

JOHANNA RAVENHURST, Chair
TONY JUDGE, Vice-Chair
KAREN WALSH PIO, LICSW, LADC 1, Clerk
JESSICA COLLINS
DR. CHRISTINE MCKIERNAN, MD

SHARON D. HART, Public Health Director

Board of Health Minutes

June 8, 2021

As Approved – July 20, 2021

Present: Johanna Ravenhurst, Chair; Tony Judge, Vice-Chair, Karen Walsh Pio, Clerk; Jessica Collins, Board of Health Member; Dr. Christine McKiernan, Board of Health Member; Sharon Hart, Public Health Director; Jennifer Jernigan, Assistant Public Health Director, Monasia Ceasar, Health Compliance Specialist; Sean Fitzgerald, SHELD Representative; Christopher Craig, Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District

The Board of Health Meeting was called to order at 4:36 p.m. by Chair Ravenhurst.

1: Acceptance of Minutes:

Chair Ravenhurst stated she would accept a motion to approve the minutes for the May 11, 2021 meeting.

Walsh Pio made the motion to approve the minutes and Dr. McKiernan seconded the motion. A roll call was then taken:

Judge: Aye
Walsh Pio: Aye
McKiernan: Aye
Judge: Aye
Collins: Aye
Ravenhurst: Aye

2: Announcements and Open Forum:

Monasia shared the first question left on the google forum. A community member followed up on the concerns shared from the last meeting regarding the status of the water faucets in the back of the classrooms at Mosier Elementary.

Director Hart confirmed she followed up with the Superintendent and was reassured the faucets in the back of the classrooms are not in use. Vivian Price, the facilities director will be looking into getting water testing done on all town buildings over the summer.

The community member also shared growing concerns on the bear presence in town. She has yet to see any information conveyed through the local tv stations and Town Reminder. Bears are still regularly roaming through town. She is concerned about the residents' lack of education on how to safely interact and prevent bears.

Hart mentioned she was able to confirm there is no environmental/animal control officer at the Police Department. The only animal control officer is associated with the Health Department, and mainly focuses on dogs. If other wildlife is found on someone's property, the owner must hire a professional for removal. The safety material on bears was forwarded to Town Administration and local cable tv channels for dissemination.

The community member has made attempts to get in contact with David Wattles, a top bear biologist in Massachusetts in hopes of getting expert advice and information. She is looking to get support of the Board of Health, as a way to further encourage his involvement with the matter.

Dr. McKiernan shared she has personally seen the informational memos displayed on media platforms and believes the Board of Health has made an effort in distributing safety information out to residents.

Walsh Pio suggested an article written in the Town Reminder may also help reiterate the necessary safety and precautions to residents.

Collins mentioned the possibility of David Wattles already having a video depicting the necessary information available that can be used for dissemination, opposed to trying to get him to meet in person.

Director Hart proposed that once received, the video from David Wattles can be forwarded to the necessary outlets for distribution. To her, residents are aware of the bear presence in town as there is a Facebook page that tracks their location and community interaction. It is typically difficult to get information out to the public, and the necessary attempts have been made.

3. New Business:

Sean Fitzgerald- SHELD- Fossil Fuel Burning Plant

Chair Ravenhurst introduced the next guest speaker, Sean Fitzgerald from SHELD. He joined the meeting to provide further information on the agreement with the fossil fuel burning plant in Peabody, MA. This was a result of receiving a letter prompting the Board of Health to make an official opinion on this matter. Prior to doing so, the Board wanted to gain more information on the upcoming project.

Sean Fitzgerald described the burning plant as a 55-Megawatt peaking power plant forecasted to run less than ten times a year. The plant would only run in critical power shortage situations for an estimation of 240 hours annually. The plant will address occurrences of heat waves and cold spurts. SHELD is one of fourteen municipalities participating in the project. The plant will be used to increase capacity. Capacity is one of the three components of the energy market. It is the biggest expense and of the highest obligation for the energy provider.

The project has received approval from the MassDEP permitting department and is moving into the finance phase. Wholesale Electric has put a pause on the project to receive feedback. There will be an open forum on June 22, 2021, in Peabody, MA for people to share their thoughts and concerns. State legislators, participants and industry affiliates will be present to address any concerns and to provide further clarification.

