

BOARD OF HEALTH
Minutes for Special Meeting, Wednesday, July 26, 2023, 7:30 PM
Remote Participation

7:00 Discussion of Assistant Health Agent Position

NEW BUSINESS

The meeting agenda lists all topics reasonably anticipated by the Board of Health at the time of posting. Additional topics not anticipated may be discussed at the meeting under the agenda item New Business.

Meeting Dates - TBD – Summer Schedule

Upcoming Dates –

Attendance members: Patrick Collins Chairman, David Erickson, Cathy Galligan, Tony Mariano, Jennifer Wall

Attendance nonmembers: Linda Fantasia Health Agent, Erin Green Wanda Avril (Carlisle Mosquito), Ryan McLane, Dave Model, Aubrey Thomas (assistant town administrator)

1. Discussion of Assistant Health Agent Position

Collins opened the special BOH meeting at 7:31pm.

McLane started by saying that when there are vacancies it is an opportunity to adopt master plan and governance study task force recommendations. In this regard, we should look at the totality of land use staffing in Carlisle. The desire is to have more flexible staffing as some positions experience seasonal lulls and with proper training personnel could help other departments. Ryan continued that the master plan indicates that we should analyze the situation whenever we have vacancies.

There was considerable discussion of this. In particular, it was noted that the BOH, while it has some land use functions, is not strictly a land use agency as it has many other responsibilities. It was also noted that the BOH has not experienced help from staff of other departments even though this position has been vacant for several months. It was expressed that the assistant health agent was a position that a hiree could grow into if they were devoted strictly to the BOH. McLane expressed concerns that the current situation is unsustainable and that we need to make more efficient use of our resources.

Eventually, Erickson moved to reconsider the position of Assistant to the Health Agent. Galligan seconded the motion which was then defeated unanimously. This means that the BOH will continue to look for a person to fill the Assistant to the Health Agent as the position has been previously described.

Mariano then moved to end the special meeting and the meeting ended at 8:53 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
David Erickson,
Recorder

APPENDIX added October 18, 2023, for clarification and additional information.

(Galligan notes 7/26/23 on BOH members' responses)

Ryan McLane

- Ryan referenced the Master Plan and doing an analysis when vacancies occur. This should include considering regional opportunities, shared staff, and other models. The Governance Task Force is also actively examining town-wide structure. For example, assistants should be prepared to move into Department Health roles. Coordinating land use cross-training will provide one-stop shopping and a smoot process for residents. For example, Ryan has heard complaints about the 1 day/week Health Department engineering consultant; this service should be made more available.

Linda Fantasia

- Linda commented that when there have been complaints about availability of the Health Department engineer, it has reflected the system installer's failure to plan the work appropriately. There is a clearly defined installation scheme that works well when followed.

Ryan

- Relative to the seasonal lulls and cross-department support: A primary focus needs to be on defining the responsibilities of this position. Some departments go through stagnant periods. Because the BOH position roles are not clearly defined there isn't an opportunity to take advantage of underutilized staff and they (staff) are not being given the opportunity to grow.

Tony Mariano

- There seems to be some confusion about the details on the part of the Town administrator. The scope and duties of the position have been well defined for years. A floating land use employee is a great idea but there is a misunderstanding about the breadth of the position. We should fill our position and floaters from other departments could help the BOH. It seems that the Town administration may not be on the same page about the position – the role requires a specific level of responsibility and formal training and certifications.

Ryan

- The regional data doesn't support the level of effort. Every department feels they are understaffed.

Tony

- People looking in and making comparisons don't know what public health in Carlisle entails. The regional data is not comparable; each town has different scenarios and the regional data doesn't support direct comparisons.

Ryan

- BOH needs to deploy resources more efficiently.

Tony

- Disagree.

Ryan

- 2-deep leadership can be accomplished in many ways through the regional model. The second person plugs holes when necessary.

Dave Erickson

- BOH covers both health and land use. The Pandemic is not the only critical activity – for example tick diseases, West Nile Virus, continued need for vaccination clinics. Half of the function is health [vs. solely land use]. It has been 3 months without the second position, why not offer flexibility during this time?

Ryan

- In three months, there has been no service drop. He hasn't observed a need to flex resources to support the Health Department.

