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AROUND THE STATE

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Pepperell's annual fee is \$30,000.

Nashoba's much larger nursing division, based in Shirley, administers immunizations, furnishes health-related information, and makes house visits to seniors and others. Nursing division services are charged back to communities on a fee-for-service basis. Last fiscal year, Pepperell paid an additional \$24,000 for services furnished by the nursing division. Residents in participating towns can contract for other services through the nursing division, such as home health care. The nursing division accounts for about two-thirds of Nashoba Associated Boards of Health's income.

The costs that member towns pay have risen only marginally over the past twenty-four years: 8 or 9 percent for the environmental services and 12 to 13 percent on the nursing side, according to Garreff. The towns themselves, through a governing board consisting of board of health members from each community, have the final say on increases.

The amount that each town pays for environmental division services is no longer on a strict per-capita basis, given the uneven growth in the region in recent decades. Garreff says the Board of Directors has expressed interest in reviewing alternative means of assessment. He adds that the membership fees that towns pay for environmental-division services function much like an insurance policy. "The membership understands that in a health association, at any given time, a certain town may need more services," he says. "The idea is that over time, it balances out so everybody gets the services they need."

Pepperell Board of Health Chair Robert Lambert says that contracting with Nashoba Associated Boards of Health made sense for a number of reasons, such as offsetting the loss of the town nurse position and a 50 percent reduction in hours for the Pepperell Board of Health secretary, from thirty to fifteen. The move also enabled the town to cut a fifteen-hour health agent position that Lambert himself once filled. That role is now handled by Nashoba's Kalene Garbarz, who devotes well over twenty hours per week to Pepperell. At least two other Nashoba health agents also conduct inspections in the town. "We've had no complaints—and I'm usually the one to get them," Lambert says. "But I haven't heard from anyone so far." ❁