

BOARD OF HEALTH

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Questions:

1. Tell us what makes you a good candidate for this office and what motivates you to run for this office?

I am a public health professional with over 12 years of experience working in municipal and state health departments. I hold a Master of Public Health degree from the Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH), where I majored in Epidemiology. While at BUSPH, I completed a practicum with the Carlisle Board of Health/Health Department and experienced the wide range of issues and items impacting local health, from Lyme disease prevention to septic tank siting. After graduating, I worked as an epidemiologist for the Boston Public Health Commission, where I tracked and reported influenza cases throughout the winter. Additionally, I conducted routine analysis on Boston's syndromic surveillance system, looking for trends in hospital emergency room visits. I later joined the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Immunization Division as an immunization epidemiologist, conducting analyses of immunization rates across the Commonwealth. In 2021 I became the Immunization Division's Associate Director. I have many years of project and program management experience, am not afraid of large spreadsheets or piles of data, and am able to build effective and harmonious teams.

There are multiple reasons why I am running for the Norwood Board of Health, and most of them distill down to a love of public service, and working to improve the community I live. I chose a career in governmental public health because it impacts the lives of all residents. I believe I can use my expertise to bring a fresh and knowledgeable perspective to the Board of Health. There are many areas where services and supports to residents can be expanded, and as my husband and I raise our daughter in town, I want to ensure that everyone in this community has the ability to live their best and healthiest lives.

In addition to my day job, I volunteer my time at the Norwood Food Pantry, and sit on the Impact Norwood Steering Committee and the Norwood Public Schools' Health Council. I have served as a Town Meeting Member for District 9 since 2019, and I am currently the chair of the Town Meeting Rules Committee.

2. What do you consider to be the most important health issues facing residents today and how would you approach communicating with residents regarding the health issues that affect them?

I consider access to medical care and mental health challenges to be the top health issues facing residents today. Norwood is overdue for a comprehensive health needs assessment, and the results of that assessment need to be shared with the community.

We need additional communication around the work being done with the Opioid Settlement Funding that Norwood is receiving through 2039. As I write this response, the Department of Public Health's Bureau of Substance Addiction Services released an Opioid Settlement Fund Dashboard. This dashboard outlines payments made to municipalities to date, expected payments for the next decade, and details on the FY25 reports made by municipalities on where funds have been expended. This is information that I was previously unable to obtain from the town. I would like to see additional information on how these particular services were decided on—people with lived experience of substance use should be involved in the decision-making process—and further explore how else we may be able to use these funds in the years to come.

Last year, I ran on improving mental health awareness and services for Norwood, and this is just as important today. The town received grant funding for Mental Health Awareness Training, which taught town staff on how to recognize mental health challenges in others and refer people to appropriate care. The grant ends in September, and I would like to see a continuation of this work by existing full-time staff. It is also important to connect with our business community to build additional awareness beyond just town employees. As a member of the Steering Committee for Impact Norwood—a program focused on substance use prevention in middle and high school students—I want to ensure continued funding for the program when its grant ends in 2027. There have been notable decreases in reported substance use in students over the past four years, and I would hate to lose the progress we have made.

Of course, the most severe barrier to health care access in our town is the lack of a functioning Norwood Hospital. In addition to providing critical emergency care for Norwood and the larger region, Norwood Hospital was the site of many other medical specialties, providing care for many community members. I was extremely grateful to have the hospital available on multiple occasions, from prenatal care and giving birth to my daughter, to knowing that the ER was minutes away the first time she had severe croup as an infant. I have also had the displeasure of needing to have two sudden and semi-urgent surgical procedures, and was able to take some relief in being able to have those both done locally instead of needing a trip to Boston. Make no mistake, Norwood needs a hospital. I wish I could say that I would use my position on the Board of Health to help bring the hospital back. However, we need to acknowledge that there is not much that the Board of Health is able to do before there is a viable buyer and operator of the hospital. Once we have an operator in place, the next step would be to acquire a Determination of Need (DON) from the Department of Public Health, and this is the step where community voices can help put pressure on state officials. Until that time, I will do whatever is possible to assist the town with finding a hospital operator, including supporting our Fire/EMS Department as they face staffing and equipment challenges exacerbated by the loss of the hospital.

