



OBSERVER CORPS REPORT

BOARD OF HEALTH – 9-9-25

Hybrid - Recorded

LWVM Observer: Tom Krueger

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

Dr. Massaro opened the meeting discussing the recent tragic death and the BOH's commitment to the town's response. He discussed his own early experiences in an ICU where children died and the need for those to help people grieve, to acknowledge the pain, sadness and anger. Perhaps this is a time to help the town grieve - "I feel your pain." He proposed a public declaration of the death on 8/3 of Swansea Gatchell, one with sympathy, condolences, and for a meaningful response with the BOH support for mental health and the consciousness of substance abuse. This was moved and passed.

He went on further to discuss the process, the steps, this response would take. First, understanding the problem at the deepest level possible, with science and data. Then to engage a small group and soon expand to a broader audience to explore options. It would be important to look to other towns to see what they have done and what's worked. Then have the "stakeholders" explore the options, make recommendations and finally to have an open forum for the town.

These considerations raise the question of how the BOH should serve the community. Now, compared to 5-10 years ago, we have more information. And with all the confusion and misinformation, honest, accurate and balanced information becomes especially important. To this end the BOH will have a regular column in both the town's newspapers, each paper with a different article. Dr. Massaro hopes, in the ideal world, that the articles would be clarifying questions of the readers. Public health, as a discipline, is a science that requires documentation of the literature. It is important that the readers know that this is done and a reader could look at these resources on the BOH website.

CommunityHealth/CAHM Survey Questions

Dr. Massaro told the board about the next steps in the health survey. On 9/29 postcards will be mailed to all town residents 18 or over about the survey and how to get access to it. Over the past summer a group of 6-7 people selected 42 questions addressing eight levels of wellness. This was done in conjunction with UMass Boston who will take the surveys that are returned, process the data, cross reference it and yield a multilevel

analysis. This will start the third week of October, and by the first quarter of 2026 focus groups will be formed to drill down and evaluate recommendations to improve health and wellness in MHD. At this point there will be two levels of information, and a final report from UMass Boston will be available by the second quarter of 2026. From there the results and recommendations will be presented to an open forum.

As to the MHTF (mental health task force), it will be seen as a body to the MCC (MHD counseling center). The MHTF can deal with broader issues.

Charter Committee

Dr. Massaro has been a member of the committee since its inception. He pointed out that this work has been to organize in a document how MHD works from day to day and in the long term. They had spent over a year gathering regulations, etc. as well as interviewing over 60 different departments, boards, and committees. The Charter Committee's drafts, now draft B, are available for all to see on the website. He noted that these drafts are clear and very readable. There are 8-9 pages in the draft pertaining to the BOH and HD. Dr. Ritvo asked when this would be finalized. Dr. Massaro responded it would first have to be approved at town meeting, then go to the MA legislature for approval, and then back to the town to be approved again. Finalizing won't likely be done until 2027.

Personal Statement

Mr. McMahon read a personal statement that he wrote in response to the recent tragic death and role of substance abuse has. He opened with what is supposedly humorous quip - "Marblehead is a drinking town with a sailing problem". This is no longer humorous and actually dangerous, sending a bad message to the youth of the town. He acknowledged he drank when younger but realized the danger and destructiveness of this. He knew he needed to be a role model for his kids. He told the audience "we (the adults) are being watched." He disputed the idea of "talking" about drinking, etc. was a "trigger" for others. Mr. McMahon has heard from residents and others about possible responses - it is unlawful for those <18 to drive past midnight; consider a curfew for those <18.

A member of the audience was acknowledged. She is new resident, mother of 3, who "discovered" a MA law from 2018 that allowed others to report those <21 who are impaired to call 911. A Samaritan law allows others to report anonymously about those impaired by alcohol. She realized most people don't know about these laws and created a flyer which posted on Instagram. Mr. McMahon said he reach out to the school committee about this, and both local newspapers agreed to include the flyer.

Waste Management

Mr. McMahon reported there is no change in regards the curbside trash/recycling strike. Temporary employees of Republic are picking up trash weekly and recycling every

other week. The temps keep changing and there are still recurring problems with pickup. Mr. Petty noted at the transfer station with the recycling pickup traffic flow decreased but on "off" weeks it picks up again. Waste Management (another firm) is hauling the recycling - not Republic.

