

*Jun 06 2023 12:51 pm**Office of the***Board of Health**

City Hall

718 Main Street

Fitchburg, Massachusetts 01420

978-829-1870

This was a regular meeting of the Board of Health held at the Legislative Building at 700 Main Street and recorded by FATV Studios, Thursday, March 16, 2023. The meeting was called to order by Dr. Bogdasarian.

Present: Stephen Curry, Director, Dr. John Bogdasarian, Chair, Ian Murray-BOH Member, John Francois Leblanc, Sanitary Inspector/Recycling Coordinator, Karen Membrino, Clerk Stenographer, Jacquelyn Wehtje, Resident.

Dr. Bogdasarian stated he wanted to thank a couple of people who are not with the Board of Health any longer. Ms. Sandra Knipe, Board Member and Nurse who served on the Board for 10 years. Ms. Knipe was fair and always provided sage advice as well as dedicated as anyone could be to the health of the citizens of Fitchburg and to the Board. Ms. Knipe also served at the COVID clinics and helped to monitor patients who were ill, we certainly will miss having Sandy here.

Dr. Bogdasarian stated Ms. Dorothy McNamara who was not on the Board but was the Public Health Nurse for the Health Department who did as much as anyone to serve the welfare of citizens of Fitchburg. Ms. McNamara also helped to participate in and arrange for COVID and other clinics as well as monitor people who were suffering from various reportable diseases and were ill in Fitchburg. She helped to provide protocols for injection as well as helping with all the work that was necessary to maintain the health of the citizens of Fitchburg. Dr. Bogdasarian thanked both Sandy and Dottie for all the service that they provided to Fitchburg and certainly we're going to miss having them both around and helping us out.

Public Forum

Ms. Jacqueline Wehtje, Fitchburg resident stated she is speaking on agenda item number 2. The fluoride added to our water is not a pure element, it is a toxic byproduct of industry which is diluted. Most of these tons of industry waste go directly into the city's wastewater and from there pollute the environment, harm people, animals and plants. There are many vested interests behind fluoridation just as there have been in the past behind other environmental harms. It has taken citizen activists from Erin Brockovich in California to the working-class women living near love canal in New York to stand up and ask for justice from our government

and that's what I'm here to do today. It's also taken some scientists outside the mainstream like Rachel Carson, sometimes it just takes a woman. We don't need to wait decades as we did with lead paint for the damage from excess exposure to fluoride to become clear. Many sources exist for those who want it including in toothpaste and treatments and dental offices. There is no need to medicate our entire city population with it and to let it infiltrate our environment. Also on your agenda PFAS contamination the FNP fast stands for fluorine which biodegrades to fluoride. If we continue fluoridating the water, we will not be able to determine if fluoride contamination comes from PFAS or the water supply, we need to avoid both these sources of pollution to protect not just our environment but those at high risk of harm, including pregnant women whom bottle fed babies and those with thyroid and kidney disease. You can wait until the EPA lawsuit is settled and more harm has been done or you can be proactive and leave the choice of whether to ingest fluoride to individuals and keep it out of our environment. One of your favorite phrases from past meetings is err on the side of caution you should do so now by supporting cessation of fluoridation of the Fitchburg and Westminster public water supply.

Dr. Bogdasarian stated in 1968 the Board of Health voted and opted to introduce fluoridation of water to the City of Fitchburg water. This was implemented in 1975 and this was all brought to pass by Doctor or Governor Volapié in 1962 who decided to place the decision regarding fluoridation of water into the hands of local Boards of Health.

Dr. Bogdasarian stated its to his understanding that the Board of Health is not empowered currently to take away fluoridation of water even though it was the Board of Health in 1968 who decided to have it done. Dr. Bogdasarian said it was his understanding that this is something that must be initiated by the City Council and that is initiated by petitions to the City Council.

Dr. Bogdasarian suggested to Ms. Wehtje that she submit a petition to the City Council to eliminate fluoridation of the water.