3. What are the key obstacles to improving local health and what steps would you take to address them?

As many people may be aware, Norwood and many other towns in the Commonwealth are facing budget challenges. This will limit the ability to add any full-time employee positions at the town level without needing to increase taxes through a Proposition 2.5 override. I would

therefore focus attention on the Norfolk County 8 (NC-8) Shared Service Arrangement (SSA), which is a state funded coalition of Norwood and six other health departments (Canton, Dedham, Milton, Walpole, Wellesley, and Westwood). The NC-8 currently has a regional epidemiologist who started late last year, and is about to bring on a regional nurse. These positions have been vacant for many months over the past few years, and I want to explore the potential for additional staffing (for example, a shared social worker) while this funding exists.

I would also like to see improved communications between the health department and town residents. I have been asked by more than one person about where they might be able to dispose of the needles from their injectable medications. They were surprised when I told them that sharps containers are available through the Health Department for \$1 or \$3, depending on the size. Many residents are unaware of \$5 bike helmets being available for children, or that the public health nurse runs both blood pressure clinics and CPR classes. There is MMR vaccine available for children at the Health Department today, but there does not appear to have been a comprehensive outreach of this information except at Board of Health meetings. The Sharon Health Department releases a monthly newsletter which covers a range of issues and highlights important events and connections, and I think this would be great to have in Norwood as well. Additionally, I would advocate for additional interactions and discussions with other town boards and departments, particularly with the schools and Senior Center, to ensure timely health information is reaching the people who would benefit the most from it.

Massachusetts is unique in its reliance on local control for health regulations, which can mean that programs and restrictions vary dramatically from town to town. Recent new regulations and updates over the past couple of years have focused on body art (tattooing and piercing) and body work (reiki, reflexology, etc.), which are two different groups of businesses that unfortunately sound alike. As a result, the newest regulation for body work establishments enacted a licensing fee that was in line with body art establishments instead of massage practitioners. Other regulations have not been reviewed for many decades, and it is certainly time to see if a regulation from 2001 or even 1957 is still doing the work we expect! I am also interested in exploring other regulations that may be worthwhile to have in Norwood. An example would be regulating or restricting the sale of kratom, which is an opioid-like substance that is currently completely unregulated at the federal or state level. Canton banned the sale of the product last year because of serious health and addiction concerns, and I would push for some regulation of this substance in Norwood sooner rather than later.

4. How important do you feel partnering with other programs such as Connect2Recovery is in improving support and services for Norwood residents?

Collaboration with other partners and programs is essential for being able to provide a range of services with limited resources, and I fully encourage exploring partnerships with programs that will improve the health of Norwood residents. Connect2Recovery is an excellent example of the additional work I would like to see be done with Opioid Settlement Funding and the NC-8.

Connect2Recovery is a peer support and coaching service provided by Riverside Community Care. Residents that are at any stage in the recovery process can request to be a part of this program and receive access to various services, including a recovery coach who has first-hand personal experience with recovery. This peer connection, alongside Riverside's other services, allows for a comprehensive and individualized approach to recovery. Norwood has been able to

use funds from the Opioid Settlement Fund together with the other towns in the NC-8 to ensure that residents are able to access this service with no out-of-pocket costs, regardless of insurance status. Connect2Recovery also hosts Community Connections at the Morrill Memorial Library on the third Wednesday of each month from 12-2pm. This program is a drop-in gathering to meet the recovery coaches and learn more about the program and receive information on additional resources available to residents.

The town also pays for the INTERFACE Referral Service through William James College, allowing residents to be connected with outpatient mental health services that meet their needs and availability. Since 2018, hundreds of residents have been connected to care through this service. However, I believe that this program can be promoted more strongly through connections with other town departments and organizations. This would allow us to reach as many people as possible who could benefit from this service.

I believe that exploring other connections with relevant organizations and programs can dramatically increase the level of services being offered to residents. Using the results from a new comprehensive needs assessment, the town can focus on programs that are of highest need. The town can collaborate with the NC-8 to not only lower costs for each town, but increase the number of people reached by these programs. Every program should also have ongoing reporting and evaluation, to ensure that what sounds like a good idea is meeting the needs of residents, and to make any needed adjustments to improve the program.