

Board of Health
Town of New Marlborough
Meeting Minutes for December 14, 2021

Meeting was called to order in person at Town Hall at 6:10 PM with Board members Larry Davis III and Jordan Chretien and agent Scott McFarland present. Peter Marks was present and presented his written request of interest in being on the Board to the BOH. The BOH voted to accept his request and recommended to the Selectboard to appoint Peter Marks to the Bd of Health.

Minutes of November 9, 2021 were reviewed and approved.

A monthly Covid and public health nursing update for New Marlborough and Southern Berkshire County was provided by the Southern Berkshire Public Health Collaborative (the Collaborative), as of 12/6/2021, in an email from Amy Hardt and is attached to these minutes. Covid cases are rising.

Scott provided an update on The Collaborative from its December 10, 2021 meeting. The main items are an Intermunicipal Agreement (IMA) being drafted for the member towns to sign on to. The document is being drafted and will be going through reviews, hopefully to be agreed upon and signed by BOHs and Selectboards of member towns in the spring. Also, Jim Wilusz will present a funding outline for starting the Collaborative flu vaccination program for the towns to consider directing some of their unused VNA budget to. The next collaborative meeting is January 14, 2022.

The following perc tests were completed since the November 9, 2021 meeting:

- 74 Mill River-GB Rd (former church)-Upgrade for residential
- 789 Stratford Rd Map 412 Lot 35 (New Construction)
- Cross to Canaan Valley Rd Map 416 Lot 65 (New Construction)

No new Title 5 Inspections were performed.

The Following Title 5 inspections were completed:

- 452 Adsit-Crosby Rd (Pass, new Dist. Box, divert softener)
- 162 Hadsell St (Fail)
- 79 Clayton-Mill River Rd (Conditional Pass, new septic tank and dist. Box)

Septic designs received and reviewed included:

- New Lot for Pelkey, formerly part of 373 Hayes Hill Rd (New Construction 4-bedroom)

No new well permits were issued but several are pending in conjunction with septic designs and will be issued once locations are staked and inspected.

The Special Permit application for 155 Norfolk Rd for the reconstruction of a dwelling on this lot where the original dwelling burned was reviewed. The existing septic passed Title 5 inspection and should be reused, with a maximum house size of 4-bedrooms. The septic tank may need to be replaced if the proposed dwelling footprint encroaches within 10 feet of the existing tank.

Scott received a housing question from a tenant at 1565 Hartsville-New Marlborough rd. Larry spoke further with the tenant about his concerns and whether they were requesting a housing inspection. The tenant will followup if they decide to request an official inspection.

A request was received for a Title 5 inspection at 870 Old North Rd/Harmon Rd from Mount Everett. Prior inspection in 2006 indicated a failed system, in the groundwater table. Perc testing/soil evaluation was performed and a Presby design completed by J. Mustain in 2006. The Board decided the perc/soil data was viable, but a new design needed to be completed due to the age of the old design and changes to approved design requirements for the Presby septic. A new 1500-gallon septic tank should also be included in the upgrade design. Mount Everett was informed of this, so no additional Title 5 inspection was necessary.

Scott requested shifting meeting dates for January and February 2022 away from Tuesday evening due to a schedule conflict. New dates will be established in early January.

Motion to adjourn was seconded. Meeting adjourned at 7:07 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott McFarland, Agent.

Public health Nursing Covid update, 12/6/2021:

A strong word of caution about the encouraging numbers reported on the South County dashboard for Nov 21-27 – they reflect a temporary dip in new cases that exactly matches the reduction in testing due to the holiday, with both down by 21-22%. However, test positivity went up, both in Southern Berkshire and in Berkshire County overall. Furthermore, we can already see that South County cases nearly doubled in the Sun-Sat week following Thanksgiving. How many of these are pent-up cases that were symptomatic the previous week, but tested later due to the delays we've heard in getting a testing appointment, or were PCR tests to confirm at-home positives during the holiday week, is unclear. But it does seem obvious that we are not bringing transmission down. Berkshire County remains the highest in the state for COVID case rate per capita. And just to keep things really real, this week's center graph depicts the moving 7-day average in COVID-related deaths across the state. In just the past week, that average has doubled from 14 to 28 deaths per day.

