

## Ware Board of Health Meeting

January 19, 2022 Hybrid Meeting / Selectmen's Meeting Room

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Meeting ID: 840 6943 4897  
Passcode: 288013

Present: John Desmond, Jennifer McMartin, Katrina Velle

In Attendance: Stephen Bell, Sai Palani, Stuart Beckley, Gail Gramarossa, Liz Whynott, Abaigeal Duda

John called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and announced the meeting is being audio recorded

### APPOINTMENT

6:05 Appointment: Quaboag Hills Substance Use Alliance and Tapestry Health to present on harm reduction. Gail Gramarossa explained some of the background for why harm reduction is important for Ware. She stated that Ware needs these services because people who need to make use of them in Ware are having to travel to other places that do offer the services. Stephen then introduced Liz Whynott, Director of Harm Reduction at Tapestry. Liz showed a PowerPoint presentation with an overview of harm reduction. Harm reduction accepts drug use is human and brings with it both harms and benefits. The main plan is to meet the individual where they are at and connect them with educational materials and access to healthcare.

Northampton was the first town to offer syringe service, then Holyoke, and other towns followed along. This is one of the services Tapestry is looking to bring into Ware. They are planning to start with mobile services, but they would like to get a physical location as well. Jennifer asked for clarity on what she means with mobile, and Liz explained that it's a van that is equipped with everything they need: syringe services, Narcan, testing supplies. Jennifer also asked how residents would know how to find the services. Liz said the program relies on town stakeholders and word of mouth. Jennifer asked whether they would work with local businesses to provide services along with them. Liz explained that they do get involved with local businesses to build relationships. Gail added that in many towns, law enforcement and first responders are very active in connecting people in need with the services Tapestry offers. John questioned where their funding comes from, and Gail explained that it is mainly coming from federal grants. John's next question is whether there is a particular thing QHSUA and Tapestry might want from the board. Gail explained that they just want support and to start a conversation, so that they can expand services to many towns in the region. Jennifer wanted to know how the board can help get the process started and streamlined, as she agrees that there's a need. Gail referred to Belchertown and how they went through the same process, and she suggested that Stephen could investigate what the process was and help get it started. She also suggested speaking with the Select Board to bring them onto the same page about what the plan will be. Authority rests with the Board of Health, but it's good to let other partners know what the board will do. The board members asked Stephen to look into how Belchertown went through the process and to attend a Ware Select Board meeting to present the information to them later. The board wants to get an idea of what the arguments against harm reduction services in town would be so that they can be addressed before the board might vote.

Discussion 1: Resource Waste Services

John summarized the letter Stuart sent to the board on December 10, stating that ReSource approached the Select Board to request an expansion of their permit to be allowed to process more waste, with the understanding that they will need to get the appropriate permits from the board of health, the planning board, and the state. They also proposed a host community agreement as part of that expansion where they would pay the town a fee for every ton of waste processed. John found this letter troublesome because he believes they want to start processing municipal solid waste. He was even more troubled that they went to the Select Board before approaching the Board of Health, because he feels that they are trying to get the Select Board to approve a host community agreement before having their permit expanded, which would put pressure on the board of health to approve the expansion.

John explained to the other board members that ReSource wants to bring solid waste from Springfield to Ware, where it would await being put on a train to be taken away. Stuart took issue with this, stating that they wanted to do solid waste in the past, but they don't want to do that with this expansion. John stated again that if ReSource wants to expand their operation, they should have come to the Board of Health first. He believes that they are trying to put money on the table to hold the Board of Health's decision hostage. Stuart again clarified that the agreement as discussed has nothing to do with municipal waste and is just intended to increase the amount of construction and demolition material they can process. Jennifer asked what amount of money the proposed host community agreement would be for, and Stuart said that is to be determined and reminded the board that they appointed Stephen and John Desmond to a committee to help figure that out. John reiterated that he believes this is a façade and that ReSource's ultimate goal is to do municipal waste. He then asked Stuart if he knows how close to their current C&D capacity they are, and Stuart said they are around 2/3. Stuart believes that the new owners of this company are committed to being better neighbors than previous owners and wants to take them at their word about what their intentions are. Jennifer suggested putting a pause on the host community agreement discussion until ReSource comes to the board of health to talk about the expansion of their permit. Stuart believes that there should be one meeting to explain the process to ReSource, but John wants to have them come before the board of health at the next meeting. ReSource will be meeting with the town's environmental justice community as part of the state's permitting requirement, but after that they will come to the board of health's next meeting.

## Discussion 2: Housing Inspection Referrals

Stephen explained that the fire and building departments will send letters of compliance to the health department when they've gotten referrals from the health department. This will allow the health department to know that the referred items have been completed. Stephen also explained that if the other departments, particularly the electrical inspector, don't get their pieces of the referral done, the health department will try to achieve compliance with the housing code. Jennifer asked about the electrical inspector and Stephen let the board know that the electrical inspector is reluctant to do inspections where no permit has been pulled because he doesn't get paid for those. Stephen suggested that the town allocate extra budget toward the electrical inspector's compensation to offset the fact that he doesn't get paid for health department referrals.

