

**HEATH BOARD OF HEALTH
MEETING MINUTES
April 08, 2026**

Board Members Present: Sheila Litchfield, Susan Gruen, Tucker Jenkins, Jason Erali, Gene Garland -Chair, Randy Crochier – FRCOG/CPHS Health Agent, Elissa Viarengo – Select Board Representative, and Cindie Garland – BOH Clerk

9:00 Meeting Called to Order by Gene Garland

REVIEW AGENDA/ADD ITEM

- The board reviewed the agenda and added Emergency Management included:
 - Emergency Management update

REVIEW/APPROVE MINUTES (March 11, 2026)

- Minor corrections noted:
 - Spelling correction (“row” to “Rowe”)
 - CPHS funding correction (\$613 → \$614)
- Susan moved to approve the March 11th minutes with minor corrections. Sheila seconded the motion. Ayes: Susan, Sheila, Tucker, Jason and Gene. The board approved the minutes unanimously.

REGIONAL HEALTH AGENT UPDATE

Randy stated:

- Permits & Applications
 - Received 1 septic construction application and 2 perk test applications
 - No permits issued in March
- Property Updates
 - **Route 8A (675):** Previously condemned; new trailer placed without Board approval. Recommended enforcement hearing.
 - **Route 8A (594):** Unfit for habitation; increased interest from prospective buyers; septic failure noted.
 - **Additional complaint (Route 8A):** Improper disposal of cat litter; follow-up inspection planned.
 - **118 Rowe Road:** Property owner deceased; unresolved septic and occupancy concerns.
- Enforcement Process
 - Certified letters often unclaimed; sheriff service recommended (~\$50 per service).
 - Board may initiate hearings for non-compliance.
- Cindie will investigate property address discrepancies and report back to FRCOG.

NEW BUSINESS:

TOWN NURSE UPDATE (CLAIRE RABBITT, RN)

- Claire stated two full sharps containers were collected and required a Stericycle pickup.

- Assistance was provided to a resident needing transportation for cancer treatments; services were arranged through LifePath.
- The Town received a vaccine reimbursement payment of \$305.69.
- The vaccine refrigerator temperature exceeded the recommended limit, raising concerns that the refrigerator may no longer function properly, it has been in service since 2008.
- Only eight vaccine doses remain, and demand for flu vaccines has declined significantly over the years (104 doses administered in 2010–2011 compared to 13 doses in 2024–2025). Increased vaccine availability through pharmacies and outside providers has reduced use of the Town vaccine program.
- Claire recommends the Town evaluate the future need for both the vaccine program and the Town Nurse position.

BOARD OF HEALTH CLERK UPDATE

- Cindie reviewed the budget report. Remaining balance: approximately \$700.
- Planned/possible expenses:
 - Tick prevention supplies (bug wipes)
 - Tick testing coupons (~\$300)
- Supplies adequate (dog bags, envelopes)
- Refrigerator purchase deferred pending vaccine program decision

REVIEW PROPERTY COMPLAINTS PROCESS

- Board discussed need for a formal complaint intake and tracking system.
- State guidance:
 - Respond within 7 days (24 hours if imminent danger)
 - Anonymous complaints permitted with detailed information
- Inspections:
 - Limited to “plain view” unless consent or warrant obtained
- Legal tools:
 - Administrative warrants
 - Court-ordered access if necessary
- New state intake form recommended for documentation of complaints and closure tracking

TOWN NURSE POSTION UPDATE

- FY27 budget set at **\$13,001**
- Constraints:
 - Must work within existing budget
 - Any wage increase requires reduced hours
 - Current wage below county average
- New step to schedule a special meeting to:
 - Define role expectations
 - Determine posting strategy
 - Evaluate compensation structure.
 - Board members agreed to meet **April 22, 2026**.

BOARDS CLERK RESIGNATION

- Cindie resigned as Boards Clerk due to conflicts with other board
- Board expressed strong support for Cindie's work and concern about replacement
- Issues identified:
 - Lack of communication from Select Board
 - Inaccurate job posting
 - Role imbalance across multiple boards
- Discussion:
 - Importance of detailed documentation for legal protection
 - Need to reevaluate Boards Clerk position structure
 - Elissa will relay concerns to the Select Board

ONGOING BUSINESS:

COMMUNITY RESOURCE FAIR UPDATE (APRIL 18, 2026)

- Planning continued for the April 18 Community Resource Fair, which will include nearly every town board, committee, and organization.
- Reverse 911 registration and emergency preparedness information will be available. Mia, Town Coordinator and Cindie will be available to assist residents with registration and enrollment questions.

