

Board of Water Commissioners

Meeting Agenda

Monday, July 21, 2025 @ 7:00 PM

- Comments from the public
- Approve minutes from the meeting of 7/7
- Appoint one Commissioner to sign warrants while conducting meetings virtually

OLD BUSINESS:

- Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)
- Current sample data, if available
- Discussion of Additional PFAS Upgrades
- Annual Audit

NEW BUSINESS:

- Discussion of Public Hours of District Office
- Route 2 Main Break
- OPEB Trust Roll Forward Report

**Present at Tonight's Meeting:**

Commissioners: Stephen Stuntz (Chair), Erika Lin, Barry Rosen

Finance Committee: John Petersen

District Manager: Matthew Mostoller

Treasurer/Collector: Christine McCarthy

Deputy District Manager: Corey Godfrey

Public: Ron Parenti, Kim Kastens

## **START OF MINUTES**

Mr. Stuntz opened the meeting at 7:00.

### **Comments from the public**

None at this time.

### **Approve minutes from the meeting of 7/7**

Mr. Rosen motioned to approve the minutes of 7/7/25. Ms. Lin seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved via a roll call vote, Ms. Lin, Mr. Rosen, Mr. Stuntz.

### **Appoint one Commissioner to sign warrants while conducting meetings virtually**

Mr. Stuntz motioned to appoint Mr. Rosen to sign warrants until the next regularly scheduled meeting. Ms. Lin seconded, and it was unanimously approved via a roll call vote, Ms. Lin, Mr. Stuntz, Mr. Rosen.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

### **Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)**

#### **Current sample data, if available**

Mr. Mostoller reported no new sample data; July sample results will be ready for the next meeting.

#### **Discussion of Additional PFAS Upgrades**

Mr. Mostoller reported to the board that both projects are making progress. This week they are selecting the interior paint for the Center Acton building. They will also have a coordinating meeting regarding the startup of the Bedrock Wells. There is still no response from MassDEP regarding the previous request on an early activation.

On the South Acton project, they are waiting for the concrete to cure and have worked through the backlog of clarifications and changes to the design to reflect what the District needs for operational ease, and things that would not have worked in the field.

### **Annual Audit**

Ms. McCarthy reported that the annual audit is going well. The only potential delay is due to some reporting from the retirement system that is not yet available. The auditors have been informed, and they will compile what they can. They did receive federal reimbursements from the Clean Water Trust for both the South and Center projects. The

auditors reported that they don't think this will affect FY 25 since the funds were received after June 30<sup>th</sup> and they go by the date received. Because of this, this will most likely trigger a single audit for FY 26.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

### **Discussion of Public Hours of District Office**

Mr. Mostoller wanted to bring this topic before the board to gauge their thoughts. Currently the front office hours are 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Since Covid, however, Mr. Mostoller has noticed a decline in foot traffic and phone calls, many of which are now being made digitally via the WaterSmart portal, or via email. Overall, their in-person contact with customers is very low.

The Town of Acton, seeing similar trends, recently reduced their public-facing hours. Mr. Mostoller commented that if the District decided to pursue a similar reduction it may result in better staffing for those public facing hours. Mr. Mostoller wanted to bring this idea to the board for discussion.

Mr. Stuntz asked how the Town's hours have changed. Mr. Mostoller did not have the exact times, but the Town did roll back their late hours on Tuesday evenings. Mr. Mostoller commented that this would just be a change of public-facing hours, management staff, and operations would still have their own schedule.

Mr. Rosen asked how many people they see at the office on average before 9:00 a.m. Mr. Mostoller responded that when he started working for the District it was not uncommon for people to be waiting outside at 7:30 a.m. however, they do not see that anymore. Mr. Mostoller responded that he would be amazed if they had 2-3 people arrive before 9 a.m. and that 9:30 or 10:00 to 2:30 tends to be the busiest.

Ms. Lin asked if there's a time of day when they get more calls. Mr. Mostoller said the only busy time for calls is if there's a problem with the system, like a water main break or a public notice being sent to customers. Mr. Mostoller added that project discussions, final reading processes, and other activities are often entirely virtual now.

Ms. Lin asked if Mr. Mostoller has any suggested targets for where he thinks reductions may work best. Mr. Mostoller responded that at minimum, starting at 8 or 8:30 would work, and possibly ending at 3:00 instead of 4:00 in the afternoon, as he's seen very little, if any, foot traffic in the 3:00 hour.

Ms. Lin asked if Mr. Mostoller's thoughts on this include any seasonality, to which he replied, no.

Mr. Stunz commented that he would be comfortable with a reasonable reduction in hours. Mr. Rosen agreed that he doesn't see a problem with making a reasonable change that would not impact when customers are already choosing to visit the office.

Mr. Mostoller added that the District will continue to be 24/7 and we always have someone on call so this alteration in public hours will not affect their immediate response structure. It primarily comes down to customer bill payment and occasionally helping people with rebate applications or the senior discount.

