



OBSERVER CORPS REPORT

BOARD OF HEALTH – February 4, 2026

Hybrid Meeting - Recorded

LWVM Observer: Tom Krueger

Members in Attendance: Andrew Petty, Tom McMahon, Tom Massaro, Amanda Ritvo

Chair's Report

CAHM Wellness Survey - Dr. Massaro reviewed the responses rate and format of the survey: of 16,792 sent, 2550 responses = 15%, better than expected; 43 questions with check boxes and many questions with multiple parts; 21 questions had write-in parts; the data was presented in deciles (18-39, 40-49, etc.) columns and rows (not a concern, modest concern, high concern, etc.). He showed two such charts - "under age 18 substance abuse" and "under age 18 bullying." Both of these questions had responses in the mod-high concern areas - 80-90s%. A last question "if you had the opportunity what would you want the BOH to know" garnered 392 comments - most were about issues like teen drinking or loneliness in seniors, but some said the BOH should just stick to "physical aspects" - trash pickup, food safety, disease prevention. The next step in the CAHM project is to form focus groups during the month of March based on age deciles. Typical question for such a group would be "If MHD is to become a place for everyone and for all to achieve greater wellness, what would have to change?" And "What programs or resources are need to help achieve or maintain wellness." The plan is to have a report by the end of March and then hold open forums for the town.

Further questions were asked about the focus groups: How to participate? Contact the HD. Other outreach methods discussed. The format would be

to have focus group sessions 90-120 minutes and discuss 2-3 keen issues. Different questions would be posed to focus groups of different ages. For example, in a child age rearing group, a question about bullying might be asked.

Social Hosting

(This topic led to a prolonged discussion, lasting for more than an hour. What follows is a brief summary.)

Dr. Massaro had met with the police chief and exchanged emails. He remained optimistic that progress could be made. At the last BOH meeting a document from the Essex County district attorney was shown.

Dr. Massaro found a video the DA had made and that was shown: a quote (paraphrased) “too many cases of injury... never a good idea to allow juveniles to drink on your property.” Dr. Massaro called the DA Paul Tucker the week before and had a very good conversation. Dr. M called the school superintendent and high school principal and found neither had seen the video. All are well intentioned but haven’t all connected yet.

Of note the police department is running an “addiction and recovery series” with the first session on 2/3 and will meet for 5 sessions all on Tuesdays. (The BOH is supporting this series.) The first had 26 attendees and 2 sponsors/mentors. (These two are seen as very trustworthy, experienced, with a high regard for confidentiality and privacy.) Half of the attendees were in the assistance community and the others have direct experience with this via family members. A question was asked about how word of this series was getting out? Not well so far. Mr. Petty said he would send an email “blast” and see if this can be put on the MHD town calendar.

Dr. Massaro said that the BOH would work more on the prevention side and develop navigation tools to go to resources that are already present. (This had been previously available via the Marblehead Health Task Force website, but when this merged with the MCC, the website had been hacked.)

Mr. McMahon talked about his experiences talking with town officials. One was not interested in working with him. Dr. Massaro will meet with Dan Fox of the SC. Mr. McMahon was frustrated that after giving the names of streets where social hosting had happened, the residences had not been engaged with. If such addresses were “engaged” by the police chief it would go a long way. However, Mr. Petty and Dr. Massaro are concerned

that in the current climate, that it would not be well received. Mr. McMahon said one can't be afraid to engage with the community.

The discussion went further as Mr. McMahon brought up a specific case from December that was not investigated. Mr. Petty agreed the police should investigate but it is hard to make any comments beforehand. Dr. Massaro reiterated that the town has to move together. He acknowledged Mr. McMahon for surfacing this topic. A suggestion was made that the DA and perhaps the Police Chief should come to a BOH meeting. Mr. McMahon said the schools are "on board" but not the Select Committee (so far.) Mr. Petty reiterated that all are on the same side. He went on to say "the longer you abstain from alcohol the less likely you are to develop an addiction."

At this point the discussion turned to what can we (the BOH) do: develop navigation tools to current resources, new presentations to high school students, figure ways to be relatable to teens, work on means for testimonials (many are afraid of public speaking) from those affiliated with substance abuse, overcoming stigma associated with substance abuse, etc.

In conclusion Dr. Massaro said they are committed to not giving up and will make progress each meeting, incremental as it might be.