Crocker Field Restoration Project

- **Turf installation discussion**

Dr. Bogdasarian stated as far as the turf at Crocker field goes, he doesn't consider himself an expert on the chemicals that emanate from that and certainly turf fields are present all around this country and various institutions but feels that it's somewhat controversial and demands additional study. Dr. Bogdasarian doesn't think it's up to the Board of Health to indicate that artificial turf can't be used on various fields in this city. This is something to be directed to the City Council via petition.

Regulations:

- **Regulating the Maintenance of Abandoned, Foreclosing and Foreclosed Residential Properties Adopted May 18, 2012 – Rescind- now Chapter 137 of City Code**

Mr. Curry stated back in May of 2012 the Board of Health adopted this regulation. The idea of the regulation was at that time we were having a foreclosure issue, there were 200 foreclosures in the city and that was the reason for the adoption of that regulation. Recently the City Council adopted a new Chapter 137 which addresses the maintenance of abandoned foreclosing and foreclosed property very similar to this regulation however it expands it to more commercial properties and it increases annual fees.

Mr. Curry said we are in process of setting up an online registry. Mr. Curry suggested that the Board rescind this regulation because it's no longer necessary and now a city ordinance.

Mr. Murray made a motion to rescind the Board of Health order regulating the Maintenance of Abandoned, Foreclosing and Foreclosed Residential Properties that was adopted on May 18, 2012. Motion was 2nd by Dr. Bogdasarian. All were in favor. Motion carries

- **Private Well Regulations-adopted June 17, 2018 – amend to include additional contaminants (PFAS6)**

Mr. Curry stated Inspector John Francois Leblanc will present this as he did a lot of work with these regulations back when they were adopted in 2018. Mr. Leblanc continues to keep abreast of changing times, and we want to discuss the possibility of amending our five-year-old regulations to include new contaminants.

John F. Leblanc stated there's been some new contaminants that have been identified by Mass DEP especially PFAS6 now classified as official contaminants and being tested around the state through various communities. There are 85 communities that are on a fast track for testing. Mass DEP is offering free testing for well water throughout all those communities however Fitchburg is not one of those, but it doesn't mean that we shouldn't be ahead of the curve.

Mr. Leblanc stated since we passed this regulation in 2018 the state of Massachusetts does not regulate private well water it only has recommendations. By passing these regulations Mr. Leblanc recommends modifying our current regulations which pertain mostly to the language. The first one would be to add PFAS which is language recommended by MassDEP for testing. They do have a list of approved laboratories that do the testing for the PFAS and others as well and is listed on their website. The testing is about \$300 additional but considering that MassDEP considers it a contaminant Mr. Leblanc feels it would be unwise to leave that out of our current regulation.

The other modifications would be replacing the wording that said "Massachusetts Certified laboratory to "MassDEP or EPA" because the State of Massachusetts recommends those specific labs and list is available on this state's website.

The other modification is on page 6 of the regulations point #4 it read "rates below 4 gallons per minute". Mr. Leblanc stated after a conversation with a well driller in what that pertained to, he changed the wording to suggest "a pumping test with a volume of water" below 4 gallons

a minute. The reason for this is that previously it read as if we were talking about the regeneration rate of the well which it is not it's the pumping test that has to be below 4 gallons per minute where now we need a special permit from the Board to allow the property to continue with that specific well. This is just to avoid confusion clarifying the language.

Mr. Leblanc stated these are the modifications he proposes to the Well Regulations to make them clearer and to make them more contemporary with the needs and what the state has declared contaminants in our water.

Mr. Curry suggested the Board allow us to put this out to the public for some feedback by posting it on our web page and sending out a notice for people to look at it and ask for feedback and then bring that feedback back to a future meeting for discussion.

After further discussion Dr. Bogdasarian stated it would be reasonable to put this out for public comment for feedback.

Mr. Murray made a motion to table the Private Well Regulations to a future meeting until public comments. Motion was 2nd by Dr. Bogdasarian. All were in favor. Motion carries.

Food Permits:

- **Establishments Failing to renew Food Permits pursuant to 105 CMR 590.000**

Mr. Curry stated the end of last week we had six permitted food establishments that were not renewing their food permit. The renewal process was done in January and they were notified four times again at the beginning of this week. As of this week the six establishments are working towards taking care of the permit issues so we will not have to take a hard stance at this point.

