

**HEATH BOARD OF HEALTH
MEETING MINUTES
March 12, 2025**

Board Members Present: Sheila Litchfield, Susan Gruen, Tucker Jenkins, Gene Garland -Chair
Others: Kurt Schellenberg - CPHS/Franklin Regional Council of Governments Representative,
Cindie Garland – Boards Clerk, Jason Erali – awaiting nomination.

0902 Meeting Called to Order by Gene Garland

REVIEW AGENDA/ADD ITEMS

- The board reviewed the agenda.

REVIEW/APPROVE MINUTES

- February 12, 2025, Meeting Minutes: Susan moved to accept the minutes with minor edits. Sheila seconded the motion. Ayes: Susan, Sheila, Tucker and Gene.

REGIONAL HEALTH AGENT UPDATE

- Title V work is ongoing, although winter conditions, including significant snowfall, have made it difficult to assess topography and ground conditions.
- A significant topic of discussion has been the regulation of battery energy storage systems (BESS). In Wendell, a proposed lithium iron phosphate battery facility raised concerns due to potential fire hazards and the town's limited firefighting and emergency response capabilities. In response, the BOH implemented a set of regulations designed to ensure appropriate safety measures for such facilities. The goal is to establish safeguards before businesses seek to develop large-scale battery storage systems in rural areas.
- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) have been prominent, particularly concerning their impact on Title V septic system regulations. Under new state guidelines, property owners can now construct ADUs by right, provided they meet size limitations (whichever is smaller: 900 square feet or 50% of the primary residence's size).
- A key question has been whether Title V requirements would be adjusted to facilitate ADU development. Based on recent discussions at the Massachusetts Environmental Health Association (MEHA) and Massachusetts Health Officers Association (MHOA) seminars, there will be no exemptions or "magic bullet" solutions for Title V compliance. Property owners will need to follow standard procedures, including Title 5 inspections and percolation tests, to determine if their septic systems can handle increased capacity.
- There are considerations for ADUs and Septic Systems. If a property's septic system was originally designed for a specific capacity (e.g., a three-bedroom home), adding an ADU may require a system upgrade or replacement. Homeowners should provide existing septic plans; if unavailable, a Title 5 inspection will be required. Some builders are proactively designing four-bedroom septic systems for three-bedroom homes to accommodate future expansions.
- At the end of each year, real estate transactions are reviewed against records of Title 5 inspections. When a home with a septic system is sold, a Title V inspection is required. If

a property changes ownership without an inspection, the new owner will receive a notice to ensure compliance. This review process helps identify and address instances where properties may have transferred ownership without meeting septic system regulations.

NEW BUSINESS

NEW BOARD MEMBER

- The board welcomed Jason Erali.
- Board voted unanimously to recommend his appointment.
- Cindie will contact Hilma regarding Jason's nomination paperwork.

PIONEER VALLEY MOSQUITO CONTROL DISTRICT (PVMCD) LETTER

- Gene discussed that Heath is a member of the PVMCD, a collaborative initiative that provides mosquito and vector collection and identification services. This includes monitoring for diseases such as West Nile virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE). Membership requires an annual fee, which grants access to these critical public health services.
- A concern has arisen regarding neighboring towns that lack the financial resources to participate in the program. The absence of mosquito monitoring in these communities could pose a broader public health risk to surrounding areas.
- In response, following a recommendation from Susan Gruen, a letter was drafted requesting state support for funding to assist these towns. The BOH approved and signed the letter, which was co-signed by the Select Board. It was then sent to Senators Comerford and Mark, as well as Representative Blais. To date, we have received responses from two of the three offices: Senator Comerford's office and Representative Blais' office. We will continue to monitor for further updates and advocate for funding to ensure comprehensive regional mosquito surveillance.

NURSE UPDATE

- In February 2025, Claire Rabbitt, RN conducted six home visits, with no in-office appointments. The International Normalized Ratio (INR) test strips arrived, and she completed two tests.
- Claire was informed that an individual she visits weekly has experienced two falls, fortunately without injury. They have expressed a strong desire to remain at home rather than transition to a nursing facility.
- Attendance in the Healthy Bones and Balance class has declined slightly due to illnesses, but the program remains well-received and continues to be popular.
- Gene stated he has not heard from his contact at HHS regarding obtaining more COVID test kits.

