



Board of Health Meeting Minutes

Date: September 19, 2025

Location: Select Board Chambers and via Zoom

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

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

Welcome & Public Comment Period

Dr. Cosgrove 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 no public comment at this time.

Review of minutes – August 8, 2025

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Epstein, and seconded by Dr. Gandhi, it was voted to approve the meeting minutes August 8, 2025, as presented. Motion passed by roll call: Epstein – aye; Cosgrove – aye; Gandhi – aye; and Partridge – abstain; 3-0-1.

Synthetic Turf Re-testing – Results and Discussion

Evan Koncewicz and Neal Kelly, from Fuss & O'Neill, and Chad Stoike, from ALS Global, attended the meeting to answer questions about the results of the recent synthetic turf testing. Dr. Epstein asked for clarification regarding the relative risk to the community based on the reported arsenic levels. It needs to be clear at what level there is a risk for cancer.

Mr. Kelly stated that this appears to be a question for a risk assessor. Dr. Epstein requested someone from Mass DEP and/or DPH to speak on this topic.

Emergency Condemnation on Tillotson Rd: Notification Board of Health Confirmation

Mr. Palani explained that this condemnation was handled administratively on an emergency basis by staff. On Thursday, September 4th, he and Ms. Gurge attended the aftermath of a fire at one of the apartment units on Tillotson Rd. The first responders asked staff to confirm which units in the building were able to be re-occupied by the residents. It was determined that the unit where the fire originated could not be reoccupied, but residents could return to the other five units once the doors were replaced. The property owner put up all the occupants at a local hotel . The units have been boarded up and secured. This order will allow staff some kind of recourse if the unit is reoccupied. Once the unit is repaired, staff will complete a reinspection and can then revoke the condemnation.

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Epstein, and seconded by Dr. Partridge, it was voted to uphold the condemnation of the property at Tillotson Rd. Roll call vote: Epstein – aye; Partridge – aye; Cosgrove – aye; Gandhi – aye; and Sawant-Basak – aye; Motion passed 5-0.

Adoption of FDA Food Code 2022

Ms. Gurge stated that the latest version of the FDA Food Code (2022) was released in January 2023 (the Food Code is updated every four years). The last Food Code Needham adopted was the 2013 version. Ms. Gurge described plans to adopt the newest 2022 version. One major change is that food allergens must be listed on each menu item or kept in a separate binder which must be available to customers. Another major change is that a certified food protection manager must be on premises for all hours of operations. Environmental Health will host a training in January to certify food protection managers.

Mr. Palani explained that other significant changes are that all food establishments will have to create guidance and train staff on “food defense” (taking measures to prevent the intentional adulteration of food). Also, within four years all establishments will have to create a “food safety management system”, with written procedures, training plans, and records for all operational steps related to risk factors and critical control points in the restaurant. This could impact the smaller food establishments in Needham. More training and a slow roll out of this requirement will be needed.

Dr. Epstein expressed concern that this could drive some restaurants in town out of business, even with the proposed training from staff. Mr. Palani noted that some restaurants deemed minimal risks could be allowed to not to comply with the food safety management system requirement.

Dr. Epstein asked how many of the violations seen lead to a substantial risk to human health. Dr. Gandhi agreed that there should be a baseline standard that all establishments should have to meet, with exceptions granted beyond that to some. Ms. Gurge noted that the Massachusetts Food Code requirements, which are stricter than the federal code, will have to be enforced. Three in-person trainings will start on October 8th.

Dr. Epstein stated that the Town regulations need to be able to override parts of the code as needed.

100-110 West St. Housing Project

Mr. McDonald explained that this is a major development being considered by the Planning Board. A neighbor expressed concern regarding potential impact of construction on pests, dust, nuisance, and traffic impacts. Ms. Gurge stated that comments were given to the Planning Board and that the Health Division demolition requirements be followed. A report will be submitted for staff to review regarding the topics of concern. Mr. McDonald stated that a response will be written to the neighbors regarding the process to address their concerns.

