

Town of Amherst Board of Health

Date: August 7, 2025

FINAL

BOH Members Present: Risha Hess, Chair; Jack Jemsek, Premila Nair, Betsy Brooks

Staff: Kiko Malin, Public Health Director, Maheen Ahmed, Program Assistant

Invited Guests: None

The Meeting Opened: Date: August 7, 2025, Time: 5:00 PM.

Review Minutes: R. Hess moved, and P. Nair seconded the motion to accept the minutes from the June 5, 2025, meeting; Approved (4-0). There was no BOH meeting in July.

Public Comment:

Waste hauler comments:

Jill Medina Elisolde, Deerfield resident, member of Mothers Out Front: She endorses the bylaw proposal that requires a town wide waste hauler contract with compost pickup and wants the proposal to be part of the Amherst Town Manager's performance goals.

Andy Steinberg, Town Councilor At Large: He wants the town to 1) make compost pickup universally available, 2) implement a "pay as you go" system, and 3) have the town administer the contract rather than individual households and management companies. He also stated that implementing a new waste hauler system is already a performance goal for the Town Manager.

Dr. John Gerber, Sustainable Food and Farming Program at UMass written comments: supports the Zero Waste proposal, notes that "social structures influence personal behavior. If we are going to effectively deal with solid waste in a cost-effective manner, we must provide community-based solutions." He hopes that the BOH can motivate the town council to take positive action on the proposal.

Madeline Charney, Amherst resident and member of Mothers Out Front, written comments, supports the Zero Waste proposal and wants implementation of the proposal to be a performance goal for the Town Manager.

Adrienne Terrizzi, written comments, supports the Zero Waste proposal.

Polly Peterson and Louise Grosslein, from Green Sanctuary Committee of the UUA, support the Zero Waste proposal. One of the writers has participated in a successful curbside compost pickup program in Davis CA.

Kratom comments:

Amanda, lives in Amherst, disabled, and was put on multiple pain meds beginning at 9 years old. She was able to get off of most medications about 8 years ago when she started using Kratom. She now has a full life. She doesn't want the BOH to ban kratom.

John Shinholser, from Virginia, Advocacy Director for American Veterans for Kratom Safe, quoted a Johns Hopkins study finding that 87% of kratom users do not have a dependency issue, 10 % do have a dependency profile and 3% have an addiction profile.

Dr. Heidi Sykora, from Illinois, retired nurse practitioner, healthcare executive, uses kratom to alleviate her chronic severe pain: "nothing safer and more effective for chronic, severe pain than kratom."

Misty Brown, from Colorado, was addicted to FDA approved pain pills for 11 years, kratom enabled her to get off or opioids and become functional adult again, wants the BOH to differentiate between the synthetic, concentrated kratom 7-OH product and "real" kratom.

Jen Mercier, from New Hampshire, uses the crushed leaf or powder for pain management after surgeries, is glad that the FDA is planning to regulate the synthetic 7-OH product, and would be available to offer the BOH more information about kratom,

Jennifer Gillis, from Tennessee, identifies herself as a consumer and advocate of kratom; she has used it for many years for chronic pain management. She supports making a clear distinction between synthetic 7-OH and kratom, and also supports regulating sales of kratom, particularly age restrictions.

Glenn Shipe, from Florida, was a police officer for 17 years, has had 15+ surgeries, and uses kratom for pain management.

Dylan Smith, New England resident. He has complex health issues which led to addiction problems, and started using natural leaf kratom. It has had a "massive positive impact on my mental health and discomfort levels without getting me intoxicated or inebriated." He sees the push to regulate kratom as an effort on the part of pharmaceutical companies to protect the profits they make from the drugs they sell.

Pat DeAngelis Town council member and liaison to the Board of Health, introduced herself to the Board members,

Old Business:

a. Revisit waste hauler discussion

R. Hess summarized the consensus of the June BOH waste hauler discussion: members were supportive of the three components of the Zero Waste proposal (universal composting, "pay as you throw," and a town contract with waste hauler.) She asked BOH members if they had questions from the last meeting that should be addressed. B. Brooks questioned whether the three components could be implemented individually. This was addressed later in the meeting, when J. Taub said that "severability" may be included in the RFP.

Jennifer Taub and Andy Steinberg, two Town Councilors who serve on the Town Services and Outreach Committee, gave an update on the proposal. A. Steinberg gave a

brief history of proposal. The Zero Waste proposal was developed based on information presented at a Mass Municipal Assoc. conference several years ago. He stated that the Town Council provided funding to hire a consultant who would create a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Zero Waste project; however, at this point, the Town Manager has not been able to find an available consultant.

A. Steinberg stated that the BOH support for this proposal is important as a way to maintain pressure on the town to address this issue. He also explained that once the service is in place, the cost will be paid by residents in the same manner that households and management companies pay water and sewer bills, (which is called an Enterprise Fund).

P. Nair asked the two councilors if the BOH can help move the Town past the difficulty in identifying a consultant. A. Steinberg explained that hiring a consultant is a complex issue in itself and is subject to the usual procurement process. J. Taub suggested that the BOH contact the Town Manager and express its support of hiring a consultant to write the RFP and to keep the proposal “on the front burner.” She hopes that an RFP can be completed and go out by the end of this calendar year.

B. Brooks noted that the Town will have to administer the program, once it’s in place, which may include hiring a part time employee.

J. Jemsek asked about the universal composting component of the Zero Waste proposal.

K. Malin stated that requiring universal composting is in the BOH’s jurisdiction, as it already has current regulations that require trash and recycling pickup.

