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# **Town of Ashland, Office of the Board of Health**

Ashland Board of Health Meeting  
Meeting Minutes  
Ashland Town Hall  
Meeting Room A / Select Board Meeting Room  
101 Main Street, Ashland, MA  
January 7, 2026

*Ed Burman, Chair*  
*John Byrnes, Vice Chair*  
*Rajit Gupta, Health Agent/Director*

*David Kinsman, Clerk*  
*Barbra Sekesogundu Simon, Member*  
*Maurice Krasner, Member*

## **Board Members Present**

Ed Burman, Jay Byrnes, David Kinsman, and Barbra Sekesogundu Simon.

## **Others Present**

Rajit Gupta, Health Director  
Laura Clifford, Administrative Assistant

## **Call Meeting to Order in Meeting Room A; 7:00 PM.**

Mr. Burman called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM in Meeting Room A.

## **Approval of Pending Permits, (Retail Food: CVS Pharmacy, Animal Permit: John Byrnes)**

Retail Food Permit, CVS Pharmacy

**Motion:** Mr. Byrnes motioned to approve the CVS Pharmacy Retail Food Permit; the motion was seconded by Mr. Kinsman.

**Vote:** 4-0-0. Motion approved.

## **Animal Permit, John Byrnes**

**Motion:** Mr. Kinsman motioned to approve the Animal Permit of John Byrnes; the motion was seconded by Ms. Sekesogundu Simon.

**Vote:** 3-0-1. (Mr. Byrnes abstained).

## **Move to Join Select Board Meeting, in Select Board Meeting Room**

The Board relocated to the Select Board Meeting Room.

*Discuss Nicotine-Free Generation with Select Board*

Dr. Zachary Rich discussed his background as a lung and critical care physician; he shared a slide presentation that overviewed the Nicotine-Free Generation policies.

What: NFG policies target those born after a certain birthday, rather than age. It has been a global effort, with Brookline becoming first to implement the policies in 2020. There are currently 21 communities in Massachusetts that have passed Nicotine-Free Generation. Dr. Rich discussed this being a bipartisan issue, much of this work stems from the Tobacco-21 work; which Ashland was a leader in.

Why: 70% of people wish they never started. 90% of adults started by age 18. Dr. Rich discussed the impact on school-aged children; he encouraged having a forum with high school students in attendance.

How: Dr. Rich shared proposed language from the Public Health Advocacy for creating a policy for Ashland.

Ms. Kinsman noted that there is a 21+ age restriction before anyone can purchase tobacco products. It becomes a slippery slope when telling adults what they can and cannot do; she expressed concern that it will not dissuade people from using tobacco products, only from purchasing it in Town, which will hurt Ashland's business owners. She would prefer the State to take action, not town-by-town implementation.

Ms. Bennett expressed concern with children who are exposed to tobacco use in schools, who worry about their friends who are vaping. Ms. Bennett inquired as to the impact on businesses who have implemented this policy; Dr. Rich noted that in Brookline there are no retailers who have had to shut down their stores.

Ms. Keegan noted it is an interesting proposal but believes the net effect makes it impossible for people of legal age to make a choice to smoke or not; she expressed concern with the implementation, particularly the impacts to small business owners; that to be effective, believes it should be regional.

Ms. Keegan inquired, and Dr. Rich responded, that they are having similar conversations with the surrounding towns; many towns take a wait and see approach to see what their neighboring towns are doing.

Ms. Greaves recognized Ashland's leadership role in passing Tobacco21 laws, and voting to not allow marijuana; she would be interested in obtaining more information regarding what other communities are doing.

Professor Katharine Silbaugh of Brookline, MA, noted that it was not until 151 towns passed Tobacco21 before the State acted and implemented it.

Mr. Magnani discussed his career as a Police Officer and his experience dealing with youth issues; Ms. Keegan would like to hear from the youth in Town as they are the ones being impacted; Mr. Magnani agreed and stated that he will send an invitation up to the High School.

