

## **Board of Health Annual Report 2021**

Board of Health Members through July/August 2021: Betsy Kovacs (chair), Armand Clavette, Henry Godek, Susan Gruen, John Palmer, and Gene Garland—Ex-officio member

Board of Health Clerk (through June 2021): Mary Sumner (appointed)

Current Board of Health Members: Gene Garland (chair), Lorraine Berger, Barbara Gordon, Susan Gruen, and Elissa Viarengo

Current Board of Health Clerk: Kate Peppard (appointed July 2021)

Town Nurse: Claire Rabbit

Regional Health Director: Randy Crochier, Franklin Regional Council of Government (FRCOG)

### **Gratitudes**

The Board of Health (BOH) transitioned to new leadership and new membership at the end of FY21, so with the writing of this annual report, we have just one Board member (Susan Gruen) staying on from the previous slate. The BOH expresses our gratitude to those members who took us through 2021, another year full of pandemic uncertainties that required the time and skills that these members generously offered to our community, and who stepped down at the transition of the fiscal year: Armand Clavette, John Palmer, and Henry Godek.

We would also like to acknowledge the strong leadership of Betsy Kovacs who stayed on as chair through the end of FY21 but stepped down from the BOH in August 2021. Betsy led the Heath BOH through the first year and a half of the COVID-19 pandemic with a great deal of care, attention, knowledge, and insight applied to maintaining our community's public health and safety.

Mary Sumner, who stepped down as BOH clerk at the end of FY21 to take on the role of Town Clerk is owed a debt of gratitude for her selfless dedication to the BOH and to the Town of Heath. Mary was an anchor for the team and spent countless hours with the Board through sometimes harrowing and uncertain moments during 2021. She generously trained her replacement, Kate Peppard, and continues to be a resource to the Board with her deep knowledge of the file system and procedures.

We offer our welcome and gratitude to Susan Gruen, who has stayed on the Board, and to the new members who have stepped onto the Board in the summer and fall of 2021: Lorraine Berger, Barbara Gordon, and Elissa Viarengo. Gene Garland, formerly an ex-officio member also officially joined the Board and filled the role of Chair.

Thanks are also due to the extraordinary team at the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), who managed to do all of the work associated with the COVID pandemic alongside their regular roles that serve the plethora of other public health needs of our town: Randy Crochier, Lisa White, Meg Ryan, Lisa Danek-Burke and two new staff members, Kurt Schellenberg and Maureen O'Reilly. As always, they continue to give selflessly of their time and talents, and we could not do it without them.

## **2021 Annual Report**

The Heath Board of Health began 2021 in much the same way 2020 finished up, with a significant portion of our energy and time dedicated to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. Heath had a total of 48 MAVEN tracked COVID cases in 2021, starting slow in January and exponentially increasing through the end of the year. We note that this does not account for positive tests taken at home, so numbers were likely much higher.

BOH efforts went into continuing to provide guidance to Heath residents, visitors, and the Select Board on COVID safety mandates for Town buildings (mask wearing, social distancing) and building reopening plans. We gathered input from employees on safety considerations to help ensure that our work, as always, was focused on how to keep Heath residents safe. To that end, we provided information on the pandemic (posters, signage, mailings, and regular Reverse 911 calls), and offered access to elders for services (food shopping, daily errands, health supplies). Claire and Susan received many calls about COVID/COVID symptoms and were available to offer individualized information and support to our community.

The BOH takes outreach to our at-risk community members very seriously and worked closely with at-risk residents: hand delivering free State sourced COVID test kits before the holidays, signing them up for free Federally sponsored COVID test kits to be mailed to their homes, setting up immunization appointments including home administered shots for those unable to travel, coordinating assistance in inclement weather, and helping with welfare check distribution.

COVID vaccines became available in FY21, with the initial roll-out completed for higher risk individuals through the winter. The vaccine became more widely available in the spring. Sheila Litchfield, Susan Gruen and Claire Rabbit took a strong lead on the vaccine roll-outs with other BOH members pitching in at the vaccination clinics held at area schools. This effort included work in multiple capacities: outreach (posting on-line, around town, robo-calls, direct calls), vaccine administration, coordination, etc. We implemented a mask mandate on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021 in response to a surge in cases and hospitalizations in West County.