Turf Installation Project

Mr. Curry stated Mr. Murray will comment on the Turf Installation Project.

Mr. Murray stated there are some other towns in the United States who have dealt with turf fields even here in Massachusetts and have decided to ban them from their towns because of the fear that they do leach PFA's into the environment. With the Nashua River close by, it's not something I want to happen. There is a lot of debate about the testing that's used to test PFOA and how sensitive those tests are, the DEP and EPA test as well as other tests out there that are more sensitive that will find chemicals that some of the other tests might not find or at levels that those might find and doesn't feel there is an established safe level at all.

Mr. Murray also stated it's a low bar if it leeches at all but it's adding to our current problem. He said by no means is an expert and we should not turn down Mr. Kraft's money and build a new field but does feel it's worth investigating more.

Mr. Curry stated if it's acceptable he asked the engineers that were involved and have proposed the project to come speak to the Board and they're willing to do that. Mr. Curry stated he will set up a meeting for further discussion.

Dr. Bogdasarian does agree with Mr. Murray and has concerns as to what is acceptable or how much of these substances are leaching from these fields.

Mr. Curry stated the City Council approved the project a few weeks ago and will get more details and will reach out to the School Department to assist with the discussion.

Meeting Minutes:

Mr. Murray made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from June 2, 2022. Dr. Bogdasarian 2nd the motion. All were in favor, motion carries.

Dr. Bogdasarian made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from September 2, 2022. Mr. Murray 2nd the motion. All were in favor, motion carries.

Mr. Curry stated regarding the December 2022 meeting there is an individual that his full name has not been identified yet, Attorney Arthur. We will further investigate that and will amend when that information is available.

FY 24 Health Department Budget:

Mr. Curry stated he submitted the FY 24 budget and has met with the finance team on this proposed budget. The proposed changes include a Deputy Director position which we have not yet hired for that position but hope to get it posted very shortly and get that person in the position before the end of the fiscal year.

Other changes in Personal Services are last year we proposed for a clerk to help assist with the several grants in the department with billing and reimbursements as well as office help within the department, we were granted that position at the beginning of the fiscal year but hope to get that posted in the next week or two and get that position filled.

Mr. Curry stated other changes from FY23 to FY24 are that we will no longer be able to receive state ARPA funds to cover the Homeless Outreach position work that Sue Christensen is doing but we will continue to explore how we can support those efforts so they can continue the work Mrs. Christensen is doing.

Mr. Curry also thanked Representative Mike Kushmerek who was the catalyst to obtaining the funds. This was a one-time thing but it made a significant difference in our Homeless Outreach and all the items that come along with that population, so we appreciate him getting the ball rolling in the City of Fitchburg.

The Weights and Measures Inspector is also a Scale Master and a Regional Inspector. The Weight and Measures position was a part-time position posted for almost two years with no or very few applicants. We combined the position with a Scale Master and the Regional Inspector. The Regional inspector would be grant funded under the Public Health Excellence grant. Mr. Peter Delorme was appointed. Mr. Delorme started in January thankfully he started in January when our Landfill Scale Master went out with a hip injury. Mr. Delorme hasn't done much Weights and Measures as he's been working at the scale house at the landfill since January. When the Scale Master returns Mr. Delorme will do Weights and Measures Inspections for the city. That is the significant difference in salary in that line item from FY23 to FY24.

Mr. Curry stated the city was contracted with the state for Weights and Measures since 2004 therefore we don't have a grasp on how long it will take for training and to pick up the duties of of Weights and Measure so it will take time to put the program together so we're hoping to be able to fund Mr. Delorme's position to be able to do those items.

Health Department Expenses category has no proposed change from FY23 to FY24. The only significant difference in money is the Weights and Measures equipment, having a new employee we're now searching for and replacing all the equipment in the city, but that expense was projected to be spent in FY22 and we have encumbered those funds to be able to use them currently.

Dr. Bogdasarian asked what the Airport land rent refers to. Mr. Curry stated the City of Fitchburg owns the land that AKS Recycle operates on which is an old landfill called the Blueberry Lane landfill on 10 plus acres and it's right on airport land. AKS recycling pays a monthly rent to the Health department for the use of that land, and we transfer the funds to the Airport.