SHELD is committed to delivering clean energy whenever feasible. South Hadley's energy is 90% carbon free, as it is sourced from nuclear contracts signed 30 years ago. We are currently only one of two municipalities meeting the 2040 net zero goal. The asset in question will mitigate capacity.

Tony Judge proposed a series of questions to Mr. Fitzgerald to gain further understanding of the project. The questions asked were have any towns withdrawn participation from the project, has the project received any opposition for environmental groups within the Commonwealth, will the plant automatically shut off once the 240 hr. limit has been reached, what carbon is being used at the peaking plants, and how many hours did the existing peaking plants run last year.

Sean Fitzgerald addressed all of Judge's concerns. Two towns have written letters offering to sell their shares in the projects. They will remain in the asset unless their shares are sold. Opposition has come from climate change activists within the region. Although the peaking plant does utilize fossil fuel, it does displace higher emitting assets. Peaking plants are necessary transitional energy sources while other renewable sources are being established.

Peaking plants are not required to shut off if the 240-hour annual rate has been reached. The plants run on demand. Typically, the plants run within that margin. Offshore wind and renewable sources will increase generation and reduce the need for peaking plants. The plants run when needed to ensure life safety issues do not become problematic. This asset will run off gas with a backup supply of oil. In 2020, the existing assets ran a total of 40 hours combined.

Dr. Christine McKiernan also mentioned a few questions and area of concern for Sean Fitzgerald. Her questions were as follows: Are there any alternative options available, what is the time course and/or contract length, is it possible to opt of the project?

Sean Fitzgerald responded that the capacity obligation is driving this project. There must be enough capacity to meet load demands. Battery storage has been a suggested alternative but comes with its own sets of issues. A battery can usually run for only two hours. This would bring down the capacity rating substantially. Generators are currently out there but they also utilize fossil fuel.

The project is a long-term investment. It is estimated to have a lifespan of at least 30 years. There has been concern surrounding being involved with an asset that isn't viable. There has been indication that thermal units will remain in the energy industry and will be valuable as support lines. The assets will sit dormant and be used in emergency circumstances. Investors are currently looking into the possibility of utilizing hydrogen to fuel the peaking plants. SHELD has already invested 1 million dollars, if they chose to withdraw there would be a loss of 3.3 million dollars. This would result in a major spike in rate pricing for customers.

Judge questioned what percentage of household would benefit from this asset.

Fitzgerald mentioned the 55 MW is critical to the Northeastern region. It can service thousands of homes and add to the generation pool in the area.

Chair Ravenhurst questioned the extent of our commitment and investment in this project.

Sean Fitzgerald stated SHELD has paid made a payment of 1 million dollars towards the construction of the generators. The total cost of the asset is around 85 million dollars. SHELD will receive payments from capacity.

Collins expressed her empathy for those who have any environmental concerns regarding the asset. What is SHELD's commitment to clean energy long term?

Fitzgerald mentioned that SHELD owns two nuclear generation projects whose contracts are good until 2045 and 2050. They will more than likely get life extensions. This has gained opposition, as there are dangers associated with nuclear energy. However, without it emission levels would skyrocket.

South Hadley is currently adequately supplied with a carbon free energy source. This initiative is being further promoted with solar power incentives, electric car rebates, and other alternative energy sources incentives.

Dr. Christine McKiernan questioned what could be expected at the upcoming June 22nd public forum.

Sean Fitzgerald assured there would be an open discussion on the project where those in support of and in objection to the project will be present to discuss, listen, and learn from each other. It is anticipated to be a heated debate as there is a lot of passion surrounding not utilizing fossil fuels. SHELD is currently tied to the project and will have to wait and see the final verdict.

Collins questioned SHELD's commitment to preserving trees.

Sean Fitzgerald expressed his concern with clear cutting and stated there was no reason to do so in South Hadley. There is already a carbon free energy source powering the town adequately.

Chair Ravenhurst asked if there is any additional information about the upcoming forum in case anyone was interested in attending?

The flyers are being made, and once finished they will be distributed to the necessary outlets.

Dr. McKiernan questioned if there was any further action required from the Board, as the topic was first introduced by prompting the Board to take a stance on the matter.