We are continuing to promote COVID vaccinations for all town inhabitants, and are implementing a free, town-based rapid antigen testing program for municipal employees. Keeping in mind our unique, local situation, we are also considering State DPH and CDC guidance as we make decisions and recommendations pertaining to mask mandates and building use.

Meetings continued to happen in a virtual format for 2021, with the frequency of Heath BOH meetings continuing at a rate of three (3) to four (4) a month, as we worked to stay abreast of the constantly shifting information around the pandemic. We continued to attend the Heath Emergency Management Team meetings to address problems and needed services. Our BOH members also attended numerous other regional and state DPH meetings.

The Town of Heath continues to be a full member of the Cooperative Public Health Service (CPHS), a health district based at FRCOG. We are fortunate to have the support and guidance of the FRCOG staff and are continually grateful for the work of Randy Crochier, Regional Health

Agent; Lisa White, Public Health Nurse; as well as Phoebe Walker, FRCOG Director of Community Services, and Tracy Rogers and Mark Maloni of the Mohawk Area Public Health Coalition (MAPHCO). Further details on FRCOG's work during the pandemic may be found in FRCOG's report contained in this booklet, or on its website [www.frcog.org](http://www.frcog.org)

We continued to undertake our usual work of responding to public health related concerns and complaints, reviewing and issuing Temporary Occupancy Permits for campers and temporary dwellings, and overseeing the issuing of septic-related permits with the support of FRCOG.

With assistance from FRCOG Health Agents Randy Crochier and Lisa Danek-Burke, the BOH continued its work of issuing public health permits and licenses and undertaking septic plan reviews, inspections, and perc tests. Between January 1 and December 31, 2021, FRCOG Health Agents received/oversaw applications for:

- 25 Title 5 inspections
- 9 soil evaluations (PERC tests)
- 5 Septic system upgrades
- 14 Septic system installations (with plan reviews, site visits and final inspections)
- 5 well permits

In addition to the property related actions above, FRCOG also reviewed and approved 13 temporary food permits, one (1) summer/recreational camp permit, and the beach permitting at Mohawk Estates.

We continued to monitor and deal with legalities around an uninhabitable property and were happy to see the property get purchased. It is in the process of being renovated. Going forward we intend to re-engage with FRCOG and town stakeholders on an Attorney General supported program to identify and chart a course forward for abandoned and derelict properties in town. We are hopeful for more positive outcomes.

The BOH successfully advocated for continued membership in the Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District (PVMCD). Heath originally joined the Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District to provide seasonal trapping and testing of mosquitoes for Arboviruses in 2020 for the initially discounted annual dues of \$1,000. The membership was re-approved at the 2021 ATM. The BOH monitored weekly data from the State throughout the season. No West Nile Virus (WNV) or Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) positive mosquitoes were detected in Heath in 2021. The risk designation peaked at low for WNV and EEE. PVMCD annual report data is posted on the BOH section of the Heath Town website.

In May, 2021, the BOH worked closely with the Select Board to make application to the State Reclamation Board petitioning to "opt out" of mandated aerial pesticide spraying for mosquitoes. This included our development of a required public education plan. The Heath application was approved in July and was one of very few successful applications granted by the State. Being a member of the PVMCD was instrumental to our approval. The State required public education program was carried out by the BOH through distribution of published materials, Town website on-line information, Robocalls to residents during mosquito season, as well as through an in-

person tabling event at the Heath Fair. Our BOH also closely monitored weekly data related to the incidence of tick-borne illness for Heath and Franklin County. Lyme disease and Anaplasmosis cases were both identified in Heath residents in 2021. Public education regarding tick protection was provided to residents throughout the season through similar outlets.

The Board of Health is dedicated to upholding the Commonwealth statutes that local Boards of health are required to perform relative to the protection of public health, the control of diseases, promotion of sanitary living conditions, and the protection of the environment from damage and pollution. The BOH meets on the first Thursday of the month; information about meetings may be found on the Town website and posted at Sawyer Hall. If you have any questions or concerns please reach out to us via email at [boh@townofheath.org](mailto:boh@townofheath.org).