Meanwhile, Omicron has been named by the World Health Organization and data is flooding in from other countries tracking evidence of the new variant – over 45 countries as of this writing, and at least 17 U.S. states, including Massachusetts. Omicron is here and we are learning more about it every day. So far, while contagiousness seems much higher than Delta (double? triple?) we do not have obvious proof of increased severity. But since COVID tends to take a downward turn on Day 7 or 8 (if it's going to happen for that person) and we've only known about it for a week now, the jury is still out on that question. Omicron does seem to be even better than Delta at evading natural infection, prompting the CDC's recent tone of urgency for unvaccinated people to finally get their shot(s). We know that Delta has had real success infecting fully vaccinated people with waning immunity, which is why boosters have been promoted so much the past month. And just under half of our local cases continue to be in unvaccinated individuals who are without primed antibody resistance, making them infectious for longer. While we haven't (yet?) seen BHS COVID+ hospitalizations go up significantly, overall, this is just not a good place for us to be in, given that winter is already the main season for respiratory infections.

At this time, we all need to continue and perhaps be more vigilant in our use of mitigation strategies – masking, ventilation, air filtration, handwashing, avoidance of crowds. The local challenges in getting a booster as soon as we want it (like, yesterday!) can be frustrating, but let’s remember that even with waning immunity, we are still well-protected against severe symptoms. And many exposures are still under our control. We might want to go out to a restaurant or to see our favorite local band, but we can hold off for now as a reasonable response to the high level of community transmission. Making a booster appointment today may mean a 2-3 week wait for a local pharmacy, but we may also be able to drive an hour and get our shot tomorrow in Springfield, if we want our immunity boosted in time for an event 2 weeks away. Our personal choices still have an impact on the trajectory of this pandemic.

Let’s also remember that we may need to boost our compassion right now, both for ourselves and for others. Healthcare, education, retail, and service workers are all short-staffed, dealing with increased public frustration and maybe their own fear that once again they will be on the front lines. Ditto for public health and public service workers. We all probably need a tropical vacation that most of us don’t have the time or opportunity to enjoy. Omicron may turn out to be another kick in the gut like Delta, or it may wind up being the high-spread, low-severity variant that we will come to think of as a common cold by next year. Only time will tell.

Please take good care of yourselves and each other,

Amy Hardt MPH, BSN, RN
Lead Public Health Nurse

Number of cases by town:

As always, the number of unvaccinated cases is in parentheses for reference. The date range referenced below is event date, which is defined by date of definitive symptom emergence or positive test date, whichever comes first.

Town	Nov 28-Dec 4	Nov 21-27	Nov 14-20	Nov 7-13	Oct 31-Nov 6	Oct 24-30
ALFORD	5(5)	0	2(1)	0	0	0
GREAT BARRINGTON	22(12)	13(9)	16(10)	9(1)	3(1)	4 (3)
LEE	15(7)	10(4)	15(5)	6(2)	10(7)	5 (3)
LENOX	10(6)	8(3)	5	7(1)	3(1)	10 (6)
MONTEREY	0	0	1(1)	1	0	0
MOUNT WASHINGTON	0	0	0	0	0	0
NEW MARLBOROUGH	2(2)	0	3	1	0	0
OTIS	3(3)	1(1)	0	5(2)	2	2 (2)
SHEFFIELD	8(3)	4(2)	6(3)	1	0	1
STOCKBRIDGE	4(1)	1	0	1	3(2)	1 (1)
TOTAL	69(39)	37(19)	48(20)	31(6)	21 (11)	23 (15)

