

*Minutes*  
*Williamsburg Board of Selectmen and Board of Health*  
*December 28, 2021*

The members of the Board of Selectmen the Board of Health met in special session on Tuesday, December 28 2021, by video-conferencing. The two chairs called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

Present: Board of Selectmen: David Mathers, Denise Banister and William Sayre.

Board of Health: Donna Gibson, Helen Symons (absent: Rusty Luce); Mark Bushee (Health Agent).

Also present: Nick Caccamo (Town Administrator), Ryan Feyre (Reminder), Shaw Israel Izikson (Country Journal), Bonnie Roberge (Collector), Eleanor Warnock (Administrative Assistant)

1. Covid-19 –

Current situation – The Board of Health is very concerned about Covid and the uptick in numbers, and is considering a mask mandate in all public spaces. There are currently 15 cases in town; one person is in the hospital and is quite sick. Some people are very sick, some not at all. Over the past two weeks the town has seen a 46% increase in cases. It was also pointed out that the number of cases is less than 1% of the town's total population.

Authority of Board of Health – Health Agent Mark Bushee explained that the Board of Health can make decisions and write regulations if there is an emergency to protect public health; it is not necessary to have a declared state of emergency. Across the state more and more towns are mandating masks. It was added that Massachusetts was the first state to have Boards of Health, and they were set up to be autonomous because of the medical issues – for instance, in smallpox and tuberculosis – and Select Boards might not have the necessary background.

Masks generally – The CDC says that the most infectious period is from two days before symptoms show. A regular (surgical) mask tends to reduce likelihood of transmission by 70%. Masks work in conjunction with each other – worn by both the sick person and by the person trying to prevent getting sick. The new variant is much more contagious than previous ones. Hospitals in the area are full and overwhelmed. Masks are a stopgap. Requiring masks can be done easily and is perhaps the least restrictive thing the town can do. It was noted that most people are wearing masks on their own these days.

Masks and possible mandate – The Boards have heard from several businesses in town, both advocating strongly for masks, to protect their employees, and requesting that the town have no mask mandate. The Boards want to support businesses and do right by all the people in town. The Board of Health made it clear that they don't want to get involved in enforcement or fines. It was hoped that a mask mandate would help take pressure off businesses. Everyone agreed that a business has a right to require masks and not to serve people who don't wear masks. After a discussion of various words – mandate, requirement, directive, recommendation – it was suggested that there be a mask requirement but that a business can opt out. The Health Agent will look into this possibility and consult Town Counsel. A business opting out would of course put up a sign saying that masks are not required in the business. The Board of Health will post a

meeting and plan to meet on Thursday, when their third member can be present, to discuss this further.

Town Offices – employees – Recently when an employee got sick, other employees were offered the possibility of working from home. While the general sense is that Covid cannot be caught from a surface, the CDC recommends cleaning and disinfecting in the space a sick person used, up to six feet, if less than 24 hours had passed, and to clean generally if up to three days. The Health Agent will check for the exact recommendation and the Town Administrator will send it out to all departments. Offices have air purifiers in each room, but fresh air is valuable and some windows do not open. The Town Administrator will look into getting them fixed.

Town Offices – masks – Masks are required in the Town Offices. Recently when there was an issue with a person not wearing a mask, steps were taken to de-escalate the situation. Town Administrator Nick Caccamo said that a situation needs to be assessed in real time; calling the police is not necessarily a quick solution but is one tool in a toolkit. The Select Board will plan to discuss this at the next meeting.

The Select Board thanked the Board of Health for their wisdom and care for the health and safety of the town.

Both Boards adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Approved:

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Clerk