



Analyzing and Aligning Permit Fees:

Comparative Insights and MHOA Calculator Customization in the Charles River Public Health District

November 5, 2025

Speakers



Janice Chen

Public Health
Consultant,
BME Strategies



**Timothy
McDonald**

Director, Needham
Department of
Health and Human
Services

Agenda

01 Background

02 Objective

03 Methodology

04 Suggested Calculator Workflow

05 Recommendations & Conclusion

06 Q&A



Background

Permitting services and establishments is a key responsibility of local public health in Massachusetts. However, significant **data gaps** limit understanding of the financial landscape surrounding permit fees and fines.



Key Data Gaps

- 01 Limited Cost Data:** Few analyses examine the *actual costs incurred* by local health departments to deliver required services.
- 02 Unclear Fee Alignment:** It was uncertain whether current fee structures reflect these true costs.
- 03 Sparse Comparative Analyses**
 - Few comparisons of permit fees across municipalities within a Shared Service Arrangement (SSA)
 - Limited benchmarking against peer communities of similar size and demographics



Objective

To address these data gaps, the [Charles River Public Health District](#) (Dover, Medfield, Needham, Sherborn) partnered with [BME Strategies](#) to launch a comprehensive permit fee analysis project.

Methodology

The permit fee analysis project was conducted in two distinct phases.

Phase 1: Fee Cost Analysis

Objective 1: Identify permits issued in Charles River Public Health District (CRPHD) towns and compare the towns to like-communities, and to each other



Phase 2: MHOA Permit Fee Calculator Customization

Objective 2: To assess fees against the labor time and other associated costs required to provide permit services

Phase 1: Fee Cost Analysis

Objective: Identify permits issued in towns, and compare CRPHD towns to like-communities and to each other.

Initial Review of Fee Schedules

Schedules were found on the website of each community, and latest “available” fees were assessed.

Split Fees into 3 Major Categories

Fee schedules could be generally sorted into three categories: Septic, Food, and Miscellaneous.

Grouped Similar Fees for Comparison

Similar fees among the four schedules were grouped for comparison.

Generated Summary Statistics

Summary statistics of the fees, such as the mean and standard deviation, were generated from the grouping.

Expanded Fee Comparison

Fees of the individual CRPHD communities were also compared to their like-municipalities*.

***Like-municipalities were determined based on demographic information, rurality, and community type.**

Phase 1 Key Takeaways

- **Fee Differences:** CRPHD municipalities have varying permit fees compared to each other and to similar communities, indicating a need for greater insight into how fees are set and what costs they reflect.
- **Cost Influences:** Permit fees may be shaped by differences in municipal capacity, resources, contractors, and external factors.
- **Analysis Level:** The fee analysis was best conducted at the municipality-level, rather than the shared service arrangement level.

Phase 2: MHOA Calculator Customization

Objective: Assess fees against the labor time and other associated costs required to provide permit services.

MHOA Permit Fee Calculator Overview

- Developed by MHOA for local public health departments in MA to set permit fees (found within MHOA's Local Public Health Guide)
- Permit Fee Calculator Purpose
 - ✓ Permit fees should be based on actual costs associated with local public health departments to provide the services
 - ✓ Fee Schedules must be defensible and not arbitrary
- Calculator costs for 5-year time period
 - ✓ Recommendation to revisit costs every 5 years

MHOA Permit Fee Calculator Customization

Permit Type	Permit Duration	Admin Time (min)	Inspection Time (min)	Total Time (min)	Hours to Perform Service	Hourly Rate	Cost of Service	Calculated Permit Fee (rounded up to nearest \$10)
FOOD SERVICE								
Food Establishment Risk Category 0 (1 inspection/yr)	Annual	20	20	40	0.67	\$ 82.66	\$ 55.11	\$ 60.00
Food Establishment Risk Category 1 (1 inspection/yr)	Annual	20	45	65	1.08	\$ 82.66	\$ 89.55	\$ 90.00
Food Establishment Risk Category 2 (2 inspections/yr)	Annual	20	150	170	2.83	\$ 82.66	\$ 234.20	\$ 240.00
Food Establishment Risk Category 3 (3 inspections/yr)	Annual	20	450	470	7.83	\$ 82.66	\$ 647.49	\$ 650.00
Food Establishment Risk Category 4 (4 inspections/yr)	Annual	20	600	620	10.33	\$ 82.66	\$ 854.13	\$ 860.00
Residential Kitchen (1 inspection/yr)	Annual	20	40	60	1.00	\$ 82.66	\$ 82.66	\$ 90.00
Caterer Base of Operations (2 inspections/yr)	Annual	20	120	140	2.33	\$ 82.66	\$ 192.87	\$ 200.00
Mobile Food No Food Service (1 inspection/yr)	Annual	20	15	35	0.58	\$ 82.66	\$ 48.22	\$ 50.00
Mobile Food With Food Service (2 inspections/yr)	Annual	20	90	110	1.83	\$ 82.66	\$ 151.54	\$ 160.00
Frozen Dessert Manufacturer (wholesale) (1 inspection/yr)	Annual	20	45	65	1.08	\$ 82.66	\$ 89.55	\$ 90.00
Frozen Dessert Manufacturer (retail) (1 inspection/yr)	Annual	20	20	40	0.67	\$ 82.66	\$ 55.11	\$ 60.00
Farmer's Market No Food Service (1 inspection/season)	Seasonal	20	15	35	0.58	\$ 82.66	\$ 48.22	\$ 50.00
Farmer's Market With Food Service (1 inspection/season)	Seasonal	20	45	65	1.08	\$ 82.66	\$ 89.55	\$ 90.00
Temporary Food No Food Service (less than 14 days with single event)	Temporary	20	15	35	0.58	\$ 82.66	\$ 48.22	\$ 50.00
Temporary Food With Food Service (less than 14 days with single event)	Temporary	20	45	65	1.08	\$ 82.66	\$ 89.55	\$ 90.00

Note: The permit types shown here are examples from MHOA permit fee calculator. Please update these to reflect your municipality's actual fee schedule.

