

BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING

Tuesday May 3, 2022 – 5:00 PM

Richmond Town Hall, 1529 State Road, Richmond, MA 01254

PRESENT: Tony Segal, Chair; Peter Cohen, Andy Fisher, Louise Maron, Valerie Bird, Berkshire Alliance, Emilie Jarrett, R.N., Phyllis LeBeau, Recording Secretary; Rick Bell

Review and Approval of Minutes of the April 5, 2022 Meeting: Andy moved that the minutes be approved as read. He was seconded by Peter and the motion passed by unanimous vote.

OLD BUSINESS:

Drainage Problem: Rick Bell – The Health Agent Valerie Bird outlined the history of the findings of the Board of Health: Mr. Bell contacted the Town Administrator to say that water running down the road adjacent to his property may be adversely affecting his property and Septic System and asked the Highway Department and Board of Health to investigate the situation. He was asking the town to remedy the situation. The Health Agent surveyed the septic system and concluded that based on the system's age and design it may be failing. The agent requested that a perc test or Title V test be performed. Mr. Bell acknowledged that the system would probably fail a perc test because of the water run off problem. At a subsequent BOH meeting Mr. Bell agreed to the perc test but added that the water run-off and the time of year would affect the test – Mr. Ed Fahey (Health Agent sitting in for Ms. Bird) informed all present that those factors would not have any bearing on the determination of groundwater at the site.

The test was performed on 4/25. Present was Mr. Bell, Ms. Bird, an engineer from Foresight Land Services and a representative from the BOH, Mr. Cohen. The perc test indicated that the system was under the water table and thus was in failure. Instructions were issued stating that the system needed to be replaced.

As this does not create a public health risk, Ms. Bird suggested allowing Mr. Bell the full two years to have his septic system redone. She noted that Mr. Bell has engaged the Foresight Company, who will design the system, which will be approved by the Board of Health. Mr. Bell will then put out the replacement project to bid and will have the new system installed and inspected by April 26, 2024.

Mr. Bell asked if he could have a formal document stating that his septic system failed so that he will be able to apply for a rebate from the State. Valerie will prepare a letter for him. He then asked that a statement of his "feelings" be included in the minutes along with a question to the Board. (see attached)

Tony reminded Mr. Bell of how the situation was triggered by his coming before the Board of Health to complain about the water running down his hill and affecting his septic system, causing it to fail. That automatically required that the Board of Health Agent, Valerie Bird, do an inspection of the system, which she did, and her finding was that the system was below the water table and must be replaced.

Mask Mandate – Tony remarked that the BOH had rescinded the Mask Mandate, albeit with some trepidation considering that the numbers of cases are rising again. However, the high number of cases is in concert with lower numbers of hospitalizations.

Community Health: Emilie offered to supply the facts about the COVID cases being seen now. Numbers of cases are up, and hospitalizations are down. The illness is not as severe as the previous variants were, but it is much more transmissible. In April Emilie was advised of 16 confirmed cases in Richmond and one probable. Many of those cases are household transmission. The Richmond School, now back from the April break, found in the past week that there were five cases of COVID in the sixth grade. As of yesterday, the sixth graders are wearing masks in school for two full weeks. They are looking at the situation and working to with the Superintendent and the Principal to come up with a solution. Schools have to reevaluate the type of cases they are seeing and then respond appropriately. Emilie reminded the group that she does not hear about positive home tests.

Tony asked what the false positive/false negative rate is with the home test. The problem with the antigen test is that if you take it too soon, you can get a false negative reading. And people are advised to re-test within 24 to 48 hours just to double-check. There is also the option to go to the BMC Testing Center

Mass DPH is doing sequencing to follow what's happening and we can assume that it is the Omicron variant that is the cause of most of the new cases.

Emilie then advised the Board about Paxlovid, an anti-viral medication to help resolve symptoms. The DPH is following how long the pill needs to be taken to achieve results. It appears that some people will need it for longer periods. For every twenty people treated with this drug, we stop one from being admitted to a hospital. BMC has an excellent set-up for COVID management.

Selectmen's Meeting – The Board of Selectmen had no comment about the rescinding of the Mask Mandate.

New Member – Dr. Cohen – Tony attended a Selectboard meeting to discuss mosquito spraying and during that meeting advised the BOS that, as Fred Schubert has moved out of Town and left an open seat on the Board of Health, the BOH would like to propose Dr. Cohen to fill that seat. The Selectmen were in favor of that idea.

As to the issue of mosquito spraying, Tony reported that the BOH was not in favor of general spraying unless positive cultures are found, in which case larvicides should be used as they are not detrimental to bees and other insects. Anyone who wants to, can opt out of the spraying.

Tony received an email from the DPH Alert Network of Mass.Gov. with a questionnaire about primary and backup arbovirus coordinators for notifications about West Nile or Triple E virus positive specimens within the community. Valerie would be the person to have them contact first and then the acting chair of the BOH.

Agent's Report – Val read and expanded on the items in her report (see attached). She noted in part that the Building Inspector is handling 140 Swamp Road, which is taxed as a single-family home, but has an attic apartment being leased. The owner states, “Occupant has defaulted on her rent for the past eight months.” The occupant states, “The landlord is refusing to do any repairs.” The apartment has only one egress and no CO₂ alarms. The Building Inspector will determine if it is a legal apartment.

At 983 State Road in trying to install a septic system they came up with ledge so the system will need to be redesigned to provide pre-treating before it gets to the field.

11 East Rd. was an abandoned house. It passed Title IV with a new system. That house will be rehabbed and sold.

30 Cheever Rd. failed the Title IV, so they went back and did a perc test.

Todd Munson Letter – (see attached): Tony has responded to that letter, acknowledging that the Board should perhaps be a bit more proactive in the issue of advising the public about decisions made by the BOH and that there will be more information provided in the bi-weekly, e-newsletter from Town Hall. He has had no response.

Emilie advised the Board that Laura Kitross has emailed her about a bi-weekly Zoom meeting regarding COVID-19 issues and concerns. All Board of Health members are invited to join these calls which occur every other Friday at 11:30 AM which are a good substitute for the dinners that used to take place where people could get together and exchange ideas.

Date and Time of Next Meeting: Tuesday June 7, 2022 – 5:00 PM – in person at Town Hall.

There being no further business before the Board, Peter moved that the meeting be adjourned at 5:52 PM. Andy seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous consent.