



TOWN OF NORTHBRIDGE BOARD OF HEALTH

Aldrich School Town Hall Annex - 14 Hill Street
Whitinsville, MA 01588
Phone# (508) 234-3272 Fax# (508) 234-0821

The Northbridge Board of Health approved these minutes at a meeting held March 2, 2021

MEETING MINUTES - DECEMBER 28, 2020

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/95567071108?pwd=NHU1ZXlMdNkZmpBZ2lzaZuem45dz09>

Meeting ID: 955 6707 1108

Passcode: 730364

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order concerning imposition on strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, meetings of the Northbridge Board of Health will be conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible. No in-person attendance of members of the public will be permitted, but every effort will be made to ensure that the public can adequately access the proceedings as provided for in the Order.

This meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Ms. Lani Criasia, Chair. Other members present were Mr. Paul McKeon and Mr. Scott Chase. Mr. Steve Garabedian and Mr. Chris Cella were absent. Also present was Jeanne M. Gniadek, Administrator.

Approval of Minutes: Motion made by Mr. McKeon to accept the minutes of **December 16, 2020**. Motion seconded by Mr. Chase. The vote was 3-0 in favor.

COVID-19 / Winter Sports Program / Northbridge Public Schools: Present for this discussion were: Attorney David Doneski (Town Counsel), Mr. Adam Gaudette (Town Manager), Ms. Alicia Cannon (BOS), Mr. Timothy McCormick (NHS), Mr. Jeffrey Kozik (NHS-AD), Brady Bajema (WCS – AD), Mr. Michael LeBrasseur (School Committee), Mr. Craig Mahoney, Mr. Steve Falconer, Mr. J Gahan.

Ms. Criasia opened the discussion to those present. She stated that it was her belief that the discussion this evening would address basketball and hockey at the Grades 8-12 level. These programs intend to run January 4th through February 21st – 4 days per week.

Ms. Cannon spoke stating she is receiving calls from concerned citizens regarding the Board possibly voting to ban winter sports. She stated that she believes the plan for winter sports follows the guidelines and based on current Covid data she felt that the sports could be played safely.

Mr. Mahoney stated that he has three children in the high school and that these kids need to get back to a normal life. He felt strongly that these sports can be played safely with the guidelines in place.

Mr. LeBrasseur stated that he has confidence that the guidelines the administration worked hard to put together would be followed and that these sports could be played safely.

Mr. Falconer noted that he is a parent of two boys that played Fall Sports with no issues.

Mr. McCormick applauded the school district as a whole and stated he is confident in the plan that was put together. He stated it won't be easy but he felt that they could provide a safe space for their winter athletes. He questioned whether the Board's vote this evening would apply only to Northbridge public schools or if the private schools would be affected as well.

Attorney Doneski stated that any Order would and should apply to all sports across the Board at both public and private schools.

Mr. Gahan stated his concern at the level of depression and anxiety in children that sit behind a computer all day. He noted that other towns have already been playing for two weeks with no known issues.

Mr. Bajema noted his concern that he was unaware of this meeting until a Northbridge parent brought it to his attention. He stated that the Christian School has been open since August with no real issues. He stated that they have worked diligently to ensure the safety of their students. He commented that cancelling sends a message to the kids that if something is hard it's not worth trying. We owe it to the kids to try.

Ms. Criasia stated that she is comfortable with the questions asked and the answers she received in speaking with not only the School Superintendent but also with Mr. Kozik and Mr. McCormick earlier in the day. She did note that it was her understanding that the School Committees in Auburn and Worcester cancelled winter sports. She asked if anyone knew of any other town that cancelled their winter sports program. Someone responded that Oxford cancelled and that Millbury had cancelled but was re-considering their vote. Ms. Criasia questioned whether the Board should leave this decision up to the School Committee. Attorney Doneski cautioned the Board not to transfer their public health authority to the School Committee.

Mr. Chase stated his concern should there be an outbreak. He noted that sports should be cancelled if that happens.

Ms. Criasia noted that the school nurse is notified if there is a positive case and in turn the Board of Health would be notified. Mr. McCormick confirmed noting that their school nurse leader, Lori Johnson, is made aware of all cases.

Mr. McKeon commented that there is a new strain that is far more contagious. He stated that it is their job to protect public health and he would not want to contribute to the possibility of a young child getting the virus and passing away.

Ms. Criasia noted that the town is a yellow community and that travel clubs are continuing. This plan allows for 12 person per team max – she noted that the town has caring people behind these regulations and felt that they would put the safety of the children first.

Mr. Chase asked if the parents are in favor of the kids playing. The response was yes, parents are in favor.

Mr. Gaudette spoke of his experience with ice hockey as they have been playing since August. He noted that there is a culture now that is accepting of these new requirements to allow play. Parents enjoy watching their kids play but know that they cannot right now. He also noted how much this sport

in particular has been studied and that they have found that the kids aren't getting it from playing. Mr. Gaudette noted that club teams have students from different towns and that the risk of exposure is much higher – he noted that if the kids can't play at the high school level then they will join clubs and they will be more exposed and those kids will still go into our schools each day. He stated that there are strict protocols in place and that there has not been one instance where a kid has passed the virus on to another player.

Mr. Falconer commented that their lacrosse club teams traveled to New Hampshire, Connecticut, and New York – these were 17 year old boys for 30 games and that they did not have any issues. He felt that you would be more likely to get the virus going to WalMart than playing youth sports.

Ms. Criasia stated she would entertain a motion from the Board to allow the winter sports program to proceed based on the plan presented and contingent upon practicing the protocols in place in that plan. Motion was moved by Mr. Chase and seconded by Ms. Criasia. Roll call on vote: Mr. Chase/YES; Mr. McKeon/ABSTAIN; Ms. Criasia/YES. Motion passes with a vote of 2-0-1.

Old & New Business: *None*

Citizen's Forum: *None*

Correspondence: *None*

There being no further business, motion to adjourn at 6:35 PM was made by Mr. Chase and seconded by Mr. McKeon – all in favor.

Attested by,

Jeanne M. Gniadek, Administrator

List of Documents utilized by Board of Health
Meeting Date: December 28, 2020

A. Meeting Minutes

1) *December 16, 2020 DRAFT Meeting Minutes*

B. COVID 19 – Winter Sports Program - NPS

2) *Email from Michael Coughlin (DPH) dated December 21, 2020*

C. Old & New Business - None

D. Citizens' Forum

E. Correspondence