Foothills Health District – Meeting Minutes of 12/31/2021

Present: Fran Fortino (FF), Donna Gibson (DG), Robby Armenti (RA), Tom Martin (TM), Mike Kurland (MK), Mike Archbald (MA), Mark Bushee (MB)

1) FF moves to approve minutes of December 17, 2021, meeting as amended with RA seconding and approval unanimous.

2) MA reports on uptick in Covid cases in FHD (63 total), but not many kids affected so far. School nurses worrying about the start of school next week and availability of covid tests. He has only gotten a couple of contacts from home tests. With new CDC & MPH guidelines on isolation and quarantine, MA can clear cases quicker and theoretically they come off MAVEN sooner. The board duly appreciated that communication between PHN and member towns is very good.

3) MB reports he is feeling better and doing most inspections, except Title 5. Janet is out this week and things are a little hectic. He has revised the health inspector job description and sent it to 3 free sites as well as to Phoebe at FRCog and the MA Academic Public Health Corps. He will also talk with Gina McNeely next week about the job.

MB mentioned covid test kits which led to a discussion of whether FHD should jointly purchase several thousand for our communities. We decided against this option citing bureaucratic issues and costs. TM said that the Biden Administration will require insurance companies to reimburse Americans who buy test kits starting in January. FF notes there are Binax test kits available for free from the state and Whately will try to get some for its town staff among others.

4) TM stated that Westhampton would like a proposed FHD assessment for their budget calculations by January 15 and that prompted a discussion about census data which are used for FHD assessments. FF had sent US 2020 census figures for the 4 FHD towns earlier and we decided to have a small committee made up of FF, MB & MK put together a FHD budget with assessments in line with the PHE grant budget for next meeting.

5) Member town reports: Goshen BOH meeting next week. Westhampton is now able to do hold hybrid in-person/remote meetings with their new 360 conference equipment. Indoor events are being reduced. Whately is working on getting test kits and a vax bus clinic at their elementary school. MK noted that with such small essential staffs in our towns, we may need the tests to keep the town functioning. In Williamsburg, the Selectboard initially questioned the BOH’s authority to issue mask mandates, but came around. The BOH issued a mask mandate yesterday and got the word out via robo calls, etc. Some feedback was good, some not. RA noted that robo calls do not reach everyone and this could be a municipal vulnerability for future disasters going forward.

6) Next meeting set for 1/14/22, FHD personnel committee to meet 1/7/22. Happy New Year!

-Minutes by FF