

DOVER BOARD OF HEALTH
MINUTES DRAFT
November 3, 2025
7:00 PM via Zoom

1. Call to order, roll call: Start time: 7:00PM

Present: Chair Kay Petersen, Member Stephen Kruskall, Member John Quackenbush, Health Director Jason Belmonte, Public Health Nurse Gael Varsa, Administrative Assistant Sophia Kriegsman

Also Present: Johnathan, Stephen Helfer, Emily Wieja, Chetan Shukla, Alex Weatherall, Shresta Chakilam, Isabel Tashie, John Daly, Jabar, Michael Sassine, Peter Brennan, Kate Silbaugh, Mark Gottlieb, Maureen Busby, Zachary Rich, Ken Elstein, Justine Kent, Janet Greenwood

2. Citizen comments: N/A

3. Nicotine-Free Generation hearing, followed by vote

Member Quackenbush made a MOTION to open the hearing. Chair Petersen seconded the MOTION.

The motion passes 2-1.

Chair Petersen begins by explaining that it is the responsibility of the Board of Health to promote and protect the health of Dover residents, which includes the regulation of tobacco and nicotine products. The purpose of the hearing is to collect public comment on a proposed amendment to the Town's tobacco regulations. She notes that attendees will not be voting; rather, the Board will deliberate and vote after public testimony and once the hearing is closed.

Director Belmonte reads the primary proposed change to Section 220-6, Retail Sale of Tobacco Products:

“No person, firm, corporation, establishment, or agency shall sell tobacco, nicotine, or e-cigarette products to anyone born on or after January 1, 2005.”

Chair Petersen then outlines the general ground rules for the hearing, and subsequently

opens the floor for public testimony.

Public Comment

Jonathan, identifying himself as a resident of Quincy and a member of Cambridge Citizens for Smokers' Rights, speaks in opposition to the proposed amendment. He states that his organization advocates for preserving smoking rights and opposes nicotine-free generation policies. He shares that, in his experience as a student and employee, he relied on cigarettes and coffee to support his work and studies. He expresses concern that limiting access to tobacco products for young adults could negatively affect their ability to manage school or job responsibilities. He concludes by urging the Board to vote against the amendment.

Stephen Helfer identifies himself as representing Citizens for Smokers' Rights and states that the group accepts no outside funding. He expresses opposition to what he describes as a generational prohibition on tobacco and nicotine. He notes that many Massachusetts tobacco retailers are owned by immigrants and people of color, and cites Brookline store owners who reported declines in tobacco, gas, and other sales after similar regulations were adopted. Mr. Helfer argues that CDC and FDA data show youth smoking and vaping rates are already at historic lows, and that the proposal would not affect those under 21 but instead restrict adult choice. He states that adults are permitted to make their own decisions regarding alcohol and marijuana and should be allowed the same autonomy with tobacco and nicotine. He concludes by urging the Board to vote against the amendment.

Emily Wieja resides at 231 Brookline Street in Cambridge. She states that she is strongly opposed to the proposed generational tobacco and nicotine restriction, expressing concerns about adult autonomy and personal liberty. She argues that the existing statewide minimum purchase age of 21 is sufficient and that further restricting access for adults is unnecessary and inappropriate. Ms. Wieja states that society permits adults to make their own choices regarding other addictive substances, such as alcohol, marijuana, and gambling, and she views the proposed regulation as an excessive limitation on adult choice. She also notes that youth smoking and vaping rates are declining and expresses

concern that the proposal prioritizes prohibition rather than education. She references a previous speaker's comments about the relationship between autonomy and public health and agrees with that point. She concludes by urging the Board to vote against the proposed amendment.

Chetan Shukla, a 23-year-old Dover resident residing at Perry Lane, speaks in strong support of the proposed nicotine-free generation regulation. He shares that he recently graduated from Brown University, where his capstone research examined smoking-cessation policies across six countries. He now works at the Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center as a clinical research coordinator focused on early detection of lung cancer. Through his work, he has witnessed firsthand the severe consequences of tobacco use and notes that many patients express regret about ever beginning to smoke. He highlights research indicating that 99% of nicotine users start before age 26, and 90% begin as teenagers, emphasizing how early initiation occurs before individuals have fully developed judgment. He explains that once addicted, many adults no longer feel that continued use is a true choice. Mr. Shukla reflects on his upbringing in Dover and recalls encountering vaping among adolescents. He concludes by urging the Board to vote in favor of the proposed amendment.

Alex Weatherall, the owner of Sherborn Fuel, speaks in opposition to the proposed regulation. He explains that his concerns are based on his experience as a retailer who sells cigarettes, a small number of cigars, and nicotine pouches. He emphasizes that he does not sell e-cigarettes or vaping products and personally believes they are unhealthy. Mr. Weatherall states that sales of combustible tobacco products have been sharply declining. He further argues that youth uptake of traditional tobacco products is already small in Dover and Sherborn. He questions whether restrictions on nicotine could later extend to other legal products such as caffeine, sugary drinks, or energy drinks. He concludes that the policy is unlikely to produce any meaningful effect and urges the Board to vote against the proposed amendment.