BOARD OF HEALTH CLERK UPDATE

- Cindie submitted the 2024 BOH Annual Report.
- She submitted 2 Opioid Settlement Fund articles for the Annual Town Meeting.

- The accountant has not sent out an updated expense report.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

- Sheila Litchfield and Tim Lively discussed the emergency response and shelter operations during the recent storm-related power outage. Heath activated emergency warming centers and shelters to support residents in need. The response underscored key strengths and areas for improvement in our emergency preparedness.
- Warming centers were set up at the Senior Center (led by Lyra Johnson-Fuller) in Heath, Charlemont Federated Church, and other locations in neighboring towns.
- The Good Neighbors Food Pantry continued operations during the storm, serving 38 people. The Red Cross coordinated an overnight shelter in Charlemont, bringing cots, supplies, and staffing. Volunteers and town staff ensured the shelters were stocked with essentials and maintained throughout the emergency.
- There were challenges with communication and coordination. Many residents lacked phone or internet access due to the power outage, making outreach difficult.
- The BOH and other emergency responders need clearer protocols for activation and coordination. A central notification system or designated meeting trigger should be established for future emergencies.
- More volunteers are needed to check on vulnerable residents. The existing emergency contact list was used, but many residents were unreachable.
- A town wide survey will be conducted to determine which residents have reliable cell coverage, generators, or backup internet.
- Many residents visited warming centers primarily to charge phones. Additional power strips should be available at designated emergency sites.
- A state of emergency was declared early in Heath to facilitate response efforts.
- Coordination with utility companies could be improved to expedite tree clearing and power restoration.
- A broader meeting with key stakeholders (including emergency personnel, the library, and the BOH) will be scheduled to refine internal warming shelter and emergency response plans. Shelter operation binders will be reviewed and expanded as needed. The BOH will evaluate and adjust protocols based on recent experiences. Red Cross and Homeland Security guidance on volunteer management and shelter operations will be integrated.
- Sheila added that the overall emergency response provided valuable insights into both strengths and gaps in the system. By refining the plans and addressing communication challenges, we can improve readiness for future events.

MA ASSOCIATION OF HEALTH BOARDS (MAHB) TRAINING

- Gene discussed MAHB training that is open to all BOH members and staff.
- The event is an approved expense for Shared Services Collaboratives.
- April 26th Hotel Northampton is the nearest location.
- Topics include Opioid Settlement Updates, Legal authority of BOH's, Open Meeting, Public record Requests, and Disruption. Environmental Case Studies, and much more!

INCREASE IN BOH STIPEND DISCUSSION

- The Board reviewed data from the annual FRCOG regional salary and stipend survey and found that Heath's BOH stipends are the lowest among responding towns. This prompted a discussion on stipend fairness, value, and potential increases.
- Board members acknowledged a dramatic increase in duties over the years—including participation in regional health coalitions, emergency management, and technical issues related to housing and environmental health.
- Not intended to truly compensate for time or cover expenses. Serve as recognition of service and help foster accountability and continued participation. Seen as one tool to help retain members and incentivize volunteerism.
- Some towns (e.g., Colrain) forgo stipends to encourage a spirit of volunteerism. However, Heath BOH members consensus was that a modest stipend affirms the value of public service.
- The Board voted unanimously to recommend increased stipends. Chair: Increase from \$375 to \$1,000 annually. Members: Increase from \$250 to \$800 annually. These amounts bring Heath closer to regional averages and reflect the scale of current responsibilities.
- The Board discussed the workload of the Board Clerk (currently capped at 8 hours/week total for multiple boards). Noted that BOH administrative needs exceed that allocation.
- Acknowledged the invaluable work of the current public health nurse (Claire). The Board emphasized the need to ensure her salary is competitive in anticipation of future recruitment challenges.
- The board decided to submit revised budget including new stipend levels for Board members. Draft memo/letter to Select Board explaining rationale and formal recommendation.
- Cindie will speak with Hilma regarding the request. If there is still time to submit before the Annual Town Meeting.

