



Board of Health Meeting Minutes

Date: February 21, 2025

Location: via Zoom

Members: Stephen Epstein, MD, MPP, Member; Robert A. Partridge, MD, MPH, Member, Edward Cosgrove, PhD, Member; Aarti Sawant-Basak, PhD, Member

Staff Present: Timothy Muir McDonald, Director of Health and Human Services; Tara Gurge, Assistant Director of Public Health; Carol Read; Kerry Dunnell; Sai Palani; Julie McCarthy; Taleb Abdelrahim, Lydia Cunningham, Ginnie Chacon-Lopez

Welcome & Public Comment Period

Dr. Epstein called the meeting to order at 9:00AM.

According to Chapter 107 of the Acts of 2022, as an act relative to extending certain states of emergency accommodations, as passed by the General Court, and signed into law by Acting Governor Karyn Polito, on July 16, 2022, revised Section 20 of Chapter 20, the Acts of 2021. In so doing, provided modifications to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, which allow for flexibility to hold remote only, and hybrid meetings, while preserving public access and, where appropriate, public participation. Currently, that additional flexibility will expire on March 31, 2025, unless additional legislative action occurs.

No public comment at this time.

Review of Minutes: January 24, 2025

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Partridge, and seconded by Dr. Cosgrove, it was voted to approve the meeting minutes January 24, 2025, as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

Environmental Testing of Synthetic Turf Fields

Ms. Gurge stated that, in furthering the discussion of the Fuss & O'Neill field turf testing results, specifically the arsenic and zinc results, the latest information received was reviewed. After the last Board of Health meeting, Staff connected with Fuss & O'Neill regarding the Board's inquiries, and they agreed to provide resampling for arsenic, due to the elevated reporting limit, at no additional cost. Fuss & O'Neill agreed to retest for zinc as well, but did not state that this retesting would be free of charge. There was agreement to take six samples from each field, instead of three. There will still be three total samples submitted for laboratory analysis, one from each field. The Board agreed that they would like a re-test this spring for zinc and arsenic levels in all three turf fields. This area is typically tested every other year. The Board agreed to review the costs for performing the two tests and move forward with having them completed in the spring if the cost is reasonable.

Enforcement of Zyn Nicotine Chill flavored pouches and other vape products

Ms. Gurge explained that staff had a follow-up virtual meeting with Cheryl Sbarra and her staff. They gave helpful guidance on the next steps for enforcement of Zyn nicotine pouches, along with resource articles. The enforcement guidance includes that staff can continue the plan to enforce Zyn Chill, as the basis for prohibiting its sale is that it is considered a flavored product, which is prohibited. If the Board is interested in restricting the nicotine content, staff can now limit it to the 3mg or 6mg amounts, due to the recent FDA authorization. It was noted that advertising and displays cannot be restricted per First Amendment rights. However, staff can also restrict the scanning of the QR coupon code on the base of the Zyn containers, since coupons and discounts are not allowed. Mr. Palani stated that, after further research on the QR codes, these may not need to be further restricted, as they are for reward purchases through the brand's website.

The Board agreed that, based on the guidance given, and that Zyn Chill has a characterizing flavor which are prohibited in Needham, that it should be pulled. The Board agreed to limit the nicotine content to 6mg. It was agreed to obtain additional information on how the QR codes are being used.

Introduction to the Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS) and PHE Data Gathering Initiative

Kerry Dunnell made a presentation regarding Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS) and an assessment process that is occurring with all 51 shared services organizations in Massachusetts. FPHS were released in 2021 to recognize capabilities and content areas to focus in. There are five foundational areas, with 28 responsibilities, that reflect the minimum number of services that should be available in a community. The capabilities may have crossover with the content areas and should be incorporated into the work. Massachusetts is working to adopt the FPHS standards. Each community will need to complete certain activities during this process.

Dr. Sawant-Basak asked if this data will be collected year over year. Ms. Dunnell stated that the idea is to have the data regularly collected with requirements for reporting and sharing progress on the different areas.

Customized Permit Fee Calculator

Mr. McDonald previewed the Customized Permit Fee Calculator which was developed with significant staff and contractor effort. The dynamic model attempts to capture the true cost to the Public Health Division to accept and process various applications and plan reviews, and to conduct the appropriate inspections and follow-ups. This will be discussed in greater depth at the Board's March 21st meeting, but the current calculations show that the Public Health Division may overcharge for some types of permits and licenses and also undercharges for various food service licenses. In March, the Board will debate the appropriate level at which to set permit fees for FY2026, including how to balance a true reflection of the cost of staff time and effort with

not dramatically increasing the charges to permit holders, especially without sufficient notice. A phase-in period of 2-3 years is proposed.