Chair Ravenhurst stated she would accept a motion on the action being taken by the Board regarding the Fossil Fuel Burning Plant.

Walsh Pio made the motion that the Board would refrain from writing a letter at this time, following a presentation that allows the Board to feel a level of trust and understanding with the process that is currently underway. Collins second the motion. A rollcall was taken:

Walsh Pio: Aye
Judge: Aye
McKiernan: Aye
Ravenhurst: Aye
Collins: Aye

Christopher Craig- Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District

Chair Ravenhurst introduced the next guest, Christopher Craig, the program Coordinator at the Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District.

Christopher Craig told the Board the Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District was established in 2017. The company provides mosquito trapping, monitoring, and testing services to its clients. Two traps are set and collected each week within the town. They are then sent off to the lab and tested for EEE and West Nile virus. There are plans to expand services to include larvae mosquito control, adult spraying, and water maintenance. The Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District is also available as a educational resource for those who are interested.

Collins asked for some context on this topic.

Director Hart explained that there was some concern with the state's plan to do aerial spraying of chemicals in the event of an EEE occurrence. To opt out of the aerial spraying, the town must submit a plan to the EEA. The Selectboard would have to submit a plan with the Board of Health's approval to the state. The exemption would be good for a year. The plan would have to identify alternative methods that would address the mosquito issue, utilizing the town's money.

Christopher confirmed that the PVMCD received several inquires from different municipalities regarding the opt out plan. The option would exclude the town from aerial spraying in case of an EEE outbreak. The state will consider spraying if transmission rates get critically high. They may act as an emergency control tactic. There is a misconception that it is a regularly scheduled service when it is only authorized in emergency situations only. Typically, aerial spraying takes place in the southeastern region of the state, as those environments are most conducive for EEE. The deadline to apply for the opt out option has since passed.

Collins recalled an incident two years prior, in which the state mistakenly said Granby, MA had a EEE case when it was in fact Granby, CT. This caused fear, confusion, and concern within the town. Recreational departments were rescheduling sporting activities and daunting new reports were being published. She questioned what would deem a situation to be of emergency level and what level of correspondence can municipalities expect from the state in situations like this?

Craig remembered hearing about the incident. The state is very vague on what defines or requires emergency intervention. There must be an elevated risk, and the state will make appropriate decisions based on the data presented. The state will communicate with local Boards of Health if an aerial spraying will be taking place. The spraying usually happens overnight.

Collins then questioned how the state communicates the opt out deadline, and why the Board of Health was not informed in a timely fashion.

Director Hart shared she attended a zoom webinar on mosquitos when she first learned about the opt out deadline. The original date was May 15th but was extended to May 28th. Towns expressed their concerns and opposition to the state's process. They believed the program should be opt in opposed to opt out. There was also mention that homeowners can individually opt out of the spraying as well online. Many concerns were brought forth, including the potential harm to bees and the death of a 3-year-old. The plan requirements are vague and do not give the municipalities a clear understanding for what the expectations are.

Craig agreed that the plan requirements are very vague. The only expectation stated clearly is that the plan must include an educational component.

Collins suggested maybe being able to see an example of an approved submitted plan to use as a reference.

Hart agreed to reached out to Northampton and see the status of their plan submission and the possibility of obtaining a copy.

Chair Ravenhurst wondered if the fear surrounding this topic could be minimized by educating the community to provide clarity on what would trigger an emergency aerial spraying and the chemicals used in the application.

Christopher Craig mentioned that there would have to be confirmed occurrences over a large demographic area that could not be adequately addressed with other control methods. There is a Q&A section provide on the state's website that addresses frequently asked questions surrounding aerial spraying. Scheduling of the spraying can prove to be a difficult task, as the weather conditions must be favorable to do so. Both the temperature and wind patterns would have to be within certain margins to allow for a successful application.

Tony Judge questioned when South Hadley had last been sprayed.

Christopher Craig mentioned he had no recollection of the town ever being sprayed. The likelihood of EEE occurrence in this area is relatively low. Recently, there has been an uptick of occurrences within this area. Therefore, this District was established.