Shresta Chakilam, a junior at Natick High School, speaks in support of the nicotine-free generation regulation. She shares that she has seen peers struggle with nicotine addiction,

which she believes increases the risk of progressing to more harmful substances and jeopardizes long-term health. She emphasizes that limiting youth access is essential. As a member of Natick Above the Influence, Ms. Chakilam states that many youth want stronger protections. She states that the tobacco industry continues to design new products that appeal to youth. She acknowledges earlier comments about declining smoking and vaping rates but reminds the Board of the initial surge in teen vaping that led many into ongoing addiction. She argues that proactive prevention is necessary to avoid another spike. She concludes by urging the Board to vote in favor of the proposed amendment.

Isabel Tashie, a high school senior from Needham, speaks in support of the nicotine-free generation regulation. She notes that Needham recently adopted a similar policy and expresses gratitude for it. She shares that she has seen many friends struggle with nicotine addiction and urges the Board to consider whether protecting young people from addiction is more important than preserving access to products that can be deadly. She states that, despite declining statewide rates, she continues to see significant youth use of vaping products and nicotine pouches. She describes recent instances of older students selling nicotine pouches to freshmen and argues that raising the age threshold over time will make it harder for younger teens to access these products through peers. In her work with middle school students, she reports that 12- to 14-year-olds regularly cite nicotine addiction as their top concern at school. She concludes by urging the Board to vote in favor of the proposed amendment.

John Daly, a Dover resident from Pine Street, speaks in opposition to the proposed regulation. He expresses concern about the impact on the town's two retailers, stating that the policy would severely affect their business without addressing addiction. He believes adults should retain the right to choose whether to use nicotine once they reach legal age. He further states that restricting nicotine access could push young adults to purchase marijuana in nearby towns, which he views as a more harmful substance. He shares personal observations of peers who use marijuana and asserts that it has serious negative effects and can act as a gateway to more dangerous drugs. He concludes by urging the Board to vote against the proposed amendment.

Jabar, representing Dover Mobil, explains that his family has operated the gas station since 2006. He states that tobacco and nicotine sales make up a significant share of revenue for convenience stores, including theirs, and that a ban would not only harm business but devalue the store overall. He reiterates concerns raised by previous speakers that adults aged 21 and over are permitted to purchase alcohol and lottery products, and he believes it is inconsistent to prohibit them from choosing to purchase cigarettes in Dover. Drawing from his own experience, he says that alcohol posed the primary risk to youth when he was in high school and suggests that efforts aimed at “saving the youth” might be more appropriately targeted toward alcohol misuse. He concludes by urging the Board to vote against the proposed amendment.

Michael Sassine, owner of Dover Mobil, states that his store strictly IDs customers and does not sell to anyone under 21. He explains that tobacco sales, though a small portion of total revenue, are important because they drive additional purchases and help keep the business running. Most tobacco customers are adults working in Dover, not local youth. He adds that people will simply go to other towns or order online if Dover bans sales. He asks the Board to consider the impact on his business and concludes by urging the Board to vote against the proposed amendment.

Peter Brennan, Executive Director of the New England Convenience Store and Energy Marketers Association, speaks in opposition to the proposed regulation. He emphasizes that retailers already check and scan IDs and keep products secured, while youth often obtain nicotine online where age verification is minimal. He notes that bans shift sales to other towns, causing stores to lose not just nicotine purchases but the full “basket” of additional items customers typically buy. Mr. Brennan also states that the policy would limit adult choice, since 21 is the established age for purchasing regulated products such as alcohol, cannabis, and gambling. He references previously submitted written testimony and urged the Board to vote against the proposed amendment.

Kate Silbaugh, a Brookline resident and Boston University law professor who studies youth health and safety, speaks in support of the regulation. She notes that while cigarette use has fallen, vaping products contain far higher nicotine levels and often lead to

long-term addiction. She emphasizes that nicotine is addictive and deadly, far more than alcohol or cannabis, and that most users become addicted as youth. Responding to concerns about residents buying products in neighboring towns, she cites public health evidence that reducing local access lowers youth initiation and cites Needham's Tobacco 21 policy, which cut youth smoking by 50% even when surrounding towns kept a lower age. She also notes that preventing addiction keeps money in the community. She concludes by urging the Board to vote in favor of the proposed amendment.

Mark Gottlieb, Executive Director of the Public Health Advocacy Institute, speaks in support of the regulation. He explains that his nonprofit defended Brookline when its nicotine-free generation policy was challenged and won a unanimous ruling from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. He notes his organization has previously offered free legal defense to Dover and says he sees little chance of future litigation. Mr. Gottlieb adds that most nicotine-dependent adults wish they had never started, and he views autonomy as including the ability to live free from addiction. He emphasizes that the proposal affects no current adult customers and phases in gradually over decades, allowing retailers time to adapt. He concludes by urging the Board to vote in favor of the proposed amendment.

