



Board of Health Meeting Minutes

Date: May 20, 2025

Location: via Zoom

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

Staff Present: Timothy Muir McDonald, Director of Health, and Human Services; Tara Gurge, Assistant Director of Public Health; Kerry Dunnell; Sai Palani; Julie McCarthy; Rebecca Hall, Lydia Cunningham, Taleb Abdelrahim, Karen Shannon; Lynn Schoeff; Carol Read

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.

Kalina Mihova and Grace Tetrault spoke about the importance of banning the sale of nicotine, especially nicotine pouches, in Needham. They spoke of the impacts they have seen nicotine use have on their classmates and teammates.

Stephen Helfer, representing Cambridge Citizens for Smokers Rights, stated that, last year in September, the FDA announced that the teen smoking rate was the lowest it has been in 25 years, and the vaping rate had gone down to the lowest it has been in ten years. The dangers of nicotine are overstated. In Massachusetts, adults 21+ are allowed to use their judgment regarding products such as alcohol and marijuana, both of which impair judgment and driving skills. Nicotine does neither of those. Adults should be free to buy nicotine products as long over the age of 21. Dr. Epstein clarified that Mr. Helfer is not a resident of Needham.

Isabel Tashie stated that sellers of nicotine pouches, like ZYN, would like the public to believe that their products are safe alternatives and are meant to help adult users quit. However, ZYN is owned by Philip Morris. Philip Morris does not want people to quit. Historically they have targeted young people, calling them terms like "pre smokers" because they want young people to replace current users. The industry has also historically used practices such as rewards programs and advertisements involving youth, marketing these products towards young people. Nicotine pouch products are constantly littered throughout school. There are plenty of

youth using them and still teachers are unaware. Philip Morris does not care about helping people quit; they care about having people continue to use products with heavy amounts of nicotine in them. In 2023 there were over 200 million shipments of ZYN products into the US. In comparison between 2016-2018, there were around 40 million imports of e-cigarette products shipped into the US. Zyn pouches are quickly taking over American youth, especially within towns like Needham. Implementing Nicotine Free Generation was a great step toward protecting the future generation of youth in Needham. In order to ensure that the policy will work, it needs to revolve around all products.

Jonathan, representing Cambridge Citizens for Smokers Rights, stated that he would prefer that everyone be allowed to smoke and use nicotine products. The availability of nicotine products could be helpful for students who cannot pay attention or for whom Ritalin does not work. Everyone should have access to coffee and smoke breaks. Smokers do not push anything on non-smokers.

Board Reorganization

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Epstein, and seconded by Dr. Cosgrove, it was voted to nominate Dr. Cosgrove for the position of Chair of the Needham Board of Health, Dr. Sawant-Basak for the position of Vice Chair, and Dr. Partridge for the position of Secretary/Clerk. Motion passed unanimously.

Review of minutes – April 18, 2025

Upon motion, duly made by Dr. Epstein, and seconded by Dr. Sawant-Basak, it was voted to approve the meeting minutes April 18, 2025, as presented. Motion passed 4-0-1 with Dr. Gandhi abstaining.

April Staff Reports

Environmental Health – Sai Palani & Tara Gurge

- Ms. Gurge updated the Board on enforcement of ZYN nicotine pouch products. She and an intern purchased sample vape products which were marked as “clear” but had an apparent flavor to them. These vape products were found at two establishments in Town and a minty-type odor was smelled on them. Staff has sent letters out to the retailers regarding these products having a characterizing flavor. There will be a follow-up to this at the Board’s June meeting.
- Mr. Palani stated that tobacco compliance checks were carried out in April and all the stores passed. Testing for the Nicotine Free Generation items is being considered for checks later this year. A full self-assessment for FDA retail standards was carried out. This will be an iterative process to identify any gaps in the standards and maintaining them over time.
- There was a Food Advisory Board meeting as part of Standard 7, including discussion regarding the potential adoption of the 2022 food code and how those changes might

impact the public and retailers. There was also discussion regarding food waste and how the Town could do more to address it.

- Mr. Palani conducted a site visit to the St. Mary's Street housing case and spoke with the occupants. The conditions there have improved to a point where Mr. Palani is willing to close the case.
- Dr. Epstein stated that there will need to be some independence to the testing when characterizing flavors for vape items. Dr. Patridge stated that the Board needs to determine how it would like to continue to enforce this moving forward.

Accreditation - Lynn Schoeff

- Ms. Schoeff stated that the Public Health Accreditation Board provided feedback, identified which documents need work in order to meet requirements, and reopened access to submitted documents last night. There were 26 documents out of several hundred identified that need some work. The deadline for this is July 24th and she is very confident it will be completed by that time.

Traveling Meals – Rebecca Hall

- Ms. Hall stated that meals are currently still being delivered by volunteers. The hiring process for summer drivers occurred in April and offer letters were sent out in May. The number of meals for April was the same as for March. Client numbers did not change.

Substance Use Prevention: Regional – Carol Read & Lydia Cunningham

- Ms. Read explained that the Mass Call 3 funding will revert back to the \$125,000 annual allocation, down from \$250,000. Ms. Read also informed the Board that she will leave her position on June 30, the end of the fiscal year. She thanked everyone on the Board.
- Ms. Cunningham explained that the town of Westwood submitted a Drug Free Communities grant application last month and, if they are awarded the grant, each of the cluster towns will be grantees.
- Staff have been preparing for the annual Regional Mass Call 3 meeting which will focus on sharing youth substance use and mental health data from the Metro West Adolescent Health Survey and updates on the regional strategic plan implementation. Staff have requested and received data cross tab reports from the 2023 Metro West Adolescent Health survey from the four towns. This data can be presented at a future Board of Health meeting.

