

**HEATH BOARD OF HEALTH
MEETING MINUTES
Feb 11, 2026**

Board Members Present: Sheila Litchfield, Susan Gruen, Tucker Jenkins, 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. Susan Gruen requested that Sawyer Hall plumbing concerns and septic system enforcement be added to the agenda.

REVIEW/APPROVE MINUTES

- Jan 14, 2026, Meeting Minutes: Susan moved to approve the minutes with minor corrections. Tucker seconded the motion. Ayes: Susan, Sheila, Tucker and Gene. The board approved the minutes unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS:

NURSE UPDATE (Claire Rabbitt, RN)

- Claire did not provide a nurse's report. Gene will follow up.

TOWN NURSE POSITION

- The Board discussed the Town Nurse position summary document prepared for presentation to the Select Board at their February 17 meeting.
- The document summarizes the role of the Town Nurse based on: current job description, input from FRCOG/CPHS, feedback from Board members, discussion included potential expansion of services, including: family wellness services, outreach to homeschool families, vision and hearing screenings, increased public health education, point-of-care testing such as: blood glucose, A1C, COVID/flu testing, INR monitoring
- Board members discussed the importance of ensuring children outside the traditional school system receive appropriate screenings and evaluating whether the Town has responsibilities in coordination with the school district.
- Plan for presentation: Gene Garland will provide an introduction; Sheila Litchfield will speak to the historical and technical aspects of the Town Nurse role. Other Board members may provide comments as needed.
- Due to multiple Board members attending, Cindie will post a BOH meeting.

REGIONAL HEALTH AGENT UPDATE

- Kurt Schellenberg stated The Massachusetts DPH has launched "Report My Meal," a new online system allowing residents to report suspected foodborne illness. Reports will feed into the MAVEN (Massachusetts Virtual Epidemiologic Network) epidemiological

reporting system, allowing health officials to identify patterns and respond more quickly to foodborne illness outbreaks. Complaints may still be reported directly to the local BOH's.

- MAHB Training – February 14 covering areas of BOH legal authority, public records requirements, Open Meeting Laws, Nuisance enforcement, and battery energy storage systems siting and regulations.
- 391 Route 8A- Property transferred without Title 5 inspection. Enforcement letters issued. Title 5 inspection eventually performed and system failed. Perc test scheduled but not paid for. No further action from owner. The Health Agent recommended preparing for a public hearing that could result in fines or condemnation due to lack of a functioning septic system. Possible penalties include \$10–\$500 per day under housing regulations.
- 405 Route 8A- Title 5 inspection missing at property transfer. Perc test completed in October 2024. The Health Agent plans to issue a housing order warning the property may be considered unfit for habitation if compliance is not achieved.
- 675 Route 8A- Property ownership transferred without Title 5 inspection. Certified notice sent to current owner. No response received. The Health Agent plans to begin enforcement through a housing order.
- Kurt and the board members agreed to revisit the septic issues at the next BOH meeting.

BOARD OF HEALTH CLERK UPDATE

- The Board reviewed the current expense report. Members were asked to identify any remaining supply needs before the end of the fiscal year. Potential upcoming purchases include tick prevention materials, emergency shelter operation plan binders, printing of emergency response plans. The emergency response plan may be 100+ pages, requiring approximately 15 printed copies. Members discussed potentially using Sheriff's Department printing services to reduce costs.
- Cindie stated the BOH Annual Report will be prepared this month and submitted in early March. She will coordinate with FRCOG to obtain data.

SAWYER HALL CONCERNS

- Susan Gruen reported that pipes at Sawyer Hall froze, preventing restroom use. This issue has occurred multiple winters.
- Concerns include public access to restroom facilities, lack of water for handwashing, and possible need for backup water supply.
- Elissa Viarengo stated she will follow up with the concern.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE FAIR

- Schedule for April 18th at JRMC. Co-sponsors: Library and Council on Aging
- Sheila Litchfield made a motion that the BOH co-sponsor the Community Resource Fair on April 18. Second: Tucker Jenkins. Vote: Ayes: Susan, Sheila, Gene, and Tucker. Motion passed. Board approved co-sponsorship unanimously.
- Nearly 50 organizations identified for potential participation.
- BOH members will provide informational materials and handouts.

