Massachusetts has a decentralized governance structure where the 351 cities and towns are independently organized for the delivery of local public health services and operate autonomously from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. The cities and towns, each with its own Board of Health, are responsible for assuring access to a comprehensive set of services defined by state law and regulations. The Massachusetts Association of Health Boards (MAHB) provides a summary of the Duties of Local Boards of Health in Massachusetts on its web site. The Town of Monson Board of Health, together with other local and state resources, performs the following duties which are conducted during regular business hours of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 7:30am to 12 noon. The office is closed on Thursdays: 1) Regulate and protect the community’s general health through disease control and health care. 2) Inspect, issue permits and enforce state sanitary code standards for local housing and dwellings. 3) Inspect and issue permits for residential septic systems under Title 5 regulations. 4) Inspect and issue permits for food service and food production establishments, pools, camps, motels and mobile home parks. 5) Regulate solid waste, hazardous waste, garbage and nuisances injurious to public health, including air pollution and tobacco regulations. 6) Control potential threats to public health from beaver damage and issue permits to allow the trapping of beavers. 7) Regulate tobacco sales to minors and enforce environmental tobacco smoke regulations. 8) Permit and inspect body art establishments, tanning salon establishments and massage therapists. 9) Keep records on all of the above.

The Monson Board of Health consists of an Administrative Assistant, Claire Forgues as well as, Lorri McCool, Health Inspector/Title V agent, and a governing board of up to five appointed members who are trained and certified by the Massachusetts Association of Health Boards. This year the MAHB Conference was held in Taunton, Ma. and three members received their current certifications. The Board of Health meetings were generally held on the first and third Wednesdays of each month at 110 Main St. and were open to the public. Questions or appointments to meet with the Board may be addressed by calling the Board of Health office at 267-4107 or emailing to boh@monson-ma.gov. Updates and information about the Board of Health, as well as links to information concerning public health may be found at the town web site: http://www.monson-ma.gov/board-health

The Board of Health Inspector oversees the enforcement of; and education for, public health issues and regulations. In response to complaints of violations, the Inspector determines the health risk and follows up with a letter to, or contact with, the affected parties to resolve the situation. When compliance with an order is not obtained within the specified time, the Inspector will continue enforcement through the legal process. The Health Inspector is also required to handle all aspects of the enforcement of Title V of the Environmental Code. This includes witnessing all site assessments required during the percolation testing for new construction and repairs of all leach fields in Monson. The proposed design for the new leach field or any component is submitted for the inspector to review/approve. The inspector is then required to conduct all field inspections of the installation to assure compliance with the approved design. In 2016, the inspector witnessed 23 percolation tests, reviewed 32 septic designs and inspected 30 installations.

The Health Inspector for the Town of Monson and her counterpart for the Palmer Board of Health are developing guidelines for the two towns’ shared dog and animal control officers. Also, there have been some personnel changes. Newly appointed by the Town of Monson is Pam Harris who, along with her other duties, will conduct barn inspections. Former Chairman of the Board, Carrie Payne, resigned following 4 years of service to focus on completing her Master’s degree program. Beau Schneider was
subsequently elected Chairman. Under the direction of the Health Inspector, Finn McCool has joined the Board of Health as a Title V/Health Inspector intern.

The Health Inspector, Lorri McCool also represents the Town of Hampden and Wilbraham at the Hampden County Health Coalition and Regional Emergency Planning Committee, which meets monthly to discuss and initiate preparedness and public health initiatives. Throughout the year, various drills are conducted to evaluate emergency response. The Monson Board of Health, as a member of the Hampden County Health Coalition, has also become a part of the Health and Medical Coordinating Coalition (HMCC). This coalition is comprised of individual healthcare organizations in Western MA (Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties) that agree to work together to maximize surge capacity and capability during medical and public health emergencies by coordinating preparedness planning, facilitating information sharing, mutual aid, and response coordination. In Monson, all Board of Health members are also members of Monson’s Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) which currently has 40+ members. MRC volunteers participate in MA Responds and DPH Region I MRC drills throughout the year. They are trained to respond to large scale fire events and natural disasters. Together with the Board of Health, they administer relief and shelter services, currently at Quarry Hill School, as needed in the event of any local disaster or weather related crisis. Another shared responsibility is the maintenance and administration of the Disaster Animal Relief Trailer (DART). It is designed and set up to deliver support and materials to care for pets that arrive at a shelter with their owners.