Maureen Busby identifies herself as a Regional Tobacco Prevention Program Coordinator for seven communities, mentioning that six that have already adopted a nicotine-free generation regulation. She speaks in support of the proposal, explaining that although retailers are legally required to ID all tobacco purchasers, her program conducts regular compliance checks using underage youth, and many stores still sell tobacco products without requesting identification. She states that this inconsistency demonstrates why relying on ID checks alone is insufficient to prevent youth access. Ms. Busby adds that surveys consistently show that young people most often obtain tobacco products through their social networks. She concludes by urging the Board to vote in favor of the proposed amendment.

Dr. Zachary Rich, who is a Newton resident and pulmonologist/critical care physician at Boston Medical Center, speaks in support of the proposed regulation. He explains that

he treats many patients with advanced lung disease caused by smoking and vaping, including patients from Dover. Dr. Rich states that nearly all of his patients who use tobacco or nicotine began as adolescents and later regret ever starting, noting that addiction initiated in youth leads to decades of suffering, health decline, and financial burden. He emphasizes that nicotine addiction should be viewed as a “pediatric disease,” since adults rarely initiate use later in life unless they were exposed and became addicted at a young age. Dr. Rich compares the Board’s authority to past public health interventions and states that proactive action prevents lifelong harm. He concludes by urging the Board to vote in favor of the proposed amendment.

Ken Elstein, a member of the Belchertown Board of Health, speaks in support of the proposed regulation. He explains that Belchertown adopted a nicotine-free generation policy in December, which has now been in effect for approximately ten months. He reports that the town has experienced virtually no pushback and that retailers have indicated only minimal impact. Mr. Elstein states that concerns raised by industry representatives have not materialized in his community and are not likely to be relevant for many years. Mr. Elstein emphasizes that the regulation’s purpose is to prevent addiction and save lives, even if the number saved is modest. He concludes by urging the Board to vote in favor of the proposed amendment.

Justine Kent of 23 Haven Street speaks as a Dover resident seeking clarification after receiving a mailing about the proposal. She explains she does not smoke and came simply to understand why the regulation is being considered. She also notes that only two Dover retailers sell cigarettes and questions why the Town is addressing this now. She thanks the Board for its service.

Janet Greenwood of 1 Anne’s Way shares her personal experience with nicotine addiction. She explains that she began smoking at age 16 and smoked two and a half packs per day until age 46. She describes many unsuccessful attempts to quit, including hypnosis, and notes that even while holding a senior executive position at a major bank, she continued to smoke despite being told it was unprofessional. She states that quitting was extremely difficult but ultimately saved her life. Ms. Greenwood adds that her brother, who also began smoking at 16, died at age 53 from renal cell cancer caused by

smoking. She urges the Board to consider the importance of preventing even one young person from starting to use nicotine. She concludes by urging the Board to vote in favor of the proposed amendment.

Member Kruskall made a MOTION to close the hearing. Member Quackenbush seconded the MOTION.

All members voted in favor to pass the motion.

Board Deliberation

After closing the public hearing, the Board begins its deliberations. The Health Director clarifies that the proposed nicotine-free generation regulation is a Board of Health regulation and does not go to Town Meeting. He also notes that all written comments received were from individuals who spoke during the hearing, with one exception being a Dover resident who submitted a brief comment.

Board members express appreciation for the range of perspectives shared. Member Kruskall notes that comparatively few Dover residents attended or spoke and observed that, despite earlier conversations in which some residents expressed opposition, most did not choose to participate in the hearing. He states that the limited local response may imply a lack of opposition to the proposal.

Member Quackenbush shares that many residents he has spoken with support the regulation. He summarizes the themes raised during the hearing, including concerns about individual rights and business impacts, as well as strong arguments regarding youth addiction and long-term public health benefits. He emphasizes that the proposal involves a gradual phase-out that would not affect current adult purchasers and also notes that nicotine is highly addictive and remains a leading cause of preventable disease. In his view, the public health benefits outweigh the gradual economic impact, and the Board of Health has a responsibility to act.

Chair Petersen states that emerging nicotine products and marketing tactics continue to target youth, citing data showing increasing use of nicotine pouches among high school

students. She emphasizes the cognitive vulnerability of adolescent brains and notes that the Board's role is to prioritize health risks over relatively small economic effects on retailers. She expresses strong support for adopting the regulation.

Board members also discuss the tobacco industry's continued development of youth-appealing products and acknowledged the strong support voiced by younger speakers. Ultimately, members agree that no substantial opposition had emerged from Dover residents and that the public health rationale for the regulation was compelling.

Member Quackenbush makes a MOTION to adopt the Nicotine-Free Generation policy, as presented on the Town website, together with the other modifications that are necessary to be made to our current Tobacco License policy, as outlined by Health Director Belmonte earlier in today's meeting. Member Kruskall seconds the MOTION.

All members vote in favor to pass the motion. The measure passes.

4. Adjournment

Member Quackenbush made a MOTION to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Member Kruskall. The meeting adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting:

[Final NFG Tobacco Hearing Notice 2025](#)

Respectfully submitted,

Sophia Kriegsman