

February 25th, 2025 Meeting Minutes

11:00 - 12:00 pm EST

Virtual: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87121959948>

Voting members in attendance:

Kristel Bennett, Billerica
Donna Greenwood, Chelmsford
Shannon Gillis, Tewksbury
Kerri Oun, Tyngsborough

Non-voting members in attendance:

Cynthia Baker, BME Strategies
Haleigh Schultz, BME Strategies

I. Opening

4/4 voting members present, quorum was met.

Motion to start the meeting

Kerri Oun motioned to start the meeting. Donna Greenwood seconded the motion.

Billerica: Y

Chelmsford: Y

Tewksbury: Y

Tyngsborough: Y

All in favor.

Haleigh Schultz called the meeting to order at 11:02 am.

II. NEPHA Regional Staffing & Hiring Discussion

A. Regional Inspector

The Regional Inspector position is still posted. 11 candidates have submitted applications to date. Haleigh Schultz will continue to screen incoming applications and convene the Hiring Subcommittee as necessary. Given current staffing and capacity gaps, MoJin Solutions will provide interim coverage for inspections in Chelmsford, Tewksbury, Tyngsborough, with additional coverage in Billerica upon request.

Recent conversations with the group suggested a need for two full-time Regional Inspector hires. Haleigh brought the question back to the group to better understand current and future needs.

From a budget standpoint, the group's PHE funds are able to sustain the equivalent of three full-time regional staff members. Cynthia Baker noted that the number of Regional Inspectors hired will directly impact the group's capacity to backfill the Regional Public Health Specialist position.

Donna Greenwood suggested an initial full-time Regional Inspector hire (1.0 FTE), with the goal of a second part-time Regional Inspector (0.5 FTE) given Chelmsford's evolving needs. Shannon Gillis seconded the need for a part-time inspector in addition to a full-time hire. Kerri Oun suggested that Tyngsborough will only need part-time coverage. If the first inspector is split between Tyngsborough and Tewksbury, that would be sufficient assuming the inspector is completing all inspections as assigned. Donna noted that Chelmsford will need 6-7 food inspections each week.

Donna asked whether MoJin Solutions could continue providing coverage for the additional inspections. Cynthia reminded the group that within the scope of the PHE Grant, an ultimate goal is to provide sustainable capacity through regional hiring. The group can leverage MoJin as an interim solution, but DPH will likely not support long-term contractor coverage. If needed, municipalities can contract with MoJin directly.

Haleigh and Cynthia will work on putting together a 0.5 FTE Regional Inspector job description to leverage in addition to the current posting.

B. Regional Public Health Specialist

Given recent staff movement within the coalition, Haleigh Schultz inquired as to whether the group would like to fill the Regional Public Health Specialist position. Options include backfilling the full-time role, converting the role to part-time (0.5 FTE), or offering additional hours to existing municipal staff who might have the capacity and interest to participate in regional community health initiatives. If municipal staff are interested in additional hours, a part-time position could be created, or hours could be paid out on a per diem basis.

Kerri Oun asked what level of support is necessary to assist Ashley Pavlakos, NEPHA's Regional Public Health Nurse. Haleigh spoke with Ashley, who requested support for community engagement and outreach. Helpful support would include promoting upcoming events and clinics, providing support at events and clinics, and connecting community members with resources and services. Shannon Gillis seconded the need for this type of support.

The Health Directors agreed to speak to their municipal staff to assess interest in part-time hours with the coalition to fill some of the Regional Public Health Specialist responsibilities. The group asked whether benefits would be available for someone in this position. Kerri clarified that 19 hours/week is the threshold in Tyngsborough: if the role is listed at 20+ hours/week, the employee would receive benefits. Given municipal staff's interest, the Health Directors will regroup to agree upon next steps.

Cynthia Baker reiterated the group's current and future budget availability. Committing to three full-time staff (or equivalent FTE) provides sustainable coverage through the end of FY27. In addition to sustaining staff salaries, the group will have the flexibility and funding to explore additional project areas and programmatic expenses, such as strategic planning. With the caveat that strategic planning requires full staff participation, Cynthia asked whether the group would be interested. This would be an opportunity to align on a shared vision and develop clear goals as a coalition. The process would produce a clear action plan and resources to achieve the identified goals.

Donna asked whether the strategic planning would be sourced from an external contractor, or if this is something the group could do internally. Cynthia suggested that a contractor would provide the greatest benefit, given the specialized expertise necessary for comprehensive strategic planning. Given the timeline, incoming hires, and some folks being out of office in the coming months, Cynthia proposed an FY26 start to the strategic planning process. While there is some initial interest, the group requested more information. Haleigh and Cynthia will put together some resources for further discussion at a future meeting.

III. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting

Kerri Oun motioned to adjourn the meeting. Shannon Gillis seconded the motion.

Billerica: Y

Chelmsford: Y

Tewksbury: Y

Tyngsborough: Y

All in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 11:59 AM.