ONGOING BUSINESS:

CPHS OVERSIGHT BOARD MEETING REPORT

- CPHS continues to hold its meetings on the last Thursday of the month, currently via Zoom until daylight saving time begins. At the most recent meeting, John Briggs from PVMCD provided a comprehensive 45-minute presentation on the work being done in mosquito control. His presentation was well-received, highlighting the extent of his efforts in the region. He also discussed an emergency response plan in case of West Nile Virus or EEE detections.
- Financial discussions included the slight increase in service costs, which amounts to approximately \$200 more for the coming year. There was also mention of outreach to various towns regarding CPHS's engagement with boards of selectmen to discuss these financial considerations. A follow-up letter was sent to gauge interest, but responses are still pending.

PIONEER VALLEY MOSQUITO CONTROL DISTRICT (PVMCD)

- Due to a late posting, the planned Monday meeting had to be canceled and will likely be rescheduled for the following Monday. The official notice has not yet appeared on the website.
- The district recently relocated to a new facility at UMass, providing a much-needed space for mosquito testing and research. Previously, mosquito samples were examined at John Briggs' dining room table. The new facility enables on-site mosquito testing instead of sending samples out, improving efficiency. John has offered to host a visit to UMass for interested individuals to learn about mosquito identification and disease testing.
- Dr. Lover has joined as a commissioner, focusing on tracking mosquito species from Cuba. Additionally, the district has been working on securing participation from more towns. New additions include Holyoke, Deerfield, Northfield, and others, largely due to concerns from golf courses where mosquito-borne diseases could impact outdoor activities.
- Financially, some towns have struggled with payments due to administrative transitions. Buckland and Sunderland, for example, are facing difficulties in processing their contributions, despite being listed as participants. The district continues to emphasize the importance of regional collaboration. Towns that opt out of participation face a risk that, in the event of a mosquito-borne virus detection, the state could impose aerial spraying without local input. By working as a consortium, towns can implement preventative measures such as targeted larvicide applications, reducing the likelihood of a major outbreak and maintaining local control over response strategies.

MOHAWK AREA PUBLIC HEALTH COALITION (MAPHCO)

- Gene stated MAPHCO was originally formed under FRCOG to support regional public health and emergency response coordination. The coalition transitioned to a state supported model that was relating to something closer to the EDS's. But, MAPHCO is now coordinated by a contractor Responsive Systems Inc. (RSI). RSI is working under a federal grant to centralize public health emergency management and public health resources.
- A needs assessment survey was circulated by MAPHCO; towns were asked to share Emergency Management Plans (if available). BOH members are encouraged to fill it out.
- Mission Statement and Principles of Operation will be voted on at MAPHCO's Annual Coalition Meeting in June.
- Emergency managers from towns have not been fully engaged with MAPHCO's mission. Combining or aligning with groups like REPC risks jeopardizing existing funding streams (e.g. hazmat vs. EDS). Emergency Dispensing Sites (EDS) funding and future operations remain unclear.
- Participation in MAPHCO varies across towns. Some are engaged; others are holding off.
- BOH members proposed to invite Randy Cardonell to the BOH April meeting to clarify MAPHCO's vision, structure, and how it fits with local/regional efforts.

HEATH HERALD ARTICLES

- In conjunction with CPHS, Sheila submitted an article about avian flu.
- For the June/July newsletter possibly a Mosquitos awareness article which would be due May 5.

COMPLAINT

Sawyer Hall Concerns

- Public Health and maintenance issues.
- Significant water damage reported.
- Potential mold risk due to prolonged moisture.
- Gene will contact FRCOG for inspection

Next Meeting April 09, 2025 @ 0900 via Zoom.

Gene motioned to adjourn at 10:39; Sheila seconded the motion. Ayes: Sheila, Susan, and Gene
Meeting Adjourned at 10:39.