Stephen also went into detail about the process. He believes that it is moving more smoothly now than it used to, but what's holding the process up now is the interpersonal issues with the landlords and owners. Stephen said that he and Sai are going to start making use of the housing courts to get the housing cases moving. Jennifer asked whether the department has to pay fees to use the court. Stephen said that what the department has to pay is the service fees to serve defendants. John suggested using process servers in town to get the orders served and save money. John also wants Stephen to get written policies from the other departments to solidify the cooperation that's in place.

### Discussion 3: COVID update, vaccination rates, and mask mandate

Stephen started by going into the COVID numbers. He said they have been their highest ever in the last couple of weeks. Last week Ware had 117 cases in Ware, the week before was 203. John asked whether the numbers included tests done at home and Stephen said no. He also said that there is a way for people to report home tests to the state, but it's difficult to find out how. Because of this, the numbers are underreported.

Stephen said that the omicron variant is following the pattern that was predicted: cases were going to rise very fast, but then start to come down again quickly as well. We are seeing that right now. Incidence rate in Ware was 228 case/day/100k residents. Stephen said as well that hospitalizations are still very high, but they are starting to come down as well. He referred to the head of the emergency department at Cooley-Dickinson, who said the people they are seeing in the hospital are less sick than they were last year at the same time. They are using fewer ventilators and not as much oxygen, but they are still taking up a lot of beds and still need precautions. John asked whether there's a difference between vaccinated vs. unvaccinated, and Stephen said that it's more unvaccinated people who are getting very sick. The vaccinated people who show up in the hospitals tend to not be very sick and often are there for other reasons.

Vaccination rates in Ware are getting better: now at 64%, compared to the state rate of 73%. The rate of booster shots in Ware is only 28% compared to state at almost 50%. Hampshire county's booster rate is the highest in the state at 55%. Katrina asked for the vaccination rates of high school aged kids, and Stephen said 12-15 is 60% and 16-19 is 47% fully vaccinated. Seniors are doing great, over 90% fully vaccinated for everyone over 65 and over 60% booster rates for the same age group. Jennifer raised the point that at the hospital where she used to work is still seeing the highest numbers that they've ever seen and that their ICU beds are reaching critical levels. Stephen said Baystate is seeing the same sort of thing, but that over the weekend they finally saw their first decrease in hospitalized patients since November.

Jennifer also asked about flu cases. Stephen said we've already seen almost as many flu cases this year as we did last year. Jennifer said there needs to be a focus on education, because people are getting their COVID vaccines but ignoring their flu vaccines.

Stephen talked about test kits, and that the state has opened the ability to purchase kits through their vendors at the state negotiated rate. He also said that test kits are an approved purchase using ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funding. Jennifer said that Ware got \$2.5 million in ARPA funds and have already spent \$700,000 of that money. Stephen asked two big questions: should we spend on test kits, and how much should we spend? The Select Board is the entity that releases ARPA funding, so any request for test kits will need to go through them. He said that the Select Board wants to focus on municipal employees and only get enough test kits for town employees. Jennifer said that the Select Board decided to table the discussion of test kits because the federal government is sending test kits to households. Stephen said that there are 4 kits available from the government and 8 kits a month can be reimbursed through health insurance, but they're still hard to find in stores. John says that town employees have good health insurance and can get reimbursed, so there's no reason to prioritize them over other town residents.

Stephen said that the town was given 3150 test kits in December, and to order that number of kits now would cost the town around \$50,000. He also said that for them to be as effective as they need to be, we need a lot of kits so that people can test multiple times. Stephen said that some of the kits are one test per kit and some are two tests per kit, and the cost for each kit depends on the vendor. The cheapest kit is \$10, but they have a high minimum order and are

also providing the state with 26 million kits and are not likely to have a lot available for smaller groups. John said he wanted to send the Select Board a letter requesting 10,000 kits (one for each person in town). Stephen said demand is still high, and he believes that the kits that were distributed were helpful based on reports he got from places that got distributions of kits. Stephen said we distributed tests to low-income housing, the senior center, the food bank, and also did a town-wide distribution. In all cases, Ware residents were prioritized, but he couldn't guarantee that a couple people from other towns didn't get some kits during the distribution. Sai also made a point that the home test kits are only free for people with an address or health insurance, so he believes that having test kits for people in town that are either uninsured or have no permanent address. Stephen said he will draft a letter to the Select Board asking for 10,000 kits and requesting that they use ARPA funding to buy them.

#### DISCUSSION/ACTION:

- Katrina motioned to approve meeting minutes of December 15, 2021, Jennifer seconded, all in favor.

John motioned to adjourn at 8:15 PM, Jennifer seconded all in favor. Next meeting to be February 16, 2022 at 6:00PM

Respectfully Submitted,  
Stephen Bell

Meeting minutes approved 2/16/2022