SHELTER OPERATIONS PLAN

- Sheila stated the Town's Shelter Operations Plan has been completed and submitted to MEMA for review and feedback.
- Board members were asked to complete their contact information and identify potential shelter operation roles.
- The plan relies on a core group of trained individuals who can initiate shelter operations and orient additional volunteers as needed.
- After MEMA feedback is received, the next step will be local training exercises and shelter operation drills in Heath.
- The shelter plan will also be shared with the public at the Community Resource Fair through the Emergency Management and Board of Health tables.

CPHS (COMMUNITY PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES) UPDATE

- Susan reported that the CPHS FY2026 budget was reviewed, with Heath's assessment increasing by only \$614 due to fee increases offsetting higher health insurance, rent, salary costs, and reduced grant funding.
- A major discussion focused on battery energy storage facilities and the importance of involving Boards of Health in permitting decisions due to fire, environmental, and public safety concerns. Members were encouraged to review FRCOG's model regulations.
- Training and presentations covered home condemnation procedures, emergency shelter operations, crisis communication, kratom dangers, and tick-borne disease updates.
 - Kratom is a drug brand that's been banned in Connecticut but not in Massachusetts. It started out as an herb that was used for people with chronic pain in Asia and now it's been condensed and it's one of the most addicting drugs that there they have at this point.

- Tick surveillance data showed significant rates of Lyme disease, babesiosis (parasites that infect and destroy red blood cells), and anaplasmosis (transmitted by deer ticks) in Franklin County, with concerns growing about the Lone Star tick (an aggressive parasitic).

PIONEER VALLEY MOSQUITO CONTROL DISTRICT (PVMCD) UPDATE

- Susan reported there are continued discussions focused on reducing costs and regional collaboration with Berkshire County.

MOHAWK AREA PUBLIC HEALTH COALITION (MAPHCO)

- Gene stated a meeting was held to approve a compliance vote required for eligibility for the state Public Health Emergency Grant. Requirements include annual drills and training exercises. The vote passed with no recommended changes to the state guidelines.
- MAPHCO has hired a contractor to provide crisis and emergency risk communication training for emergency management personnel.
- Training will include both a virtual session on April 14 and an in-person workshop on April 28. The training will focus on emergency risk communication and public information coordination.
- Members discussed the need for coordination between MAPHCO and local emergency management teams, and volunteers were invited to participate in the training.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT /REPC

- Sheila stated the Town of Heath's Emergency Needs Survey has been completed and will be introduced at the Community Resource Fair through the Emergency Management table and the BOH Office. Residents will complete the survey on paper rather than online, although the information may later be entered into an electronic format. The survey package includes a two-page questionnaire and two pages of liability/disclaimer information modeled after similar efforts in neighboring towns.
- Due to the sensitivity of the information, completed surveys will need to be securely stored and accessible only to authorized first responders through a protected system such as OneDrive.
- FRCOG and REPC are also developing a countywide emergency needs survey framework for towns to adopt if desired.
- Heath plans to begin with a local-only system because residents may be more comfortable knowing their information remains within the town rather than in a countywide database.
- Participation in any future regional emergency response network would require resident permission and further discussion.

BOH ACTION ITEMS

- Gene reviewed the BOH Action Report.
- Cindie will add the properties of concern on the spreadsheet for tracking purposes.
- Elissa reported on stipend recommendations presented to the Select Board. A proposal was made to increase BOH member stipends by \$100 annually to better align with comparable positions and responsibilities.

- BOH member stipends would increase from \$275 to \$350 annually. Chair stipend would remain at \$375 annually.
- The Finance Committee did not approve the increase.

HEATH HERALD ARTICLES

- Gene will submit a tick awareness article for the June/July newsletter.

MEETINGS

- Special Meeting to be held April 22, 2026 @ 0900 @ JRMC.
- Next Monthly Meeting: May 13, 2026 @ 0900 @ JRMC.

Gene made a motion to adjourn at 10:29 a.m. Moved by Sheila. Susan seconded the motion. Ayes: Sheila, Susan, Tucker, Jason and Gene. Meeting Adjourned at 10:29 a.m.