December and January Staff Reports

- Environmental Health – Sai Palani & Tara Gurge

Mr. Palani stated that the property owner confirmed that settlement is being finalized between them and the former Rice Barn owner. There is already interest from prospective tenants to occupy the space to be used for a new restaurant. Also, Environmental Health staff created signage for new Nicotine Free Generation policy. Signage was posted at each retailer during the week of December 23rd and the health agent described the policies to each store owner or another representative of the store. Staff created a new online dumpster permit application and made it live at the end of January. Notices will be sent out in February to have businesses, property managers, and landlords apply for dumpster permits with assistance from the Town Economic Development manager. The Environmental Health Team recently hired a temporary part-time Environmental Health student intern who will be starting on Monday, February 24th.

- Accreditation

Mr. McDonald explained that all required documents were uploaded to the PHAB website and sent to PHAB on December 11, 2024. There will likely be an in-person visit and review in May.

- Traveling Meals

Ms. Gurge stated that, in December 2023 there were ten more clients than there currently are. Otherwise, there are no major changes.

- Substance Use Prevention: Regional – Carol Read & Lydia Cunningham

Ms. Cunningham stated that staff continue to work on implementing the MassCALL3 strategic plans. Specifically, staff have been focusing on a health curriculum strategy featuring two programs, one for middle school and one for high school students. Staff met with a representative from each school to learn how to best support the schools in implementing the two programs. Staff also worked with a graphic designer to create a brochure about the MassCALL3 regional grant program. Staff attended a planning retreat in Westwood for that town's Drug Free Communities grant application. If Westwood is awarded that grant, it would allow them to hire a full-time staff coordinator who would partner with MassCALL3 staff.

Ms. Read noted that, due to the work staff did with the town of Walpole, that town was awarded a Drug Free Communities grant and just hired a full-time coordinator.

- Substance Use Prevention: Needham

Mr. McDonald stated that, in January SPAN launched *Conversations with Your Middle Schooler: Why You Shouldn't Wait to Talk About Substance Use*, as a three-part series for parents

of 5th-8th graders to help increase awareness about underage drinking and substance use, provide skill-building techniques for parents to have conversations with their children, and build a connection with other parents. Approximately ten parents attended the first session. Also, the Peer Recovery Coach worked with six individuals in December and January and continued her oversight of the Dual Recovery Anonymous weekly meeting. Regarding the STOP Act grant, staff hosted responsible beverage service training in December. 16 attendees from seven Needham businesses attended.

Dr. Epstein noted that the STOP Act grant should be used only for education and not lobbying.

- Public Health Preparedness – Taleb Abdelrahim

Mr. Abdelrahim stated that in December NACCHO awarded the Norfolk County-8 (NC-8) MRC unit the full \$10,000 Operational Readiness Award. This funding will support new initiatives and opportunities for the unit this year. Staff continued working on the Health Action Plan to document actions to take before and during an extreme temperature event to mitigate health impacts.

- Epidemiology – Julie McCarthy

Ms. McCarthy stated that the Biosafety Committee met in January and worked on updating the annual permit renewal process. Regarding influenza numbers, the Town is on an upward trend for influenza cases, with 260 confirmed cases at this time, compared to less in previous fiscal years. Needham has a much higher vaccination rate than the state, but the overall trend shows a decline in vaccination rates. There was a steady decrease from FY21-FY25 in vaccination rates. There is a connection between the decrease in vaccination rates and the increase in flu cases.

- Nursing – Ginnie Chacon-Lopez

Ms. Chacon-Lopez detailed a number of donations received and stated that gift cards have been purchased to help those in need. Staff has continued to host blood pressure clinics at both Needham Housing Authority locations. Staff has agreed to visit the locations on a monthly basis.

- Shared Public Health Services – Kerry Dunnell

Ms. Dunnell stated that there is a Mass Health Officer's session being offered regarding which communications are and are not appropriate for local public health. Regarding the Charles River District, the strategic planning process for the collaborative has begun. There will be work completed with consultants to help establish what the priorities will be for this collaborative for the next three to five years. The results of that strategic planning process will be available at the end of the fiscal year. Staff worked to create onboarding guidance for establishing a public health program in a community which was based on work and comments from the Needham Public Health nurses. All four communities completed a self-assessment two years ago and the collaborative was at 78% of the minimum standards and has since moved up to 85%. Staff completed a fee-cost study with all four communities which has been valuable. Regarding the training hub, it has been focused on working with the Office of Local Regional Health and

development of curriculum to train inspectors. The housing inspector training will be kicking off in March. In December, the Environmental Health Trainer position was filled.

Mr. McDonald noted that, regarding the recent federal fund freeze, the only item that has been impacted thus far for the Department is the food code standards work.

Other Items

- Next Meeting Date and Time
Friday March 21, 2025, at 9:00 a.m.

Adjournment

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Cosgrove, and seconded by Dr. Sawant-Basak, it was voted to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:38AM.

Attachment:

February 21, 2025, meeting packet