Required Data Inputs For Calculating Hourly Rate

- Health Department Positions
- FTE of those Positions
- Annual Salaries for Positions
- % FTE to EH
- Annual Vacation Hours
- Operating Budgets (Split into General and Permitting Operating Budget)
- Cost of Living Adjustment (Percentage)
- Anticipated increase/decrease in EH Staff
- Most Updated Fee Schedules

Hourly Rate	
\$	82.66
\$	82.66
\$	82.66
\$	82.66
\$	82.66
\$	82.66
\$	82.66
\$	82.66
\$	82.66
\$	82.66
\$	82.66
\$	82.66
\$	82.66
\$	82.66
\$	82.66

Required Time Inputs

- Administrative time for permits and plan reviews
- Inspector time for permits and plan reviews

Admin Time (min)	Inspection Time (min)
20	20
20	45
20	150
20	450
20	600
20	40
20	120
20	15
20	90
20	45
20	20
20	15
20	45
20	15
20	45

MHOA Permit Fee Calculator Customization

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Suggested Calculator Customization Workflow

Lessons Learned from the CRPHD Fee Analysis Project

01

Identify individuals within the health department that are needed to customize the calculator.

02

**Collect Data Inputs
(as seen in previous slides)**

03

Allocate Inspection and Administrative Time, in minutes, for both the administrative and the inspection portions of each of the permit fees.

Suggested Calculator Customization Workflow

Lessons Learned from the CRPHD Fee Analysis Project

01

Identify individuals within the health department that are needed to customize the calculator.

Considerations

- Access to **all data inputs** is required to complete the calculator.
- **Information may come from multiple sources** within the health department, which can take time to gather.
- This project **identified this step as a key bottleneck** in customizing the calculator.
- Individuals must **estimate administrative and inspection time** for each permit fee in their municipality.

Suggested Calculator Customization Workflow

Lessons Learned from the CRPHD Fee Analysis Project

02

*Collect Data
Inputs (as seen in
previous slides)*

Considerations

- The calculator includes all department personnel.
- Requires two budgets:
 - **Environmental Health (EH) budget** – specific to permitting.
 - **Department-wide budget** – overall department budget excluding EH activities.
- Budgets may need to be proportionally allocated between EH and Department categories using FTE-based estimates.

Suggested Calculator Customization Workflow

Lessons Learned from the CRPHD Fee Analysis Project

03

Allocate Inspection and Administrative Time, in minutes, for both the administrative and the inspection portions of each of the permit fees.

Considerations

- Time allocation can be challenging when administrative and inspection time vary across permits.
- Define and apply consistent boundaries for what counts as administrative and inspection time.
- Use framing questions to guide definitions:
 - What does administrative and inspection time mean in your municipality?
 - When does permitting take more time?
 - Is this time representative of typical cases?
- The calculator separates permits and plan reviews; parsing both can be time-intensive.
 - Municipalities may focus on the 'Permits' sheet as a practical alternative.
- The calculator applies only to Environmental Health permitting activities.

Tracking Impacts to Revenue

Permit Type	Total Number of Permits *	Current Permit Fees *	Current Revenue *	Calculated Permit Application Fees	Projected Revenue Based on Calculated Fees	Difference
FOOD	(Plan Review Fees <u>Not</u> Included)					
Food Establishment Risk Category 0	19	\$ 25.00	\$ 475.00	\$ 60.00	\$ 1,140.00	\$ 665.00
Food Establishment Risk Category 1	52	\$ 75.00	\$ 3,900.00	\$ 90.00	\$ 4,680.00	\$ 780.00
Food Establishment Risk Category 2	43	\$ 100.00	\$ 4,300.00	\$ 240.00	\$ 10,320.00	\$ 6,020.00
Food Establishment Risk Category 3	13	\$ 150.00	\$ 1,950.00	\$ 650.00	\$ 8,450.00	\$ 6,500.00
Food Establishment Risk Category 4	7	\$ 200.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 860.00	\$ 6,020.00	\$ 4,620.00
Residential Kitchen	5	\$ 100.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 90.00	\$ 450.00	\$ (50.00)
Caterer Base of Operations	2	\$ 150.00	\$ 300.00	\$ 200.00	\$ 400.00	\$ 100.00

The last tab of the calculator allows new and old permit fees to be compared by tracking differences in current revenue and projected revenue.

Calculator Recommendations

- Revisit Permit Fee Costs every 5 years
- Special circumstances where fees should be re-evaluated before 5 years include but are not limited to:
 - Unexpected staff reduction/addition
 - Large changes to budgets
 - Necessity for new permit types
 - Unexpected Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) changes
 - Technological advancements
 - Public Health Emergencies
- Community-Specific Needs: Calculator should be used as a planning resource for fee assessment in conjunction with other tools and information within the municipality.

Conclusion

- The CRPHD Fee Analysis Project provided **data-driven insights into permit fees** across Dover, Medfield, Needham, and Sherborn, which revealing key differences among fee schedules.
- Customizing the MHOA Permit Fee Calculator enabled assessment of labor time, and other cost drivers, creating a framework for **defensible, accurate fees**.
- The project demonstrates a **forward-looking approach** to ensure sustainable funding for evolving public health services.



Q&A with Tim McDonald



MHOA Calculator Walkthrough



Thank you so much for your time!

Please reach out to jchen@bmestrategies.com with any questions.