The Board of Health manages new wells in town. The well company obtains a permit from the BOH and this year 13 new well permits were issued. The drillers work in conjunction with the Health Inspector for proper location and submit completed documentation on well and water quality after completion. All of this information is kept in file in the BOH office. In accordance with the Wellhead Protection Regulation, 310.CMR22.2 1 (2)(a), the Board of Health also enforces regulations on commercial floor drains, which helps to ensure the removal of harmful chemicals that could get into the ground water and pollute the town’s wells.

Drinking water quality is a shared concern of the Board of Health and the Monson Water Department. Accordingly, the MA Department of Public Health (DPH) is working with the MA Department of Environmental Protection (MA DEP) to increase awareness of the importance of reducing exposure to lead and high levels of copper. Recent water testing at all Monson public schools indicated the presence of unacceptable levels of lead, copper, or both at a few of the 531 samples taken. All of those where within acceptable levels once they were allowed to run for 30 seconds. The Town of Monson will be working with the MA DEP Drinking Water Program to completely remedy this situation.

Together with the Conservation Commission, the Board of Health continues to oversee the implementation of the State Beaver Bill. When problems arise with beavers damming up waterways, the Board of Health inspects to determine if a public safety or health impact is present. When a health or safety issue is present, such as flooding of well heads, basements, and public ways, the Board grants a permit for the trapping of the beaver(s). This year the Board of Health updated the beaver permits to include follow-up data about the number of beavers that were trapped on a given permit.

The Board’s semi-annual Bulky Days events continued to challenge our resources. The 196 vehicles participating in the Fall event represented about 5% of eligible households. The costs for disposal of the collected items have continued to escalate significantly each year, especially for electronics and tires. The Nomads of Hope of Monson conducted a recycling event at the First Church concurrent with the Fall Bulky Day and have offered to continue to provide an alternative site for recycling and disposal of some items.

Under the Attorney General’s new ‘Abandoned Housing Initiative,’ the Town of Monson has identified a number of houses as dilapidated or abandoned and likely eligible for the Initiative. The Board of Health plays a role in that the Initiative falls under the State Sanitary Code. These properties characteristically have incurred a large amount of title debt. The goal is to bring the properties up to sanitary code and to encourage perspective buyers and benefit existing property owners.
The Board of Health continues to monitor the incidences of West Nile Virus, EEE, the Flu and a number of other diseases that potentially represent a public health threat. Through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health on-line portal, the BOH monitors the incidence of communicable disease in our community and follows up with information gathering and case reporting back to the MDPH.

The Board would like to thank Republic Services for awarding a $750.00 scholarship to a Monson High School senior this year and also for their generous donation to the "Gifts to the Town" account. This year Republic Services gifted funds were used to purchase a Network Extender which has greatly improved cell phone service at the Town Office building. Republic Services' community commitment, generosity and continued support is greatly appreciated.

The Board would especially like to thank members of the community whose commitment and dedication assisted the Board of Health in their efforts this year. We gratefully acknowledge the efforts of community members, local businesses, and town departments. Their support and cooperation have truly enabled the Board of Health to successfully fulfill its mission.

Respectfully submitted,

John (Beau) Schneider, RN, Chairman
Wayne Yee, Vice Chairman
Vicki Alfano, RTR
Joanna Sorreiro
Lorri McCool, Title V/Health Inspector
Claire Forgues, Adm. Assistant