Jennifer Wall

- She is looking at the higher level, framework for the Health Department. We are coming out of a 3-year pandemic and should systematically examine weaknesses in the infrastructure, what we did or didn't do well. We have no category that addresses health and safety, and yet that is critical. We should consider that in our planning. Does our community understand that public health has changed and we won't get care like before COVID for a long time. There's no dispute that land use is important, as is flexibility. However, we need to think deeply about the skill sets that are important for cross-department flexibility. The Health Department might be able to combine efforts with the Fire or Police department, but not Town Hall departments. Jenn noted that the Health Department needs an on-call person 24/7. Linda Fantasia's phone never gets turned off even when on vacation. It's important to have a full-time position, not a floating assistant.

Ryan

- The job description won't get us what Jenn is describing. For that we would need to tap into regional resources and consultants. Ryan also gave an example of how he worked with the DPW and found cost savings by renting a mower instead of purchasing the equipment.

Tony

- Tony understands Ryan's viewpoint on flexibility and saving money but some things Ryan is describing are pie in the sky. How do you hire a consultant with no budget; consultant services are very expensive. It's not like renting a lawn mower. You also don't know when consultant services are needed, so the consultant may not even be available.

Cathy Galligan

- Cathy pointed out that Ryan's proposal addresses only land use, but the job entails considerable public health responsibilities. She disagreed with Ryan's opinion that the position won't get the Health Department what's needed. The employee who recently resigned was very effective in the role and we anticipate hiring a similarly capable staff member. She commented on the training, certifications, and breadth of duties that the Health Department must cover. She read off a list of over fifty topics the Health Department actively supported during her tenure on the Board of Health – many of these arose suddenly with no warning. The list of duties continues to grow, not abate. In the past, the Health Department routinely used grants and student interns (public health candidates, medical students, and engineering students) for key projects. While this is a cost-effective and highly productive mechanism, it requires adequate bandwidth to supervise the projects; almost impossible with our current staffing of 1.6 FTEs. When Ryan argued that this number was not the true staffing level because of the 53E funding for additional hours, Cathy asserted that this was the funding level in the town budget that is paid for by the tax base. The additional hours are direct costs paid by user fees for services that benefit individuals, not the town as a whole.

Cathy also rebutted Ryan's comparisons with other towns from data Ryan shared earlier. Once the Nashoba Board of Health towns were teased out, Carlisle's staffing was typical of our sister towns. As Tony noted, it's hard to make direct comparisons; for example, other towns have a mix of public sewer and municipal water unlike Carlisle.

Linda

- Linda chose to leave the discussion and decision up to the Board.

Patrick Collins

- Patrick agrees with the statements of the BOH members. He has concerns about our ability to transfer staff work to consultants as recommended by Ryan. As a consultant himself, he is aware that in an emergency, consultants go with the person that pays the most. So, consultants are not ideal for emergencies. He feels the Health Department is doing well with the existing structure and we need to move ahead on the same path. This is not the right position for a floater and Patrick would like the position filled ASAP.

Cathy

- Cathy commented on Ryan's assertion that the spending is not sustainable. Based on the Health Department having one of the lowest budgets of any town department, any savings eked out would be minimal in comparison to belt-tightening in departments with considerably higher budgets.

Jenn

- We need to look at the next 20 years and back into a strategy that incorporates health and safety. Our goal is leveraging the right person for the open position to get the menial tasks off Linda's plate and simultaneously make sure the historical knowledge and vision continue. This can be done with a high functioning person as we had in Kris Gines.

Patrick

- Patrick summarized that this special meeting gave us the opportunity to hear Ryan. Patrick leans towards staying the course that we already voted on twice.

Dave

- Dave questioned what is happening in other departments.

Ryan

- The plan is to consider restructuring upon vacancies in the DPW, Finance Department and Police, remaining cost-neutral.

Tony

- Ryan's hoping for cost savings in the Health Department is to cut the existing role to a clerical role, while the Board agrees that we need to grow the department's skilled capabilities. If a different model is to be applied, it needs to be researched and modeled out before we make any change. There are no clear details being offered for us to consider in the approach Ryan is proposing.

Patrick

- A decision is to be made by the end of this meeting. In consultation with Linda on the process, Patrick requested a motion to reconsider our previous vote. (if the motion fails, the original decision stands). The motion was made and all votes were nays.