July & August Staff Reports

Environmental Health – Sainath Palani & Tara Gurge

- Ms. Gurge reported that the part-time Environmental Health Inspector position has been filled. Camerson Bishop began in the position this week. Four per-diem inspectors positions are open.
- Mr. Palani stated that the medical marijuana treatment center in Needham closed in August.

Accreditation – Lynn Schoeff

- Ms. Schoeff stated that she is working with a consultant (BME) to arrange a mock site visit on October 27.
- The Public Health Accreditation Board will conduct the site visit on November 25th (virtual) and December 2nd (in-person). The site visit will include meetings with staff, Board members, and community partners.

Traveling Meals – Ms. Gurge for Rebecca Hall

- Ms. Gurge stated that the program continues to go well.

Regional Substance Use Prevention – Lydia Cunningham

- Ms. Cunningham stated that one grant strategy selected by the communities is an adult social marketing campaign to promote protective behaviors. A consultant team was brought on to support the campaign. A focus group will be held this month to create draft messaging to be piloted with the same group.
- Another grant strategy is a non-punitive restorative response to school-based substance use violations. “I Decide” from Mass General Hospital was chosen for information on an implementation guide.
- The website has been transferred to a more user-friendly system.

Dr. Epstein recommended that the non-punitive restorative response to school-based substance use violations be monitored carefully.

Substance Use Prevention: Needham - Karen Shannon

- Ms. Shannon stated that there were several community events including the Needham Overdose Awareness Vigil, and a presentation to the Needham High School Athletic Coaches.

- The Opioid Strategic Action Plan is moving along with a focus on strategies such as developing a community recovery support fund and an advisory committee.
- The STOP Act grant was completed. The House and Senate are moving toward maintaining funding for the grant.
- A hearing was conducted in July by the Select Board for a restaurant with a third sales-to-minor violation. The Select Board voted for a seven day suspension of the restaurant's alcohol license. The seven days will be served in two chunks midweek.

Public Health Preparedness – Taleb Abdelrahim

- Mr. Abdelrahim stated that an MRC training day took place last Saturday and over 40 volunteers attended.

Epidemiology – Julie McCarthy

- Ms. McCarthy stated that the respiratory virus wastewater data tends to be on the upswing and cases have been coming in.
- She was able to get the rat sightings map back up on the website.
- A coffee talk on vaccines was held at CATH in August, and another follow-up meeting is likely needed.
- There have been many West Nile virus reports and Needham is bracketed by towns considered high-risk.
- A future community health survey is being planned.

Nursing - Ginnie Chacon-Lopez

- Ms. Chacon-Lopez stated that 100 doses of Pfizer from 12+, and 10 doses of 6months-11 years have been ordered. More can be ordered depending on how the community receives this.
- There was a flu vaccine clinic held on September 6th; there will be additional clinics tomorrow, October 4th, and a fourth COVID/flu clinic may be scheduled.
- Five new per-diem nurses have been hired.
- Staff will participate in Needham Community Council's Memory Café.

Public Health Excellence – Mr. McDonald for Kerry Dunnell

- Mr. McDonald stated that there are two open positions and there were 17 applicants. None of the applicants included active full-time inspectors.

BOH Regulations – Modernization plus Racial & Health Equity Assessments

Mr. McDonald explained that staff worked with consultants to review older regulations that have not been recently updated. There are recommendations for modernization for six regulations at this time. Over the next six months, the process will be reviewed with the Board. Drafts of the regulations will be considered, and public hearings may be held as the Board sees fit.

Dr. Epstein asked for a written opinion from Town Counsel regarding if the Board needs to allow people other than Needham residents to speak during the public comment period.

Other Items

None at this time.

Adjournment

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Epstein, and seconded by Dr. Partridge, it was voted to adjourn the meeting. Roll Call Vote: Epstein – aye; Partridge – aye; Cosgrove – aye; Gandhi – aye; and Sawant-Basak – aye; Motion passed 5-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:34AM.

Attachment:

September 19, 2025, meeting packet