ONGOING BUSINESS:

CPHS (COMMUNITY PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES) UPDATE

- Susan Gruen reported that the CPHS FY27 budget has been finalized. The Town of Heath's increase is approximately \$614, one of the lowest among participating towns. Potential funding concerns remain due to federal public health funding changes. The next CPHS meeting is February 26.

PIONEER VALLEY MOSQUITO CONTROL DISTRICT (PVMCD) UPDATE

- Susan stated PVMCD held two meetings totaling approximately five hours of discussion. Director John Briggs and the commissioners are currently working on a strategic plan to address potential expansion and staffing needs.
- Several additional communities have expressed interest in joining the district, including: Leverett, Agawam and Belchertown. The district is evaluating what staffing and operational changes would be necessary if additional towns participate. Currently the district operates with one full-time Director (John) and one part-time seasonal employee. If additional towns join, the district may require additional staffing needs.
- Susan also reported that Chris Horton, who oversees mosquito control in Berkshire County for Pittsfield, contacted the district. As he is considering retirement, he suggested exploring greater collaboration between eastern and western Massachusetts mosquito control efforts to address funding disparities and advocate for legislative changes. The district will explore opportunities for collaboration and advocacy in the coming weeks.
- A question was raised whether potential district expansion and increased staffing could result in higher costs for participating towns. Susan reported that district leadership is committed to holding current costs steady and is exploring ways to obtain additional funding without increasing assessments to municipalities.

MOHAWK AREA PUBLIC HEALTH COALITION (MAPHCO)

- Gene presented the key highlights from the MAPHCO meeting. Approximately \$17,000 remains available to support training for members interested in attending a National Emergency Management Team training program in Baltimore. An online version of the training may also be available.
- An online training titled: "Extreme Heat 101: Municipal Planning Resources" will be offered March 3 from 1:00–2:00 PM. The workshop is available through the FRCOG website. Board members noted that trainings such as this are highly relevant to local public health work and discussed whether they might qualify for continuing education credit toward required Board of Health training programs.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- Sheila stated the Emergency Management Team held a productive meeting the previous month. Participants have been assigned various sections or chapters of the emergency plan to review and update. Progress is continuing as members return feedback and revisions. The group agreed that while progress should continue, there is no strict deadline, and the focus remains on creating a practical and usable document for the town.
- Board members discussed improving forms and documentation so that they are more user-friendly and effective during emergency response situations.

BOH ACTION ITEMS

- Gene reviewed the BOH Action Report. Many items remain in progress.
- A new item added to the report is the need to review and potentially revamp the Town's Septic System Loan Program. The Board discussed the status and potential future administration of the Town's Septic System Loan Assistance Program. The program was established in 1996 through a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, through which the Town received approximately \$60,000 to assist property owners with the repair or replacement of failing septic systems. The current balance of the revolving loan fund is approximately \$43,000.
- Board members discussed several questions regarding the program's structure and future use, including how deferred repayment options might affect future loan availability, whether the remaining balance could support multiple applicants if several septic failures occur, and whether the funds must continue to be used exclusively for Septic System loans. Members noted that while the current balance would likely not cover the full cost of a modern septic system installation, it could still provide partial financial assistance to homeowners.
- The Board also discussed the need to establish clearer program guidelines, including an administrative process, eligibility criteria, loan repayment and lien procedures, and the possibility of third-party administration. One potential administrator discussed was the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, which manages similar programs in other municipalities.
- The Board agreed that additional research is needed and will be placed on the March meeting agenda for further discussion.

HEATH HERALD ARTICLES

- Next submission date is March 5th for the April/May newsletter.

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

Gene made a motion to adjourn at 10:04 a.m. Moved by Sheila. Susan seconded the motion. Ayes: Sheila, Susan, Tucker and Gene. Meeting Adjourned at 10:04 a.m.