Substance Use Prevention: Needham - Karen Shannon

- Ms. Shannon stated that this month's SPAN activities included a social host law presentation at the high school.
- The team partnered with the Police Department for drug take back day on April 26th and collected 54 lbs. of medications from the community, for a total of 447 lbs. collected over the previous six months.
- The peer recovery coach has been working full time.

SALSA students have been extremely active this spring and several members received awards for their leadership.

- A nicotine summary was previously presented to the Board, and it was requested that staff look further into the Metro West Adolescent Health Survey data from 2023 to find any disparities in the use of electronic vape products and e-cigarettes reported by Needham high school students.
- Ms. Shannon included a chart showing the disparities in use of electronic vapor products among those students who identify as LGBTQ+, across racial groups, and among students who report having a learning and/or physical disability.
- The STOP Act grant ended in April. Ms. Shannon explained that the Police Department is in favor of continuing the compliance work, including alcohol compliance checks.

Public Health Preparedness – Taleb Abdelrahim

- Mr. Abdelrahim stated that staff have started planning with the Norfolk County-8 (NC-8) MRC team to host the September Volunteer Training Day in Needham.

Epidemiology – Julie McCarthy

- Ms. McCarthy stated that the rat reporting survey has been shortened based on the Board's feedback and a handful of responses have been received. An educational website about rats is being created.
- Regarding the Biosafety Committee, all of the permit renewals have been submitted, and all of the lab inspections have been completed. The Biosafety Committee met last week and is on track to have the permit renewals approved by the end of the month.

Nursing – Ms. McCarthy for Ginnie Chaon-Lopez

- Ms. McCarthy stated that staff has begun the process to become HEARTSafe Certified. One specific criterion calls for the integration of AEDs into the 911 system which would require the system to be upgraded. Staff continued to work on this.

Shared Public Health Services – Kerry Dunnell

- Ms. Dunnell stated that Sam Menard, who was the assistant manager and lead trainer for shared services, has submitted her resignation. This position and the regional environmental health agent position are open and posted.
- The regional public health nurse continues to provide coverage for the town of Medfield and previously provided coverage for Dover, Sherborn, Medfield, and Needham.
- Staff offered a hands-free CPR event at an employee fair for Dover and Sherborn which was well received.
- Regarding the training hub, there will be a workshop on how to do proper report completion for housing inspections, and a de-escalation for inspectors training. There are a number of curricula that are projected to be developed, including one for camps.
- Regarding the Charles River Health District, the strategic planning work is proceeding, and a draft report will be submitted to the Advisory Board in May. The funding for this

group is a combination of State and ARPA funding and this seems fairly secure through 2027.

Designation of Agents

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Partridge, and seconded by Dr. Gandhi, it was voted that Board of Health designate Mr. McDonald as the Board's agent, and empower him to act in its stead, including designating additional deputy agents. Further move that the Board of Health designate Ms. Gurge and Ms. Dunnell as deputy agents to act in its stead when Mr. McDonald is unavailable. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Health Division Charge

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Epstein, and seconded by Dr. Cosgrove, it was voted that the Board of Health approve sending the drafted letter to Mr. McDonald outlining the Board's charge that all the professional staff of the Public Health Division research best practices, review best available data, and educate and inform the community, elected officials, and Town Departments about sound public health practices and the potential impacts of actions, initiatives, and policy choices on the public's health. Also move that a copy of said letter should be sent to the Town Clerk, Ms. Miller, to keep on file. Motion passed unanimously.

Nicotine Pouches

Mr. McDonald stated that the Board previously made some decisions regarding Nicotine Free Generation and agreed to remove the item on nicotine pouches for further discussion. The Board can now consider restricting nicotine pouches to adult-only, not allowing the sale at all, or a third option potentially regarding dosing.

Ms. Read explained that there are two versions of the revised regulations, one which includes a nicotine pouch limit and the other that allows for nicotine pouches in adult-only retail stores. Dr. Epstein stated that Needham has a flavor ban, and he is not aware of any ZYN product that is unflavored. Thus, for all practical purposes, ZYNs are not being sold currently in Needham. Mr. Palani stated that only one product has been determined to have a characterizing flavor. There are grey areas for other products and enforcement has not occurred on them. Dr. Epstein stated that the FDA has taken the authority to approve these for sale. The Town could state that the only ones allowed for sale have to be FDA approved. They also have to be unflavored, with no characterizing flavor or odor. All other items would have to come off the market.

The Board agreed that the language regarding adult-only stores should be removed. The content should not be greater than 6mg per pouch, the pouches should be unflavored, the pouches should be FDA approved, and prior to retail sale the Board or Board's agent should evaluate to confirm they are unflavored. The Board suggested that Ms. Gurge develop a standard practice for determining if a nicotine pouch is flavored. There was agreement that

implementation and enforcement should be discussed with other towns. Mr. McDonald stated that a draft document would be submitted to the Board for further review.

Proposed New Fee Schedule , Permit Fee Calculator, & Risk-Based Fee

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. The current calculations show that the Public Health Division may overcharge for some types of permits and licenses and also undercharge for various food service licenses. That is especially true if the Board chooses to move to a risk-based inspection fee model. In May, the Board will debate the appropriate level at which to set permit fees for FY2026, including how to best balance the desire to have the charge accurately reflect the time and effort devoted to that permit with the consideration of not dramatically increasing costs to permit holders without sufficient notice and a potential phase-in period.

Other Items

- Discussion of July or August Meeting Date, Location & Time

The Board agreed to take a poll as to which summer meeting date it would schedule.

- Next Meeting Date, Location & Time

Next Meeting – June 20, 2025 – Charles River room – Public Safety Administration Building

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 10:53AM.

Attachment:

May 20, 2025, meeting packet