Community Health

Dr. Ritvo was happy to report from her meeting with the head school nurse that the immunization rates from the students at MHD schools are high: for MMR in 2024, the rates for Glover = 100%, Brown = 90%, Village = 100%, Veterans and MHS = 100%.

In regards to Riverhead Beach, after the BOH discussion at the last meeting, Mr. Petty talked with Park and Rec about additional signage. He read a draft of the signage that the board "wordsmithed" and revised. Basically, the message states that the water there are not tested for contamination.

Mental Health 5K

Mr. McMahon talked about the upcoming 5K on 11/2 sponsored by the MHD Rotary Club for the Inner Explorer program that supports mental health and wellness. This is its fourth year. The race begins and ends at the Boston Yacht Club. To help promote the race, Mr. McMahon is not only running in it but will donate \$25 (up to a total \$1000) for each person who can beat him. As a further incentive, he has "challenged" Seth Moulton that if he, Seth, can beat him, he will donate an additional \$500.

Directors Report

Mr. Petty discussed further the financial aspects of the Republic strike. He is looking into the nonpayment for the recycling and says it is likely that MHD would pay only half of the cost. As far as the Teamsters and Republic, they met last week with no resolution. It is now week 12 of the strike.

The transfer station project bids are out, and he has received five subcontractor bids for all the trades - roofing, metal, plumbing, HVAC, electrical, etc. (These bids are for the site work and the scale house.) From here a general contractor would take these sub bids and then add any other work. The entire bids are due by 9/17. Once awarded, the time to be implemented would be discussed, presumably after the Republic strike is resolved. The first step is before winter install the concrete foundations and then proceed.

Otherwise, TS has a long-term environmental monitoring contract with Hailey Ward. An inspection by MA DEP is scheduled for 9/10.

An encroachment of the landfill was committed by a resident on Stony Brook Road. (The landfill was permitted by MA with very specific requirements - liner, sand, organic material etc. This is to prevent any damage to the cap which could result in leakage.)

The resident had tried to “beautify” the area and this needs to be remediated and inspected again.

Mr. Petty discussed the need for an additional employee at the HD to deal with stickers, phone calls, etc. The position would be 20 hr/wk at a cost of \$26K per year. The sale of car/facility stickers has increased greatly and the sales of these stickers will only occur via the HD. The sales of stickers will easily cover the costs. Over the past months the HD has been helped with a volunteer from the COA. The board moved and passed the hiring of such a person.

As for the BOH meeting minutes, the plan is to hire a person to do these with a stipend of \$400 per month.

Mr. Petty gave an update about grants that the HD and other North Shore towns jointly are awarded. The first is the emergency preparedness grant from the CDC of which 75% of \$134K was received in July but the other 25% is still held up. This covers trainings, staffing and responses to pandemics, outbreaks, humanitarian responses, food borne illness, etc. Another grant has to do with substance abuse and the YRBS (Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance). One program I Can Help is to train people to help others with substance abuse.

Mr. Petty went on to discuss what Peabody did in response to a youth suicide in its town. They purchased for the entire town an app called BLOOM which helps with not only mental health but also parenting, elder care, etc. issues. It is web based but also offers four free counseling sessions with a counselor. The program is connected to both McLeans Hospital and Boston Children’s Hospital. The program was developed by a clinical psychologist. It is totally confidential and available 24/7. The cost for MHD to purchase this program for the entire town and its employees is \$15K/year, and could be paid for from the opiate settlement funds. If approved by the BOH, the time frame to begin would be very short. It would be important to “market” this to the community. The BOH moved that Mr. Petty proceed ahead with evaluating and implementing the program. One question was about parental notification of a child <18 with thoughts of suicide. This will be checked to see that safeguards are in place.

Additional discussion concerned the HD financial commitment to the MCC. The finance committee last year approved \$120K but with budget constraints this was lowered to \$60K. If additional funding could be restored, it could help with the backlog at the MCC. Also, if counseling could happen at the schools, the backlog would decrease as the after-school counseling session demand are part of the problem. Other towns have MH professionals in the schools, e.g., Peabody does. MHD is one of the few school systems that doesn’t.