Alex Wetheral, is a convenience store owner in Sherborn, MA, and was in attendance to lend support to his peer retailers in Ashland. Mr. Wetheral spoke of the accelerating decline in tobacco sales. He feels that NFG demonizes retailers and stated that less than 5% of Massachusetts Towns have implemented this policy.

Steven Helfer, Cambridge resident, stated that he is a part of Cambridge Citizens for Smokers Rights; and stated that according to the CDC and FDA, the teenage smoking rate is the lowest it has been on record, it is a form of total prohibition over time.

Rick Lopez, Member of the Reading Board of Health, discussed passing NFG in June 2024 after a lengthy hearing. They received 200 emails, pros and cons, from residents, it was a very active process which they decided to move forward on; he noted that no retailers have gone out of business. Mr. Lopez said that 8-12% of Reading students use nicotine products in Reading; if they can see any decline in use, that would be helpful.

Paul Kendall, resident, discussed the need to be careful when implementing policies not to restrict freedoms and choices, but when it comes to public health, smoking is one of the reasons why our health care system is strained, which impacts us all. Mr. Kendall encouraged the Boards to continue the conversation, to seek more information; to make a sound decision.

Ken Elstein, Member of the Belchertown Board of Health, discussed passing NFG one year ago; he noted the retailers have adapted. Mr. Elstein noted that Amherst is the latest community to pass NFG.

John Byrnes, Ashland Board of Health Vice Chair, explained that during their December 16<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Board Members agreed that this is more of a personal health / personal choice issue; it is interesting to hear from Members of other Health Boards from around the State. Mr. Byrnes stated that the Board felt this is more of a personal choice issue, and for it to have a true democratic process would be through a Citizens Petition, and ultimately to Town Meeting, to let the residents vote on it. If it were to pass, the Board of Health would implement the measures that would need to be put in place.

Ms. Kinsman agreed, noting she may not be comfortable with making that decision for the entire community without having the community being able to weigh in on it.

Ed Burman, Ashland Board of Health Chair, explained that the Board discussed this in length, and noted that the Members did not feel it should be left to the five Board Members to make this kind of decision for the whole Town; therefore, they asked that the Health Director, Rajit Gupta, bring it to the Town Manager, to discuss with the Select Board.

Mr. Magnani inquired as to the Board of Health's availability for a public forum; Mr. Burman agreed they would be available. Mr. Magnani inquired, and Dr. Rich responded, that of the 21 communities that have passed this, 19 were passed by the Board of Health.

Susan Jensen, resident, discussed her personal experience with cigarettes and tobacco, and the impact it had on her life; she feels this is a public health issue under the Board of Health's purview.

Amy Turncliff, resident, public health policy advocate, spoke in favor of the NFG policy, the harmful effects of nicotine, and the tobacco industry's development of addictive products that appeal to young people who become lifelong customers; she believes the NFG policy will impact adolescent perceptions in a positive way.

Scott Francis, resident, stated he works for MOAR, Massachusetts Organization for Addiction Recovery, which is in support of the Nicotine-Free Generation legislation; he said of all the addictions, tobacco is the most difficult to overcome. Mr. Francis discussed the negative impacts of tobacco use, and second-hand smoke.

Chuck Lidz, resident, explained how he has been impacted personally by tobacco use by others.

Jonathan Leopold, Cambridge, Smokers' Rights volunteer, stated that he finds smoking enjoyable.

Mr. Magnani said this will be taken under advisement; he does not disagree with it being brought to Town Meeting and having the people vote on it; Ms. Greaves recommended the Board of Health hold a public forum, at a time where high school and middle school students, and others who may be impacted by this, may attend.

### **Adjournment**

**Motion:** Ms. Sekesogundu Simon made a motion to adjourn the Board of Health meeting; Mr. Kinsman seconded the motion.

**Vote:** 4-0-0. Motion approved.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.

**ASHLAND BOARD OF HEALTH**  
**DOCUMENTS REVIEWED AT THE 1/7/2026 MEETING**  
(All items stored in the Board of Health files unless otherwise noted)

1. Nicotine-Free Generation PPT Slide – Dr. Zachary Rich