members through some HVAC-based best practices for reducing indoor risk:

- Increase ventilation through use of operatable windows and HVAC system to the extent possible
- Where it can be accommodated retrofit HVAC equipment with MERV 13 filters
- Where spaces are not protected by MERV 13 filtration, add portable plug-in HEPA filters. These are low cost and widely available in the marketplace
- Where possible install air quality monitoring of CO2, particulate, and VOCs to verify ventilation effectiveness and indoor air quality
- Where possible retrofit HVAC equipment with UVC technology.

A short youtube video previously circulated by James describes these best practices and may be of interest to area restaurants, **Health Department** will circulate accordingly. **Stephanie** will add to the Ventilation FAQ.

Overcoming vaccine hesitancy would also contribute to public health. Many vaccine-hesitant individuals do not understand the research/development/approval process and may be influenced by access to this information in an easily digested form. **Kathie** will draft and **Ann** and **Kim** will review prior to full committee circulation.

Ann made a motion to close the meeting, seconded by James, all agreed.

ADDENDUM 1 TO MINUTES (ASSISTANT MAYOR SPLAINE EMAIL)

Kathryn Lynch

Wed, Sep 1, 8:19 PM

Please see email below from Asst Mayor Splaine regarding the motions he has prepared for Tuesday's city council meeting.

He wants us to be informed as we discuss the mayor's request for guidance on a possible mask policy.

Kathie Lynch
Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Jim Splaine <asstmayorjimsplaine@gmail.com>

Date: September 1, 2021 at 7:54:01 PM EDT

To: Karen Conard <kconard@cityofportsmouth.com>, Rich Dipentima <rdipentima@gmail.com>, Kathie Lynch <kathielynych@hotmail.com>

Subject: Karen/Rich/Kathie -- Could You Provide The Following To Your Health Committee Meeting Membership:

I note that the Committee will be meeting on Thursday, September 2nd. I have the following motions on the City Council Agenda for the meeting of Tuesday, September 7th. I want to provide you with the text for your consideration: -- Thank You, Jim Splaine -- Assistant Mayor

1. Encouraging Masks In All City Buildings: With new cases and hospitalizations increasing, the Portsmouth City Council is concerned about the impact of COVID-19 and its variants on the health and well-being of our residents, visitors, and city employees. Therefore, we encourage the City Manager to set a policy that masks be worn indoors at all times by city employees, residents, and visitors in the public areas of all city buildings. We will back the City Manager in setting that policy, with exceptions and a timetable to be determined by the City Manager.

2. Encouraging COVID-19 Vaccinations Or Tests For City Employees: With nearly 40% of the population of New Hampshire unvaccinated and with the Delta variant now infecting many who are vaccinated and unvaccinated, the Portsmouth City Council is concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on the health and well-being of our residents, visitors, and city employees. We also agree with the science about the spread of viruses, and the advice of medical professionals, that every additional person who is vaccinated contributes to the reduction and impact of the spread of COVID-19 and variants. Therefore, we encourage the City Manager to set a policy that all city employees, full and part-time, and contractors who work in city buildings, be vaccinated. We also encourage that the City Manager set a policy that employees and contractors who do not produce proof of vaccination be required to be tested for COVID-19 at least once a week. We will back the City Manager in setting that policy, with exceptions and a timetable to be determined by the City Manager.

ADDENDUM 2 TO MINUTES: The BRC on Health statement on masking in Portsmouth:

Masks are effective. Therefore, everyone shall wear masks indoors, subject to the exceptions defined in NH Universal Best Practices),* until everyone including children under 12 have the opportunity to be vaccinated and the region reaches "Low" community transmission as defined by the NH Division of Health and Human Services. <https://www.covid19.nh.gov/dashboard/map>

* <https://www.covidguidance.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt381/files/inline-documents/sonh/universal-best-practices.pdf>

Universal Best Practices on Face Mask Use

- Face masks should not be required for people who are under the age of 2 years
- Face masks should not be required for a person with a valid medical or developmental reason that prevents that person from wearing a face mask (see CDC guidance:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprevent-getting-sick%2Fhow-to-wear-cloth-face-coverings.html