

Public Hearing Meeting Minutes
March 20 2006; 7:00 pm; Durham Public Library

In attendance were guest presenter P. Kilbey-Fox, J. McLaughlin, M. Boord, R. Parmelee, D. Viola, T. Russell, S. VanDerzee, B. Wilkinson, B. Milardo, S. Levy, M. French, D. Levy, T. Bradely, M. Engelhardt, P. Downs, and R. Edwards.

J. McLaughlin opened the meeting by stating the purpose of the Public Hearing was to provide residents of Durham the opportunity to discuss the State of Connecticut's proposal to form a Regional Health District (RHD). Pamela Kilbey-Fox from the state Department of Public Health (DPH) spoke on the subject and explained that the state is encouraging small towns to join such districts to improve service, emergency preparedness, and response in the case of a public health emergency. Currently, there are 19 regional health districts in the state covering 100 towns. There are less than 40 part-time health departments remaining, of which Durham is one of these. Durham currently has a part-time health director, but if Durham joins a RHD, a new regional health director would be appointed. Other towns currently exploring the formation of a RHD as proposed by the state include Clinton, Old Saybrook, Westbrook, Essex, Haddam, Deep River, Chester, and Middlefield.

P. Kilbey-Fox commented on the status of Senate Bill 978, which if passed by the state legislature would require towns to join health districts within the next three years. Although this bill is presently not before the Senate, P. Kilbey-Fox explained that residents can now choose their district instead of having it chosen for them in the future. The state is encouraging towns to join now by offering \$1.94 per capita, which is significantly above the current \$0.49 per capita provided by the state to part-time health departments. The Town of Durham is exploring the formation of RHD through a \$5,000 grant from the state.

S. Levy asked if the RHD's Health Director would be available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. P. Kilbey-Fox explained that in a RHD, a dispatch center can be contacted 24/7 through 1 emergency phone number.

Questions were raised regarding what would happen in the case of an emergency if the town was not in a district, and would mutual aid be provided to Durham. According to Kilbey-Fox, the state would help in any case, but the first line of defense would reside with the local resources. Currently, Chatham is the mass vaccination site for Durham residents (however, sanitarian B. Milardo stated he thought Wesleyan University was the

mass vaccination site for Durham residents). By forming a RHD, Durham would have a say in location, strategies, etc. for emergency preparedness. District members would have a wider network of resources.

S. Levy commented that towns should be prepared locally and that the state should provide adequate funds to towns and not just to districts. Towns should not be excluded from the benefits of a RHD if they don't join, and money should be shared equally. The state should provide incentives for a mutual aid arrangement across independent towns.

P. Kilbey-Fox responded that Durham is part of Region 2 of the Department of Emergency Management and Health Services and that mutual aid does exist. However, the DPH supports regionalization, which promotes better networking across towns and information exchange with the state.

R. Parmelee stated his general support for the operation of the state Department of Health, but he expressed his dislike of regional governments due to lack of local control and lack of adequate funding over time. P. Kilbey-Fox explained that each town within a RHD appoints a representative to serve on a Regional Health Board, which would define by-laws and priorities. She also stated that an out-clause is available after 2 years of membership.

D. Viola asked if there is 1 Health Director assigned per town in a RHD. P. Kilbey-Fox answered that there is 1 Health Director per RHD.

R. Parmelee asked if the Health Director must possess a MD degree and would a RHD be able to pay such a salary. P. Kilbey-Fox stated that a MD degree isn't required, but a Master's degree in Public Health is a requirement for the Health Director.

P. Kilbey-Fox was asked why vaccines could not be delivered to the town. She responded that security is the chief concern, and the DPH could not risk delivering away from vaccination sites.

The meeting was concluded at 8:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Renee Primus Edwards