Public Health Nursing, Mr. Curry stated he tried to consolidate and conserve, and by doing that we were able to save about \$30,000 in the Nursing Budget. Our Public Health Nurse retired in February so that salary disappears in FY24 but we are proposing that we hire a public health nurse and combine it with the current COVID response team still being funded and incidentally that team will be funded in FY24 for \$240,000. We will continue providing those services as well as we're already expanding on disease investigations within the Montachusett Public Health Network.

Mr. Curry stated the Public Health Excellent Grant which funds the Montachusett Public Health Network requires us to provide a Nurse, Epidemiologist, Shared Services Coordinator and an Inspector. Mr. Curry is proposing to hire a Public Health Nurse position once again but make it half regional so the region would pay for it and thus the grant would pay for it until the grant runs out and at that time the other towns would most likely pay for the service or if they don't want to pay for the service anymore then the position could be at risk. The Public Health Excellence grant is pushing regionalization at the state level and they're offering \$300,000 a year for upwards of 10 years.

Mr. Curry stated the next page of the Budget is funding regarding curbside collection as well as the disposal of municipal solid waste and a closed landfill fund. The closed landfill fund is supporting the environmental efforts that will be installed shortly at the Blueberry Lane landfill which AKS pays rent at. We will be installing monitoring devices. The proposal is at the DEP for approval. As soon as we get approval from DEP we'll install that environmental monitoring observation equipment. The cost will be a little above \$50,000 a year. We have already contracted with the company to do the environmental assessment as well as the monitoring that needs to be done thereafter. That landfill was closed in 1971 so hopefully we we're long past the contaminants that may have been resulted there.

Contract fees for the curbside contract is currently out for bid and the current contract ends at the end of this fiscal year June 30th. Today was the first pre contract meeting and there were six to eight companies interested and asking questions and interested in bidding on the contract. There is competition for curbside collection and that process will be finalized by the end of March beginning of April. The numbers that Mr. Curry requested for funding are sort of a guess on the collection end but finalizing it within the next few weeks so hopefully we'll have more accurate numbers.

Mr. Murray made a motion to approve the FY24 Health Department budget. Motion was 2nd by Dr. Bogdasarian. All were in favor, motion carries.

Mr. Murray stated he had the pleasure and really the honor of working with Sandra Knipe for 10 years on this Board, I don't want to be negative, and I don't want to be political because I think we all join this Board perhaps naively thinking that it was about public health and not politics, but you can't escape politics especially after COVID. These days if there is a place to fight the cultural wars, they will find it and the Board of Health became a target of that and unfortunately after years of outstanding service and dedication to the City of Fitchburg I believe Sandy deserved to leave on her own terms and that is not what happened. It makes you wonder after 10 years of dedication all the certifications all the expertise that she brought into the position from her career as a nurse. The City of Fitchburg made an investment in Sandy over these last ten years getting her training getting her up to speed in our community and the problems in our community and she used those tools to help the City of Fitchburg. Sandy is more of a citizen of Fitchburg then I'd say 90% of the citizens of Fitchburg. Sandy took the time to drive from her home in Hubbardston to Fitchburg every month for these meetings, but she didn't just come to these meetings she volunteered. Sandy worked at over 80 of the COVID clinics she observed and investigated some of our sickest constituents who are sick with communicable diseases and some very dangerous communicable disease like tuberculosis. In addition to the 80 clinics that she worked at giving out COVID vaccines she put herself at risk to help keep the City of Fitchburg healthy. I'm sorry but after 10 years of doing all that just to be let go without a real thank you is unconscionable in my opinion. Mr. Murray stated he will not name names or blame anybody it's just the way things are now and it's certainly not the way it was when I joined 15 years ago it's the new normal as they say but we must deal with this kind of stuff. I just want to thank Sandy for all her work that she did here, and I wish she was still here, I wish she was here today. Sandy would have been a big help over these last couple of

