



Laura Vlasuk  
Director of Public Health

# CITY OF NEWBURYPORT BOARD OF HEALTH

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**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

## **\*Remote\* Board of Health Meeting** **August 18, 2022 7:00pm**

### **Attendees:**

Dr. Robin Blair, Chair  
Dr. Robert Slocum

Laura Vlasuk, Director of Public Health  
Michael Lawler, Office Manager

Joe Neipp, 37 Toppans Lane  
Capt. Paul Hogg, Newburyport Harbormaster

### **Minutes:**

#### **I. 7:00pm – Call to Order**

Dr. Robin Blair called the meeting to order at 7:05pm.

#### **II. Approval of Minutes**

Motion to approve the last meeting minutes by Dr. Slocum, seconded by Dr. Blair. Motion passes 2-0.

#### **III. Variance Request – 37 Toppans Lane, Newburyport, MA 01950**

Mr. Neipp explained that a deep hole test was done at 37 Toppans Lane for a new build and they went down a total of 10'2" and did not hit groundwater, but what they did hit at 14" was a perched water table (for 14" there was compact clay, and the water can't penetrate through the clay). The plan is to dig the foundation out and remove the 14" of clay then over dig by 4' and put a footing drain with stone. Then they will put stone 24" out with another drain so if water comes down it will go towards the drain. Option 2 is a sub pump with a chamber and then battery-operated pump. There is no water coming up and both neighboring houses have had no water coming through the basements.

Dr. Blair said the preferable plan would be to go with the plan that did not have the sub pump. Dr. Slocum asked if this is looked at by the Building Commissioner. Director Vlasuk explained that she showed all of this to the Building Commissioner, and he did not have an issue with any of it, but we do need to vote on the variance because the 2' slab above groundwater is a health regulation.

Mr. Neipp explained that in other towns, deep hole tests are under building department purview for construction and under health for septic systems. Director Vlasuk will look into moving this piece over to the Building Department.

Motion to approve variance by Dr. Slocum, seconded by Dr. Blair. Motion passes 2-0.

**IV. Discussion on Water Safety w/ Harbormaster Paul Hogg**

Capt. Hogg explained that we have signage at the beach about swimming in rip currents, but what seems to be the bigger issue is the undertow at the island.

The big thing that the Harbormaster Department is working on is lifeguards. Since COVID, lifeguards have not been on the island, so the department is working with the Mayor's Office and others to bring them back. There is a national shortage that is also playing a role in this.

A few years ago, kayaking was a major problem, with kayakers needing to be rescued weekly. In response, the Harbormaster Department started teaching a kayak safety class. The class was taught by Harbor Commission Member Ron Thurlow and has about 20 attendees per class. Also working with Plum Island Kayak since they are the biggest provider of kayak tours in the area.

Now that COVID has settled down a bit, the department is looking to bring back boater safety classes. Right now, anyone in Massachusetts can go get on a boat and drive it without a license. Capt. Hogg is working with the Massachusetts Harbormaster Association and other Harbormasters to bring legislation forward so boaters are required to have a license to operate. Right now there are a lot of inexperienced boaters and people can come to the Merrimack with no experience and rent a boat and go.

With this increase in inexperienced boaters, the Harbormaster has increased patrols. Part of the patrol duties also include going to the Plum Island sandbar as the tide turns to make sure that people get off the bar and back to the beach before it gets covered by water.

The department has also added safety rings to all City-owned and operated locations. This includes Plum Island, where the safety ring has already had to be recovered from being thrown in the water three times. In addition to the safety ring at Plum Island, there is also a defibrillator on the Harbormaster shed and during the summer, the lot is monitored by dock and lot attendants.

Starting in September, the \$11 million (mostly grant funded) dredge project will begin. This will improve the flow of water in the channel and also add sand to the beaches to help with erosion.

**V. Director's Report**

COVID-19 Numbers

August (cases thus far) – 51

Newburyport % Positivity – 6.86%

Statewide % Positivity – 7.76%

The Health Department hosted a follow-up COVID-19 vaccination clinic on August 11, 2022 with our partner VaxRX. There was no cost to the city for this clinic and it was very well received.

The White House declared Monkeypox a public health emergency. We have updated the Health Department webpage to include information on monkeypox ([www.cityofnewburyport.com/health-department/news/monkeypox-outbreak](http://www.cityofnewburyport.com/health-department/news/monkeypox-outbreak)). The Health Department is monitoring the situation and preparing should we start receiving calls or positive cases within the City.

The Health Department will be hosting a Blood Drive at the Senior Center on Wednesday, November 30, 2022 from 11am to 6:15pm. There will be a \$10 gift card by email to those who donate thanks to the Red Cross's partners at Amazon.

We are diligently working on records retention work in the department by redacting old files and making room for new projects.

Starting next week, we will be booking flu clinics. We have identified the following sites for clinics: River Valley Charter School, Newburyport High School, Nock Middle/Molin Upper Elementary School, Bresnahan Elementary School, Newburyport Senior Center (Council on Aging), Sullivan Building (Housing Authority), Horton Terrace (Housing Authority), Heritage House, James Steam Mill, Newburyport City Hall, Newburyport Fire Department, and the Newburyport Department of Public Services (DPS).

In March 2022, the City of Newburyport was selected as one of 140 communities across the country to be added the City Health Dashboard through the Put Us on the Map Challenge. This challenge was an opportunity for smaller cities (population size 3,000 to 50,000) to make their case for why their city should be added to the Dashboard and we were lucky enough to be chosen. The data will allow state and local officials, residents, and community leaders to dig deeper into health and the factor that drive health within the city while also illuminating the gaps and challenges facing the community. The data went live not too long ago and the dashboard can be accessed via a link on the Health Department webpage.

Finally, of our 150 food establishments, there are only 27 outstanding that have not completed the renewal process for their FY2023 Annual Food Establishment Permit. We are working on getting those final 27 completed and will have an update at our next meeting.

**VI. Set date for next Meeting**

Next meeting is set for Thursday, September 15, 2022 at 7:00pm

**VII. Session for topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of meeting**  
None.

**VIII. Adjourn**

Motion to adjourn by Dr. Slocum, seconded by Dr. Blair. Motion passes 2-0. Meeting adjourned at 7:36pm