Town Charter - Dr. Massaro said the revision of Part B has not been presented yet. Mr. McMahon said he had a problem with the revision about the word "reasonable." He said that an action needed a "reason" presented. Dr. Massaro said the word "reasonable" was used because it is the MHD bylaws. Mr. McMahon felt that during COVID that the state mandate for schools lead to a reaction from the public was not seen as "reasonable". He said that you just can't say so. Mr. Petty said the mandate was to protect the public. Dr. Ritvo said that initially the worry was about what happened in the Spanish flu of 1917, but the data changed for children as time went on, and there was concern about COVID in teachers and family members.

Wellness Fair - Mr. McMahon reported all was proceeding well. He had already reached out to a number of vendors and reminded attendees about the raffle prizes.

Transfer Station - Mr. McMahon said that he had gotten a suggestion to allow out-of-town-employees to be able to purchase one town sticker on a primary car. Given the budget constraints, this could be seen as a benefit. Mr. Petty said this could be done via a car registration and a recent payroll stub. The BOH voted and passed this motion.

The issue of separate a town sticker for both the transfer station and one just for the beaches is more complicated. It is too late for this year. The Park and Rec may also be installing LPR (license plate readers) soon. Mr. Petty said that the costs would need to be analyzed as the costs need to be covered. While the revolving fund from the commercial business generates income, this is to be used for further work at the transfer station, e.g., the swap shed. The next year the funds will be used to buy trash and recycling bins for each household. Perhaps in the future the revolving funds can be used differently.

Associate Chair for Health - Dr. Ritvo gave an update on infectious diseases. Initially respiratory infections were heading down but now are back up. 18% of cases are influenza, COVID 5%, and RSV 6%. There have been 52 pediatric deaths from flu (90% unvaccinated), and CDC estimates there have been 20M illness, and 11K deaths so far this season. Influenza A has waned and now it is Influenza B. Still not too late to get vaccinated. COVID vaccine currently is about 50% effective against ED and UC visits, and from a recent article 80% effective against death. The vaccine takes about 4 (not 2) weeks to fully protective.

Measles is surging country wide - 588 cases in 2026 so far. 94% of the cases are within the country, not brought of foreign origin. 93% of the cases are in those unvaccinated. There is concern with the World Cup and tourism this summer, cases could rise. The measles vaccine is highly effective after 2 doses. Measles is highly contagious: one case can infect 15-17 others. It is most dangerous for young children.

A new shingles vaccine shows promise in the reduction of dementia risk by 20-30%. Note that when chicken pox (herpes zoster) gets reactivated it can lead to cognitive decline. Why is unknown. The vaccine is about 90% effective in preventing serious disease.

Mr. Petty said the MA will have 40 Days of Celebration this summer - World Cup, US 250, the Tall Ships, etc. The health department is working with 15

other north shore communities is public health preparedness. If say a coffee shop has a case of measles, a nurse will be posted there the next day offering to vaccinate immediately. Kids would have to stay out of schools, camps, etc.

Directors Report - Mr. Petty reported on further work at the transfer station. A few change orders were needed: \$19349 for a steel plate at the bottom of the loading dock, \$730 for ADA compliance at scale house (strobes for smoke detectors.) There was additional work for the sewage and drain systems and some concrete in the scale pit will need work. But, the transfer station is now open for commercial business with a one-week hiatus for trailer removal and site work.

Trash and recycling contract - Mr. Petty has received a number of bids and met with three of the large companies. He is looking at pricing and the best proposal. He and Dr. Massaro are to meet with town administrator and CFO to discuss the budget. Mr. Petty reiterated that the contract over the past 10 years is soon over and that the proposed cost came in under budget (\$844K vs. \$1M). He was told that the trash/recycling contract should be part of the town budget.

Mr. Petty went on to discuss if businesses want to take part in this program. He talked about how businesses could opt in, etc. As for residences, a new 65-gallon bin for trash and a 65-96 gallon bin for recycling would be purchased for each. These will be purchased from a third party (=best deal), and any repair will be done at the waste department. Each bin will have a QR code identifying which residence has them. Further discussion concerned the large budget deficit which has gone from \$6.4M to \$8.5M. Trash can't be part of an override because of public safety and state requirements. There would be dire effects from cuts to services in town. Of note, if one looks at the average taxes of towns in the state, MHD is on lower side.