

**HEATH BOARD OF HEALTH
MEETING MINUTES
Jan 14, 2026**

Board Members Present: Sheila Litchfield, Susan Gruen, Tucker Jenkins, Tim Lively – Emergency Management, Gene Garland -Chair, Elissa Viarengo – Select Board Representative, Kurt Schellenberg– CPHS Representative and Cindie Garland – Boards Clerk
Absent: Jason Erali

0900 Meeting Called to Order by Gene Garland

REVIEW AGENDA/ADD ITEM

- The board reviewed the agenda.

Brian McHugh, Director of Community Development, Franklin County Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority (FCRHRA)

- In 1996, Town of Heath received a MA Dept of Public Health (DEP) award for a Septic System Repair/Replacement Program.
- Heath's program appears to have been structured as a loan program (records are incomplete due to age and paper files). Funds were fully expended at the time; repayments created a revolving loan fund. Current available balance approximately \$43,000, likely sufficient for one septic system under current costs. No homeowners have formally applied recently.
- Previously, the program gave priority to low- and moderate-income households. Used income qualification before forwarding applications to the BOH. The board discussed outreach possibilities. First-come, first-served, lottery, if demand exceeds available funds, income-based prioritization, e.g.: 80% Area Median Income (AMI) threshold. Optional point system (similar to housing rehab programs). Brian emphasized that income verification adds administrative complexity, but could be simplified (e.g., using tax returns rather than projected income).
- Options discussed: Interest-free loan, deferred-payment loan (lien recorded, repaid upon sale), repayment terms determined by the town, and requirement that owners have lived in the home for at least two years (supported to deter speculation).
- FCRHRA previously charged an administrative fee (historically ~\$800 per loan). Administration included: Income qualification, owner eligibility checks, contract preparation, and coordination with engineers and installers. Brian emphasized that the town is NOT required to use FCRHRA. Some towns now administer programs themselves, especially smaller, simpler versions. FCRHRA is available to help, but there is no contractual obligation.
- Bank selection is entirely up to the town. Engineers were historically selected by homeowners. Option to pre-qualify engineers if the town chooses.
- Program applies to residential homes only, not municipal or commercial buildings.

- Brian agreed to identify towns currently administering similar programs on their own. He also agreed to provide the board with historical program guidelines, step-by-step procedures, copies of the original 1996 DEP award and contract, and any relevant restrictions that may still apply.
- The BOH will continue internal discussions on program structure, administrative capacity and eligibility criteria. The board will decide whether to administer the program locally or contract with FCRHRA for administration.

REVIEW/APPROVE MINUTES

- Dec 10, 2025, Meeting Minutes: Susan moved to approve the minutes with minor corrections. Sheila seconded the motion. Ayes: Susan, Sheila, Tucker and Gene. The board approved the minutes unanimously.

REGIONAL HEALTH AGENT UPDATE

- Kurt Schellenberg stated the septic season is winding down due to environmental conditions.
- New health inspector hired with experience in food inspections, septic systems, and soil evaluation.
- Respiratory illness rates remain high. Vaccinations continue to be effective in preventing hospitalizations.
- Training updates will be distributed via train.mass.gov.
- Follow-up was requested for the property at 324 Route 8A regarding potential garbage and septic concerns.
- The Board requested brief written summary updates from FRCOG when staff are unable to attend meetings.

NEW BUSINESS:

EMERGENCY NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

- The Board reviewed the revised draft emergency needs assessment survey.
- Discussed that the survey should remain concise and avoid overly intrusive medical questions. Participation must be voluntary with explicit written consent. Survey must include disclosures addressing privacy, public records, and data security.
- Sheila will incorporate appropriate legal and privacy language (with assistance from Tucker).
- A complete rewrite of the shelter operations plan is underway to create a practical operating manual with simplified forms. A joint BOH / Emergency Management meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 28, at 10:00 a.m. To review of shelter operations plan and development of usable forms.

NURSE UPDATE (Claire Rabbitt, RN)

- Claire did not provide a nurse's report.

TOWN NURSE POSITION

- The Board discussed the town nurse position and the Select Board's request for further discussion prior to posting the position.
- The board discussed that the town nurse role is distinct from CPHS. Preventive care and community-based nursing were emphasized as cost-saving and essential services. Budget concerns were acknowledged.
- Several BOH members will meet with the Select Board that is scheduled for February 17th at 6:00 p.m. Gene will compile background materials, including prior BOH reports and correspondence from Meg Ryan's (CPHS) clarifying service differences. Sheila will provide suggested data questions for Claire (Town Nurse) to help identify service metrics, if available.

BOARD OF HEALTH CLERK UPDATE

- Cindie reviewed the budget report.

ONGOING BUSINESS:

CPHS (COMMUNITY PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES) UPDATE

- Susan reported the CPHS meeting is scheduled for Jan 15th, and she plans to attend.
- The meeting will include an update on budget choices, as the prior meeting was canceled.

PIONEER VALLEY MOSQUITO CONTROL DISTRICT (PVMCD) UPDATE

- Susan stated a recent PVMCD meeting lasted nearly three hours. Jessica Burgess presented for 45–60 minutes on Open Meeting Laws.
- Conway, Colrain, Hawley, and Charlemont are currently not members. If they join, John believes coverage can be maintained without increasing staff. In Agawam the BOH members supports joining, but approval must go through the mayor. A decision is expected next month. Belchertown and Leverett are also considering joining.
- The annual report (24 pages) has been shared. Once finalized, it will be distributed to the towns.

MOHAWK AREA PUBLIC HEALTH COALITION (MAPHCO)

- Gene presented the key highlights from the MAPHCO meeting.
- MAPHCO has approximately \$12,000–\$13,000 available to support training. Funds may be used for the Annual Emergency Management Planners Conference in April, held in Baltimore, Maryland. In person (estimated up to \$3,000 per attendee) or virtual attendance for those who do not want to travel. A link to the conference will be shared so people can review details and decide if they're interested.
- FRCOG, under HMCC, is hiring a full-time emergency planning coordinator. This role would coordinate regional/county-wide emergency management efforts.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- Sheila stated a report was sent on January 9 covering the framework of the tabletop exercise, which took place on January 7. She stated that the exercise was extremely worthwhile. Adding one of the most valuable she has participated in over many years involved in emergency management, public health, board of health, and town nurse work.

Notably, this was the first time emergency management and public health were in the same room, working from the same framework and actively discussing coordination and roles.

- Sheila stated there is significant follow-up work that can and should be done, the exercise represented a very strong starting point. Heath is in a good position. She added that key documents are coming together. Coordination among emergency management, BOH, and the town nurse has improved substantially. Sheila stated overall it was a very good meeting, meaningful progress, and a solid foundation to build on.

BOH ACTION ITEMS

- Gene reviewed the BOH Action Report. Cindie will add the property complaints to the report.

HEATH HERALD ARTICLES

- Articles were submitted for the February/March Heath Herald. One article addressed how to manage and prevent chronic diseases. A second article focused on emergency shelter in Heath.
- The next issue will cover April/May. A suggestion was made for the upcoming issue is mosquitoes and ticks, with an emphasis on personal protection.

Next Monthly Meeting: Feb 11, 2026 @ 0900 via Zoom.

Gene made a motion to adjourn at 10:14 a.m. Moved by Sheila. Susan seconded the motion. Ayes: Sheila, Susan, Tucker and Gene. Meeting Adjourned at 10:14 a.m.