Hart shared that typically most occurrences are found underneath Red Maple and White Oak in swampy areas. These conditions can be found in the southeastern region of the state. It occurs in three-year cycles and certain weather conditions must be met. West Nile can be found in urban areas with unattended water. As a result, the Board adopted a regulation that requires all storm water detention basins to be drained with 72 hours. This reduces the amount of breeding sites for the mosquitoes.

Tony Judge asked where the trapping sites are in South Hadley.

Christopher Craig said he places traps in various spots throughout the town. The traps are strategically placed to get a good reading of the town. The chosen locations are those that would be conducive for mosquito breeding sites. This would include wetland/conservation area and forestland.

Chair Ravenhurst questioned what type of response a positive testing in South Hadley would bring.

Christopher mentioned that both the DPH and Mosquito Control District would work together and make recommendations for the town. Depending upon the severity of the occurrences, the recommendations could include hiring a private company for spraying or simply informing residents of the occurrences and encouraging precaution. The district will be expanding to respond to occurrences like this.

Director Hart recalled in the past the department has issued out informational memos in response to occurrences in nearby towns. Residents were encouraged to wear long sleeves and insecticide. Recreational departments were informed that activities taking place after dusk were highly discouraged.

Dr. McKiernan asked why there was mention of BTI and how does it relate to mosquitoes.

Christopher Craig replied by saying that BTI is a larvicide for mosquitoes. It is a bacteria based biological control agent that is poisonous to mosquitos. It is environmentally friendly and can be used for organic farms. The mosquito Control District will use it as their larvicide when they add chemical spraying to their services.

Collins was interested in capturing the conversation as there was a lot of concern within the town about aerial spraying. Residents had concerns about the possibility of planes dumping chemicals all throughout town. She confirmed that aerial spraying would only be considered if the situation was spread amongst several communities and was deemed an emergency by the state. The state would notify the Board of Health and community of the spraying prior to doing so.

Christopher Craig agreed with Collin's statement but made a point to mention that occurrences are happening in the Pioneer Valley, despite history saying otherwise. In 2019, there was an unprecedented number of cases recorded for this area. He attributes some of that to climate change. New England's weather is becoming more favorable for invasive species and mosquitoes.

Dr. McKiernan suggested that the Board thoroughly analyze the pros and cons if they were to consider opting out of the aerial spraying. Because spraying is only conducted in emergency circumstances, the risks associated with EEE, and West Nile may exceed the risks associated with the spraying.

Christopher Craig reiterated Dr. McKiernan's claim and said towns have decided against opting out to have the option available if an emergency outbreak did occur. With the opt out option, the town would be solely responsible for financing any necessary control methods.

Director mentioned she believed that the state could still possibly execute the aerial spraying even if a town opted out, as an emergency override. Property owners could opt out of the spraying via the state's website.

Johanna Ravenhurst volunteered to do more research on the opt out process, obtaining copies of approved town's opt out plans, and providing more information on what initiates an emergency order from the state. She also proposed that the Board consider looking into preventive measures for the town. This could include reducing habits, applying larvicide to problematic areas, and ditch maintenance.

Dr. McKiernan suggested having this as a running agenda item to stay current and proactive on this topic.

Emergency Orders to Vacate – Electric Shut-off

Director Hart explained that the covid protection has ended. Prior to this, the covid orders prohibited utilities from being shut off. Now that the orders have been rescinded, the utilities have been shut off for nonpayment. This resulted in 8 shut offs. SHELD notified the department on the shutoffs. Condemnation orders were issued on the dwellings. Several notice of compliance letters were sent out as payment was made. The remaining orders do not have occupants. Hart was looking for the Board to ratify the orders that were listed.

Chair Ravenhurst asked for clarification on why the need to ratify when the electricity has since been restored.

Director Hart explained that the Board will have to ratify the original condemnation order, regardless of compliance. Occupants were either able to pay or received assistance from an outside source. There are programs available for those who are in need and are facing covid related struggles at 413cares.org. This information will be available on the town's website.

Dr. Christine McKiernan made a motion to ratify the emergency orders to vacate presented by Sharon. Tony Judge seconded the motion. A rollcall was taken.