J. Taub described one of the complications that the RFP would have to address, which is that there are some residents who currently use the Transfer Station for all their waste. It isn’t fair to make this process more expensive for them.

R. Hess summarized the BOH position as supportive of the Zero Waste proposal. The consensus of the Board members is that R. Hess and K. Malin will draft a letter of support, review it with the BOH members, and send it to the Town Manager. P. Nair shared her frustration with the process so far, in that the difficulty in locating a consultant has not been public knowledge. J. Jemsek offered to reach out to the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. R. Hess asked J. Taub if this kind of assistance would be considered helpful by the Town Council. It was also suggested that the BOH invite the Town Manager to a meeting to give an update on the Zero Waste Proposal. R. Hess will consider inviting Paul Bockelman to a future meeting.

New Business

- a. Kratom: K. Malin explained how kratom became an agenda item for the BOH: Merridith O’Leary, the Public Health Commissioner at the Northampton Department

of Health and Human Services, contacted her about the ongoing efforts in Northampton to formulate kratom regulations and asked if the Amherst BOH had discussed making kratom regulations. Since it is much more effective for community public health to have regulations that align with surrounding towns, it makes sense for the Amherst BOH to also consider kratom regulations. Northampton BOH has prohibited the sale and distribution of synthetic kratom and are currently working on restricting the sale of natural kratom in terms of location and age.

K. Malin stated that the role of the BOH should be finding the balance between protecting people from taking something potentially dangerous while also allowing people to use something that could be helpful. P. Nair supported efforts to regulate kratom, noting that medical journals identify management of kratom withdrawal and kratom use disorder as issues. B. Brooks noted the distinctions being made between natural and synthetic kratom, and that just because a drug is natural doesn't make it less potent. Secondly, she doesn't feel comfortable regulating kratom until she learns more about it. J. Jemsek asked whether the BOH has the time and energy to address this issue. R. Hess said that if the BOH wants to address kratom use, that there are sufficient regulatory efforts in the state and local towns that the Board could use to adopt for Amherst regulations. However, she noted that Board members have not yet had the opportunity to talk about topics that they want to take on proactively; "We keep reactively taking things on, and this could be one of those things we reactively take on." When asked her opinion, K. Malin responded that the workload for regulating kratom was probably not significant, and not nearly as much work as the tobacco and the body arts regulations. P, Nair and B. Brooks volunteered to work on this issue, with K. Malin's support.

b. Preparation for Fall Tobacco Public Hearing about possible Tobacco Free Generation Regulations.

R. Hess noted that the BOH wanted to hear young peoples' reaction to the Nicotine Free Generation regulation, since it would affect younger generations. A public hearing in the fall would possibly enable more young people to participate in a community discussion.

K. Malin suggested that the hearing be held separately from the BOH meeting, and that it be widely publicized. B. Brooks noted that it is important to hear from students and adults who actually live in the community, as well as local pediatricians and school officials. The consensus of the Board was that the public hearing would be held after the regular monthly BOH meeting on October 9. A decision to hold it virtually or on-line was not explicitly made.

c. Possible BOH retreat. R. Hess moved this topic to the next BOH meeting because this meeting was running overtime.

Directors Update

a. Mosquito and Tick-borne Illness

K. Malin reported a sharp increase in tick-borne illness this year. The health department is following a number of cases of anaplasmosis and babesiosis. She explained that medical offices enter data about an infected person into a state wide system called MAVEN (Massachusetts Virtual Epidemiologic Network). This electronic infectious disease reporting system alerts public health nurses that a resident is ill. The nurse then follows up with the resident, making sure they have the treatment and information that they need. K. Malin stated that the public health department has been distributing tick bite kits to the public, has been distributing information about preventing mosquito and tick bites, and has a contract with the Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District to test for West Nile Virus and EEE. Because there were mosquitoes that tested for EEE in Belchertown, she asked Mosquito Control to test the mosquitoes in the area in Amherst that borders Belchertown. So far, there have not been any reported West Nile virus and EEE cases in Amherst.

- b. Summer Intern Projects: Hailey Barrows has been an intern at the Public Health Department this summer, and has been working on a Needs Assessment and Plan for using the town's Opioid Settlement Funds. So far, her survey, which asks people what the funds should be used for, and has received 75 responses. K. Malin wants to hear from people who use drugs, and who are in recovery, and their families, friends, and loved ones. A virtual community forum is scheduled for August 19 and an in-person forum on August 21. The other intern working at the Health Department is Dominion Feme-Jegede an Amherst student, who has been working on the Department's vaccine information campaign.
- c. Upcoming Events: The Health Department will be hosting a table for Overdose Awareness Day at the UU Church on August 31.

Topics Unanticipated by Director:

Approval of water supply certificate: Well water from a homeowner's well on Market Hill Road tested positive for high levels of manganese. The owner installed a reverse osmosis device which solved the problem. Current regulations require the BOH to approve the water supply certificate. B. Brooks moved to approve the certificate, J. Jemsek seconded the motion, approved (4-0). K. Malin suggested that at a future meeting, the BOH could review the Well Regulations and streamline the process so that Inspection Services has the power to approve water supply certificates.

Public Comment

Heidi Sykora, from Wauconda, Illinois, offered the BOH further information about the positive effects of kratom.

John, from Virginia, stated that the problems with kratom abuse come from the synthetic product, not the natural leaf products.

Jen, from New Hampshire, also offered the BOH further information and training about kratom.

Misty Brown, from Colorado, encouraged the BOH to accept the training and educational information about kratom, particularly about the differences between synthetic and natural leaf kratom.

Adjourn: B. Brooks moved, P. Nair seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting, approved (4-0).