Thursday, June 15, 2023 7:30 – 8:30 AM

Members present: Alex Babaian, Mike Bellissimo,Victor Capoccia, Leslie Clapp, Louise Clough, Betsy Edge, Beth Folcarelli, Lewis Laskaris, Bob Laskowski, Marina Lent, Lisa Nagy, Chantale Patterson, Dan Pesch, Susan Pratt, Kathleen Samways, Susan Sanford, Joyce Stiles Tucker, Sheryl Taylor Thompson, Martina Thornton, Christine Todd, Mary Jane Williams. Guests present: Cathy Wozniak, Peter Wharton, Bill Rovero.

**Call meeting to order / Approval of May 18 meeting minutes:** Mary Jane Williams called the meeting to order at 7:30 AM. The May minutes were moved, seconded, and approved.

**Dukes County's use of ARPA funds to mitigate nitrogen runoff – and why it’s important** – Peter Wharton, Dukes Commissioner introduced himself, and described the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) which came about during COVID to provide funding for municipalities for a broad set of financial stimuluses to be used as discretionary funds with some strict guidelines. The County received about 3.6 million dollars, and each Town separately received funding. In 2021, the County developed a steering committee to identify the use of the funds that would be both compliant and effective. ARPA had a carve out for infrastructure and wastewater – something of importance on the Island. A decision was made to divide the money up, allocating about 1.5 million to the Dukes County Airport wastewater facility which was in critical need of updating. The Airport wastewater facility includes not just the airport, but also the large business park which serves many businesses across the Island. The rest of the funding will be used to directly apply to improving individual’s septic systems, retrofitting them with new nitrogen reducing systems. Title 5 systems in use now allow a tremendous amount of nitrogen getting into the water table. A coordinating committee made up of the health agents from each town and a member of the Dukes County Commission to decide how awards will be distributed. Estimates for upgrading systems range for $30,000 to $55,000. There will be a social justice overlay regarding use of the funds, looking at adjusted median income (AMI). The grant application and conditions will be designed by the County so that each Town can use them. After installation, data will be collected to see that systems are maintained and tested according to manufacturers’ guidelines and operating as designed – with a hope that their use will make them more widely used across Massachusetts including Dukes County. For this project, permission was granted to pre-fund the individual projects based on AMI. The use of ARPA funds means that funds must be materially obligated by December 31, 2024 and actually payments can lag until December 31, 2026.

Bob Laskowski asked how significant the impact of the program will have on nitrogen loading on the Vineyard. Peter responded by saying retrofitted Title 5 systems will achieve nitrogen reduction levels at a lower cost per pound of nitrogen than a typical wastewater plant. The new systems can reduce up to 90% of nitrogen in leaching fields. Both Peter and Marina Lent said that this demonstration project could enable us to get more money, perhaps from the State, for additional work on septic nitrogen reductions. Lew Laskaris asked about funding for homeowners whose systems are not failing, and Peter said that the priority is homeowners with failing systems and that there are more of those than we probably want to admit. He also said that the goals is that applications and manuals for people who want to apply will be available by the end of July. Kathleen Samways asked if there was a metric that would help track the project – is there a measure of success? Peter said that Liz Durkee at the Martha’s Vineyard Commission has put together a lot of information which is available on their website and is one of the reasons that the County wanted to partner with the MV Commission. Martina Thornton said the Barnstable County is collecting data about these systems on the Cape and Vineyard and it will be available to us.

**Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Statement Discussion** – Kathleen Samways said that the working group has not been able to meet, but has a lot of notes and said that rather than a statement, the Council should have a vision, and the group will be working on that. It will be a process with discussion at a future Council meeting.

**Council Priorities – Preliminary Results of the Member Survey –** Kathleen Samways emphasized that she had only preliminary results to share. Only 19 Council members responded to the survey – about half. She also said that they’d already learned that many Council members are not aware of the Council’s committee structure. She reviewed the Council’s mission statement as follows:

The Dukes County Health Council is a coalition of community members, public health officials, health practitioners, and health organizations working together to promote community wide health and wellness and to advise the commissioners and island residents concerning these issues.

The model to guide the work of the council and its committees includes: 1) needs assessment, 2) program planning and development, clearly based on identified community needs, which produce measurable outcomes, and 3) evaluation of the successes and challenges encountered by ongoing council related programs on an ad hoc basis.

So, more communication and advisory than specific action at the Council level. She displayed bar charts with the preliminary data indicating that most people thought the Council was very effective with aging, becoming more effective in our data, and fairly effective with access. Responses to the question about how successful outside agencies have been indicate that Healthy aging continues to be the highest, followed by oral health and housing. The rank order from highest to lowest of the following focal areas for the Council over the next two years included housing, data, oral health, followed by mental health and emergency preparedness, health workforce development. The committee working on this will meet again next week, and there will be more information at the next Council meeting. And she reminded people to take a few minutes and respond to the survey is they done that yet.

Bob Laskowski commented that the data needs to be explored. As an example, five years ago cancer was a high priority, and now it’s the lowest. That’s interesting since in the American population caner is the second leading cause of death. Heart disease is the leading cause of death at 23%, and cancer follows at 22%. He hypothesized that perhaps cancer is being well addressed in the community – but we don’t know about it as a health council. He described the data as a question asker rather than a question answerer.

**Public Health Update**

Marina Lent said that she had two main things to speak to. The first is ticks, saying we have good commitment for people to work on the tick disease end, and working with our tick biologist, Patrick Rodon Reynolds, we can put the tick information together with the human disease information. And we also have Betsy VanLandingham, a former ER nurse, who is going to be working through the State infectious disease database to try to convert as many tick borne illnesses which as “suspect” to either “revoked” or “probable so that we have a better handle on what is an acute illness and what is just exposure.

The other topic she discussed was data- she’s very happy with the work Alexis Babaian is doing, interviewing people/organizations about the data they collect. She’ll be working with data committee, and said she also will be looking at mortality, as she has access to every death certificate in the State. She plans to go back a decade to look at causes of death. As Bob mentioned, nationally cancer is the second leading cause if death, and Marina said that COVID is the third. She wants to see how the Vineyard compares to the national statistics and will share the information with the Council and the community.

Kathleen Samways asked if anyone attended the tick event on Saturday – Louise Clough was one of about 100 people there. She said that the speakers were very good – smart, well educated, and passionate about their work. Her only disappointment was that the slides are apparently not available - they contained a lot of great information. The only way to see the information is to watch the event on MVTV. Kathleen also wanted people to know that the conference was sponsored and funded by the hospital, Vineyard Medical Care and Island Health Care. Mary Jane Williams offered to send a letter of appreciation from the Council, and Marina suggested it be copied to the newspapers as a letter to the editor.

**Meeting adjourned at 8:30 am**

**The next regular Health Council meeting will be held via zoom on July 20 at 7:30 am**

Respectfully submitted, Louise Clough, secretary