



Board of Health Meeting Minutes

Date: April 18, 2025

Location: via Zoom

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

Staff Present: Timothy Muir McDonald, Director of Health and Human Services; Tara Gurge, Assistant Director of Public Health; Kerry Dunnell; Sai Palani; Julie McCarthy; Taleb Abdelrahim, Ginnie Chacon-Lopez; Karen Shannon; Lynn Schoeff; Sam Menard

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.

There was discussion with Green Needham regarding a proposed black plastic ban.

Nicotine Pouches

Mr. McDonald explained that the Board adopted a revised regulation in December and there had been some discussion regarding removing Section G in its entirety, partly because there was not enough information. Staff has done additional research to allow the Board to again consider this topic.

Karen Shannon, SPAN Coordinator, explained that the research focused on the health impacts of nicotine pouches, including if they can be considered a cessation tool. The information uncovered does not point to them being a tool. Among the impacts to youth include the tobacco industry's marketing tactics and the targeting of youth. Limiting access is part of the work for primary prevention.

Sai Palani stated that there are at least nine Massachusetts communities that have included the Section G language, stating that nicotine pouches are only allowed in adult-only retail stores, most notably, Somerville. There is a movement growing around this topic. A couple of communities have also restricted the pouches to a six milligram dosage.

Dr. Partridge stated that enforcement of a dosage amount would be fairly simple, but there would be a difficulty in characterizing flavor of these pouches. Ms. Shannon suggested eliminating nicotine pouches in Needham altogether. Dr. Epstein stated that this would require public hearings.

The Board agreed to review a redlined version of the document, including restricting the pouches to six milligram doses and banning natural and artificial sweeteners and flavors. After review of this redlined document, the Board would then consider when to set public hearings.

Mr. Palani stated that staff looked at statewide compliance data for youth access and found that there was an 8% failure rate for nicotine patches. In Needham, the last few checks have also seen failures on these kinds of products.

February and March Staff Reports

Environmental Health – Sai Palani & Tara Gurge

- Ms. Gurge introduced the part-time Environmental Health student intern, Alexandra Diener. She will be assisting with ongoing Environmental Health projects for the next six months.
- An administrative meeting was held with The Farmhouse to discuss whether they have made sufficient progress over the past four months in order to release their food safety consultant mandate. An inspection was conducted, and sufficient improvements were observed. As a condition of the release of their food consultant, The Farmhouse agreed to several conditions.
- Ms. Gurge also reported that artificial turf field testing was carried out on April 7th and results will be presented at a future meeting.
- Mr. Palani said that the Environmental Health unit will be permitting the establishments that sell soft serve ice cream (“frozen dessert manufacturers”) separately from food service establishments as per state law.
- Environmental Health will also be issuing permits for funeral home directors going forward, also per state law.

Accreditation - Lynn Schoeff

- Ms. Schoeff stated that staff have been working on documents they had identified as weak during the accreditation submission process. A response is expected from the Accreditation Board within the next few weeks. This will include identification of documents that did not meet expectations and need to be modified and resubmitted. NPHD will then have 45 days to submit the new documentation.

Traveling Meals – Tara Gurge for Rebecca Hall

- Ms. Gurge stated that many applications have been received for the driver position and hiring is expected at the end of April.

Substance Use Prevention: Regional – Timothy McDonald for Carol Read & Lydia Cunningham

- Mr. McDonald noted that, in the past three years, Mass Call 3 regional grants increased from \$125,000 to \$250,000 but this may be reduced again due to the situation at the federal level.

Substance Use Prevention: Needham - Karen Shannon

- Ms. Shannon explained that staff held the second and third sessions of a three-part series for middle school parents focusing on how to talk with their children about substance use. Each was attended by about ten parents. The series was a productive approach, and staff are pleased with the outcomes.
- In February, staff took Narcan training to the high school for 38 SALSA students and 10 staff members. Boxes of Narcan were available at the Public Health Division for anyone who wanted them.
- In March, the last alcohol compliance check under the STOP Act grant was completed. Of the 24 businesses checked, there were four sales to minors.

Public Health Preparedness – Taleb Abdelrahim

- Mr. Abdelrahim stated that staff have begun rolling out the new CORI policy update to ensure volunteers remain eligible for employment.

Epidemiology – Julie McCarthy

- Ms. McCarthy stated that confirmed influenza cases were much higher this year.
- Ms. McCarthy noted that staff have been working on a rat reporting survey and will be releasing this to residents in the next couple of weeks. The intention is to identify areas where residents are seeing.
- Staff are also working on a Heart Safe website to capture how much work went into Needham becoming a Heart Safe community, and to act as a resource for residents.
- Ms. McCarthy noted that there have been comments on Facebook regarding urban heat islands and Board of Health involvement. She met with the Sustainability Manager to discuss the challenges around high heat areas in Town, including collecting air quality and temperature data and potentially applying for climate resilience grant money.

Dr. Epstein stated that, regarding the increase in influenza cases, it also appears that vaccination rates were lower this year. He suggested increasing public awareness on this matter.

Nursing – Ginnie Chacon-Lopez

- Ms. Chacon-Lopez stated that the Matter of Balance class finished with ten graduates. Feedback from participants was very positive for both the program and the instructors.
- There have been weekly blood pressure clinics at CATH with good resident attendance and weekly walk-in clinics for CPR/AED instruction offered this month.
- Camp applications and required documents were sent out to listserv from last year's season and one camp will not be returning this season.
- Ms. Chacon-Lopez gave an update on the Legionnaires' Disease case.

Shared Public Health Services – Kerry Dunnell

- Ms. Dunnell stated that Amy McInerney has left NPHD and her position will be posted shortly.
- All the communities have been scheduled for the Foundational Public Health Service Assessment. The results will be available in May.
- The Environmental Health Working Group continues to review self-assessment answers for accuracy.
- Hands Only CPR classes are being offered among the communities.

Review of Minutes: February 21, 2025

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Partridge, and seconded by Dr. Cosgrove, it was voted to approve the meeting minutes from February 21, 2025, as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

Designation of Agents

The Board agreed to table discussion on this item until a future meeting when more members are present.

Public Health Division Charge

The Board agreed to table discussion on this item until a future meeting.

Positions on Annual & Special Town Meeting

The Board discussed certain articles, including the citizen's petition under the Special Town Meeting Warrant – Skip the Stuff and Ban Black Plastic. Skip the Stuff was supported by the Select Board and Finance Committee. Ban Black Plastic was put on the Warrant by the Select Board, but it voted 2-3 to not support it. There was agreement to craft a statement from the Board of Health that explains the hazards related to nanoplastics.

Other Items

- Board Reorganization

The Board agreed to table discussion on this item until a future meeting.

- Next Meeting Date, Location & Time

Next Meeting – Friday May16, 2025 at 9:00 a.m. – Public Services Administration Building (PSAB) – Charles River room, 500 Dedham Avenue

Adjournment

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

The meeting was adjourned at 10:34 AM.

Attachment:

April 18, 2025, meeting packet