

***Prevent. Promote. Protect.***

In these unprecedented times, these tenets of public health work are truer than ever! Our fiscal year began with hopes and excitement about a new strategic plan to bring Southborough Health Department into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Review of the much awaited “Blueprint for Public Health Excellence in Massachusetts” published in June of 2019 help us think about our current programs and services. We evaluated our current mission, vision and staffing requirements which led to much discussion and strategic planning. After the planned retirement of Leslie Chamberlin in February of 2020, the Board of Health hired a qualified part-time public health nurse, Emily Amico. Within a few short weeks however, all of our energy rapidly transitioned to our COVID-19 response. We were all personally challenged with the changes to our work locations, new technologies for children learning from home and staff working remotely. We all worked hard to support friends, family and neighbors while physically distancing ourselves while we were coping with so much uncertainty for the future. Emily was quickly thrust into a 24/7 focus on the health department’s response to the pandemic. The pandemic required an “all hands-on deck” response. The information was continually changing and evolving. The learning curve to stay informed and up to date was challenging at best. Our medical community, town administrators, schools, churches, businesses, and government agencies were all working hard to keep us safe and healthy. Our residents were asked to wash their hands, social distance, wear face coverings, and get tested as needed. The residents of Southborough responded. Although the pandemic is not over, we can all see the light at the end of this dark tunnel. The Board of Health and Health Department staff have been working closely with other town departments and committees to ensure that we are positioned to obtain and administer the vaccine when and if needed. Now more than ever, this pandemic has underlined the critical need for a robust and well-funded health department to conduct the business of local public health in Southborough.

Simultaneous with the COVID-19 impact, there has been a real estate boom in Southborough. Because our town does not have a municipal sewer system the Southborough Health Department is responsible for ensuring that all private sewer systems (there are over 4,000 such systems in town) are in compliance with the State Title 5 Code. Every house sale in town requires communication and sometimes inspections and plan reviews of the Southborough Health Department. As many of the house sales in town involve older homes, the Title 5 Code’s Mandatory Inspection Process prior to Title Transfer has triggered many “failed” systems. A “failed” system requires extensive work on the part of the health department. Builders, developers, real estate agents, and sellers have often become frantic trying to schedule the necessary soil tests and new septic plan approvals so that the sale process can proceed as planned. This has created a backlog of inspections and timelines, which we have not seen in years. Your Health Department has tried to cope with the current situation, trying to keep up with normal sanitary and environmental code inspectional mandates, answer the hundreds of questions that come through the office at all hours of the day, night and weekends and keep the wait-time for inspections as low as possible.

As Covid-19 has shown a light on the work of your local health department, it has become clear to the Board that many residents, including members of Boards and Committees in town, have only a minimal understanding of what our Health Departments does. Health Departments most often do their work behind the scenes. However, when there is a crisis, like a pandemic or an emergency event, the health department becomes front and center. For this reason, we would like to share some of the work that your local health department does to keep you safe and healthy.

**Preventing Disease and Promoting the Environment**

**Communicable Disease Surveillance - investigate** and report any Southborough cases of infectious diseases (over 90 different potential diseases), monitor lab results, document communications, and report data in the state communicable disease database. COVID-19 is a perfect example of this work. During FY21, we followed **276** confirmed cases of COVID-19, provided contact tracing for close to **500** individuals, and followed over **100** other communicable diseases.

**Immunizations** – providing opportunities for our vulnerable people to get vaccinated. The public health nurse works closely with the senior center, medical community and the schools to provide immunization and vaccines as needed. During FY21, we provided **4** flu clinics and vaccinated over **300** residents and town employees.

**Food Service Inspections** – providing mandated inspections of all public food service establishments and following up on any food service investigations, including schools, hotels, recreational camps, retail stores, mobile food units and pushcarts. Issue permits and licenses. In FY2, we conducted food services inspections and issued **51** food licenses.

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**Sewage Inspections** – providing subsurface sewage disposal system (SDS) inspections and permits, conduct soil-testing. Issue permits. In FY21, we provided permits for **75** SDS, **18** new construction, **23** complete replacements, **24** component part repair inspections, **1** sewer connection inspection, **2** inspections of abandoned sewer systems, and **1** inspection of non-hazardous holding tank. Issued **13** pumper/hauler licenses. Issued **26** licenses for septic installers.

**Soil Testing** – provide soil testing in compliance with State Title V code. In FY21 we provided Title V inspections for **130** systems. (**91** systems passed, **33** systems received a conditional pass with need for component replacement, and **6** were total failed systems). We also provided soil testing for **28** complete residential replacement systems, **22** new residential systems, and **2** commercial systems.

**Mosquito Control** – work with MDPH and Mosquito Control District to measure mosquito populations and infection rates in the area. Plan and schedule regular spraying to deter mosquito activity as needed. Educate the community about mosquito borne illnesses such as EEE.

**Substance Use Prevention** – work with Youth and Family Services and the Northborough-Southborough Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition to develop and implement strategies to educate residents and schools in the battle against the silent epidemic of substance misuse.

**Tobacco Control and Prevention** – regulate and license establishments that sell tobacco and vaping products. Enforce “no smoking” laws. work closely with a multi-town tobacco prevention coalition to provide education to residents and compliance checks of our licensed tobacco vendors in Southborough, ensured that laws limiting the sale to minors is enforced. In FY21 we revised the tobacco regulations in Southborough, limiting the number of available licenses available in town. **2** permits to sell tobacco we renewed in 2021. Permits are issued on a bi-annual cycle.

**Waste Disposal-** work with other town departments and committees to issue solid waste hauling licenses, collect data and generate reports.

**Hazardous Waste** – assess significance and degree of danger to public health. evaluate and report as required. In FY21, we evaluated and reported on a long-standing question of the Breakneck Hill “dump site”.

**Nuisances** – assess, evaluate and report any nuisances that may impact public health.

**Housing** – enforce state sanitary code and lead poisoning prevention regulations which include, inspecting housing code compliance, certifying violations, issuing orders, holding hearings, granting variances, and participating in court proceedings if necessary. In FY21 we assessed and inspected **3** housing complaint violations.

**Camps and Special Events**– inspect all recreational camps for children and issue licenses. enforcement includes conducting inspections, reviewing all medical records and orders, testing water, pools, and other public safety concerns.

**Pesticides** – we monitor and make reasonable regulation regarding pesticides that are consistent with Massachusetts Pesticide Control Act.

**Emergency Preparedness** – conduct all hazards planning, including emergency dispensing site plans. Participate in the 4AB Emergency Preparedness Coalition. In FY21 we were able to obtain supplies and consultation services of the Regional Planner to improve our preparedness for emergency dispensing site execution as we as preparations for emergency sheltering.

**Other Licenses and Permits** – issue licenses and permit as mandated by public health law In FY21 we issued **1** Funeral Director license.