Karen Walsh Pio: Aye
Tony Judge: Aye
Dr. Christine McKiernan: Aye
Jessica Collins: Aye
Johanna Ravenhurst: Aye

COVID-19 Update

Director Hart shared that there was only one positive case and two contacts. She has worked with the Superintendent to schedule a mobile vaccine clinic at the middle and high school this upcoming Friday. Amherst is administering the vaccines to the interested parties between 10am-2pm. Hart is looking into the possibility of setting up a mobile clinic at the Village Commons that would service the business employees and owners. State reports show that 58% of South Hadley's eligible residents are vaccinated.

Chair Ravenhurst followed up by saying that the state has reports depicting the percent of eligible residents that are vaccinated separated by various categories. She wondered which category the Board would be interested in analyzing on a closer level. Some information could be deemed confidential.

Dr. Christine McKiernan highlighted that the 16–29-year-old age group have the lowest vaccination rates with the highest rate of infection. It would be imperative to target this group. Nationally there has been a significantly lower percentage of African Americans getting the vaccine. What strategies could the Board implement to help? She also mentioned it would be important to stay familiar with the data to provide knowledgeable suggestions and recommendations to inquiring parties, like the school committee.

Walsh Pio questioned what the possibility of the vaccine becoming a requirement is and what stipulations must be met in order to do so.

Dr. McKiernan responded that the vaccines are not FDA approved yet. This would make it very difficult to make it a requirement. They are currently under emergency use authorization only. Certain employers are looking into the possibility of requiring employees to be vaccinated, but there are specific

legalities surrounding that. Pfizer is in the process of submitting for FDA approval with Moderna trailing behind. The state of Massachusetts has exemptions that allows for those to be exempt from mandatory vaccines.

Chair Ravenhurst agreed to produce visuals for the vaccination rates in South Hadley. The visuals would include information on varying age groups and compare rates to those from Hampshire County.

Dr. McKiernan agreed this would be helpful in making decisions and/or suggestions surrounding any adjustments that may need to happen to safety protocols as unmasking and large gatherings continue to happen.

Ravenhurst recognized the covid update included in the supplemental documents. The update provided information on policy changes, programs, and resources available. This included rescinding the mask order and advising those that are unvaccinated to wear them. The definition of a close contact has also recently changed to exclude any interaction that takes place outside. Because of that, would it be possible to remove the signs on trails that require mask wearing.

Director Hart explained that is up to the Town Administrator because masking is still advised for those who are unvaccinated and some signage may be necessary.

4. Old Business:

Mobile Convenience Plus – E-Cigarettes – Update on Request to Speak

Jennifer Jernigan questioned if the chair had decided to invite the owner of Mobile Convenience plus to address his concerns surrounding the ban on e-cigarettes.

Chair Ravenhurst stated that the Board would not be inviting the owner to speak. Allowing him to speak would be revisiting items that were already thoroughly considered.

Director Hart verified that it is not legally required to do so with the Town Administrator and that the chair can decide.

What Health Departments Do and Board of Health Member Roles

Chair Ravenhurst suggested that the board consider establishing a masterplan with set goals for the future meeting. This would help set a direction and allow for the meetings to be more intentional.

5. Set Next Meeting Date – (TBD) at 4:30 p.m. in Selectboard Meeting Room

Director Hart mentioned that the Board typically does not meet in July or August to accommodate vacation schedules, but the ultimate decision is up to the Board. Moving forward, the meetings would have to be in person.

Chair Ravenhurst suggested meeting in July and August to be of use to the school committee. The meeting could be arranged to accommodate vacations.

Dr. McKiernan asked if the meeting time could be pushed back to accommodate her work schedule.

Chair Ravenhurst confirmed the next meeting for July 20, 2021, at 6 pm in the Selectboard Meeting room.

Collins volunteered to reach out to the school committee to get their meeting date and to see if they had any inquiries from the Board of Health.

6: Adjourn Meeting

Ravenhurst stated she would accept a motion to adjourn the meeting. Walsh Pio made the motion and Collins seconded it. A rollcall was taken.

Karen Walsh Pio: Aye

Dr. Christine McKiernan: Aye

Jessica Collins: Aye

Johanna Ravenhurst: Aye

Tony Judge: Aye

The meeting was adjourned at 6:58 pm.

ATTACHMENT A

DOCUMENT	RECORD LOCATION
Covid Update	BOH File
BTI for Mosquito Control	BOH File
MMWEC Statement on Project 2015A	BOH File