months as we weren't able to meet because we don't have a new member, because people are not lining up to replace her. They also were not lining up when she took over 10 years ago. We were very lucky to get her and like I said the expertise she brought to this city was invaluable and we used that expertise over the course of these ten years and kept reappointing her despite not being from the city the whole time, and it's an issue now? Mr. Murray stated he is not from the city but grew up here in Fitchburg and it will always be my hometown. I love Fitchburg and that's why I volunteer. I was a citizen when I started 15 years ago, and I was a citizen much of the years after but I've moved and so I'm not from Fitchburg now but you will not find anyone that loves Fitchburg not to mention I come here to work every day, and have spent most of my life here, I love it and I'm not leaving this position till I'm forced out of it, which is 2025 for anyone keeping tabs on that but that's all I have to say. Thank you for your service Sandy, if you're out there listening I really appreciate it and I know John does and Steve and Karen here we all appreciate working with you and thank you for all of your help and thank you for keeping Fitchburg healthy .

Announcements:

Ward Cleanups are scheduled to begin April 22, April 29 and May 5th. More details in the coming weeks on these dates as well as advertising on the city website and other various places. We invite folks to come and take part in the different wards and help clean up our streets, parks and common area places so we can make the city look beautiful.

Mr. Curry stated he would like to thank Sue Christensen and our Fitchburg Street Outreach Team of Keith Barnaby & Kim French as well as our community partners who worked together on Monday to house 30 unhoused individuals in a shelter both Monday and Tuesday night during the recent storm. We also had assistance from Street Outreach as well as Restoration Recovery which is on Fairmont St. in Cleghorn, whom helped us transport over 30 individuals to Motel 6. Also, thank you to the CHC Action team on Water St. for helping us arrange all those folks for a bus to transport. Thank you to the Fitchburg Police Department and Lieutenant Howe & Officer Sevigny as they were in close contact with us during the storm monitoring those that refused to be in a shelter. Thank you to Fitchburg Fire Department & Emergency Management went above and beyond, Captain Pat Haverty personally delivered hot meals provided by the Salvation Army to three folks who did not want to go into the shelter during the storm. Salvation Army also cooked and delivered hot meals to the Motel 6 guests. Lynette Valentine was in contact with us through the storm as she does a wonderful job at the Salvation Army, so kudos to her. We also got some assistance from SMOC in Leominster as they offered shelter and housed a couple of people that we couldn't reach on Monday night, so we appreciate their collaboration. Keith Barnaby also managed the Street Outreach phone for the duration of the storm to make sure that everybody that wanted to get shelter and be safe was able to do so. Mr. Curry is proud of those efforts and couldn't wait to spread the word on those efforts.

Vaccine clinics are still being held on Friday afternoon at the Fitchburg Public Library at 610 Main St from 1:00pm-5:00pm. The covering Public Health Nurse/Vaccine Coordinator Kathy

Jones has been running these clinics with the assistance of Transformative Healthcare. The Pfizer vaccine is available from ages six months and up and all are welcome to get boosters and first doses, whatever is applicable. We encourage folks to apply online and register but walk ins are welcome during those hours.

Medication Take Back Day will be held on Saturday, April 22 at 718 Main St in front of City Hall from 10:am to 12:00pm. Folks can bring their unused and unwanted prescriptions for proper disposal. This is a very successful event in two hours as we took 108 pounds of pills and prescriptions out in front of City Hall at our last event, so it was very successful. We will also be accepting gently used spring and summer clothing which will be distributed by the Fitchburg Street Outreach team later in the year.

Senior Safety Event will be held at the Fitchburg Senior Center at 14 Wallace Ave, Wednesday April 26th from 10:30 to 11:30. This is for our senior folks that visit the Senior Center and bring their unwanted and unused prescriptions as well. Mayor Stephen DiNatale and Police Chief Ernest Martineau will be there to discuss how seniors can recognize scams and how to handle a potential scam. The first 35 people who RSVP will be provided a complimentary lunch, so we invite folks to RSVP as soon as possible at 978-829-1790.

Mr. Murray made a motion to adjourn. Motion was 2nd by Dr. Bogdasarian. All were in favor, Motion carries.

Meeting adjourned at 5:20pm.