



Board of Health Meeting Minutes

5/13/2026 / 5:30 PM / Google Meet

ATTENDEES

- **Present:** Beth McRist (BM), Steven Coughlin (SC), Ryan Griffin (RG), Kelsey LeClair (KL), Brad Riley (BR), Heather Warner (HW), Ken Elstein (KE), Maureen Buzby (MB), Merridith O'Leary (MO), Paul McNeil (PM), Richard López (RL), Sam Ferland (SF), Sherryla Diola (SD), Zach Rich (ZR), and Irza Bigas Meléndez (IB)

AGENDA ITEMS

Open Meeting

SC motion to call the meeting to order at 5:30 PM; BR seconded; all in favor. BM read the opening remarks.

Public Speak Time

- BR asked if anyone was present for Public Speak. RG confirmed that nobody was present.

Approval of Minutes: April 8th, 2026

SC motion to approve the April 8th, 2026 meeting minutes; BM seconded; all in favor; motion passed.

NOTES

- **Hearing - Proposed Updates to Tobacco Regulations**
 - RG presented seven proposed updates to tobacco regulations, including permit non-renewal for repeat violations, a 'nicotine-free generation policy', retiring permit cap (permanently retiring any tobacco permits that are not renewed), aligning cigar pricing with neighboring communities, limiting sales of nicotine pouches to adult-only tobacco retailers, mandatory three-day suspension for first time violators, and increasing the buffer zone for new tobacco retailers from 500 feet to 1,000 feet from schools and existing retailers.
 - MO (Northampton Public Health Commissioner) supported NFG noting its focus on preventing future addiction rather than punishing current users.
 - HW (Tobacco-Free Community Partnership) supported all changes, citing high local youth vape (25% of 12th graders) and nicotine pouch (9% of 12th graders) usage rates.
 - PM (Prevention Coordinator) emphasized that oral pouches are engineered for high potency and discretion, targeting vulnerable adolescent brains.
 - RL (Reading BOH Chair) shared that NFG has not caused economic disruption in other Massachusetts towns like Reading or Brookline.
 - MB (Regional Tobacco Prevention Program) urged the board to join 24 other Massachusetts communities in passing the NFG policy, noting that the tobacco industry uses a long-standing "playbook" from the 1990s intended to hook young customers for life as older smoking rates decline.



- BM expressed readiness to vote on the proposed policy, feeling adequately informed by public testimony.
- While in favor of the policy, SC noted he would like to hear from the youth demographic affected by the change, specifically suggesting outreach to the high school.
- RG committed to ensuring a student representative is present for the next month's meeting.
- **Hearing - Variance Denial Appeal: Ginger Love Mobile Food Truck**
 - SD appealed the health department's denial of a variance that would allow mobile food trucks at Hawker Square (a proposed food truck park) to remain on-site for four days without returning daily to their base of operations.
 - RG recommended denial, citing that local food code requires daily return to base of operations for proper cleaning, prep, and waste disposal to prevent mobile food trucks from becoming "gray-area" brick-and-mortar establishments without proper facilities.
 - SD argued that the current food code interpretation creates an undue burden on small, seasonal businesses and is overly restrictive compared to other regional event standards.
 - BM and SC upheld the variance denial citing the need to stay within the current state codes and on RG's interpretation of the food code for seasonal, and ongoing operations.
 - The board agreed to review the additional documentation provided by SD and may revisit the topic if necessary.
- **Director of Public Health Update**
 - RG emphasized the importance of voting "yes" on the upcoming Proposition 2 ½ Override to avoid a 40% budget reduction that will impact staffing and inspections.
 - RG noted updates regarding summer camps and farmers' market applications.
- **Public Health Inspector Update**
 - KL reported on recent inspections, including Dynasty (new owners) and Tong Singh (emergency shutdown/reinspection) due to cleanliness and food contamination violations.
 - KL noted progress on housing issues on 166 Holyoke Street and 531 East Street.
 - KL shared that there is a new establishment opening up on Union Street (a coffee shop) and she is working on their plan review.
- **Community Health Worker Update**
 - BR reported on the successful "Pizza Proxy Party" held at the ECOA, which educated 23 attendees on healthcare proxies.
 - BR updated the board on the Opioid Remembrance Garden proposal for the conservation commission, noting that he continues to work with them.
 - BR announced that his tenure with the health department will conclude in 10 weeks and offered to assist the board with policy analysis or special projects before departure.



BOH Last Minute Items

- None.

Adjournment

SC motion to adjourn meeting at 6:43 pm on 5/13/2026; BR seconded; all in favor; motion passed.

NEXT MEETING: June 10th, 2026 at 5:30 pm on Google Meet