Ms. Lin asked if there would be cost savings associated with this change. Mr. Mostoller responded that there could be cost savings on the administrative staff, but if the consensus was that the board was interested, Mr. Mostoller and Ms. McCarthy would look more closely at how a reduction could impact costs. A possible reduction would be to reduce the FTE from 2 to 1.5, while looking at core business functions, and how much time is spent on that versus customer service.

Mr. John Petersen commented that for the Town's hours adjustment they can extend the end of the day to accommodate later working hours. He also added that they could preserve the 7:30 start for 1 or two days in case people need to visit before work. Mr. Petersen also commented that he would be comfortable with not opening on Fridays as long as whatever changes either increased productivity or provided cost savings.

## **Route 2 Main Break**

Mr. Mostoller reported on the recent Route 2 water main break. They received a phone call in the afternoon about low water pressure and went out driving around the neighborhood to look for the problem. They eventually found the break between the travel lanes on Route 2 during rush hour. They were able to shut down the area and begin excavating. Due to reduced manpower because of staff vacations, and the time sensitivity of working in a high traffic area, Mr. Mostoller brought in a contractor to work alongside District personnel, which is a rare occurrence. Around 2:30 a.m. they made the difficult decision to stop work and regroup as they had only just found the water main at 10 feet deep, and they were experiencing conflict with the traffic signals in the area.

The District worked with MassDOT to remove the traffic signals to continue working safely, they filled in the site and made plans to return Sunday evening. They waited until 8:00pm to close the area and brought in the contractor again because they knew at this depth the contractor would be able to provide a safer and more efficient work site. Mr. Mostoller commented that typically water mains are 4.5 to 7 feet deep, so this main at 10 feet deep was very unusual.

Between the staff overtime on that break and the contractor work, this event will be a significant investment in water main emergency repair. Ultimately, they ended up replacing 26 feet of water main. Typically, when the District experiences a break, they have a small crack that they can resolve with a wrap around, or they can do 2 to 4 feet of section replacement. The 26 feet of replacement is a very catastrophic scale and constitutes a very high cost early on in a tight fiscal year.

Later that day they had another break on private property, and another break in the vicinity of Route 2, but unrelated to the Route 2 break. Crews worked very hard to make repairs very quickly. Mr. Mostoller thanked the crew for their hard work on these issues.

Mr. Mostoller acknowledged the relative lack of water main improvement planning while the District has been using its resources to address PFAS. The District has been evaluating where they are seeing more frequent breaks and looking where those locations may overlap with other upcoming projects from the Town of Acton or MassDOT.

Mr. Mostoller then shared his screen to show a segment of road where MassDOT has a proposed crossover project for 2030. The map stretched from Piper Road to Taylor Road. Mr. Mostoller proposed that if MassDOT is expected to work in that area, it makes sense for the District to use that opportunity to do a relining, rehabilitation, or replacement of the water main in that location either before or in conjunction with the MassDOT project.

Mr. Mostoller added that from Mass Ave where the Kelly's Corner improvements end, to the middle of the intersection, MassDOT has proposed new turning lanes. This area covers 1,900 feet of water main.

Similar to what the District has done for Kelly's Corner, Mr. Mostoller would like the District to consider how they can join up with the MassDOT work and either make improvements or see if the state is willing to include any costs for water mains. Ideally this would prevent disruptions while improving District infrastructure.

With the recent Route 2 break, the tie card for that section had listed a 6-foot depth. It's possible that the extra four feet of elevation came from other projects and improvements. That is yet another reason to advocate for joint work between organizations with infrastructure in the same area. Mr. Mostoller asked for the District to reach out to their legislative delegation to get better outcomes on these objectives.

Mr. Stuntz asked if they would like a letter to Senator Eldridge, to which Mr. Mostoller affirmed and added it would be good to put on their radar. Recently MassDOT did an outreach session in Acton in June which was well attended. Mr. Mostoller has been in contact with some people from MassDOT in recent weeks. His perspective from those

conversations is that they are reluctant to add a specific utility to projects, but they did see the havoc from these recent breaks in the area.

Mr. Mostoller continued to explain the limits of what the District can do on its own, and how they are often playing whack-a-mole with issues as they arise. He acknowledged the role of the Master Plan in planning, but the District cannot be everywhere at once.

Mr. Stuntz asked how many gallons they think this Route 2 break cost them. Mr. Mostoller responded that they are still working on the final numbers, but early estimate would be between ½ to 1 million gallons of water, partially due to the half hour it took to shut it down, and the nature of the break.

The board was in agreement with Mr. Mostoller's suggestion.

Mr. Petersen asked what kind of data they collect for water main breaks. Mr. Mostoller explained that they look at the age of the pipe, material, size, depth, kind of break, soil conditions, if the break was tied to a known event. With this Route 2 break, vibrations from the nearby paving could have contributed to the failure. Mr. Petersen asked what happens with that collected data. Mr. Mostoller explained it's kept in a spreadsheet that is used to inform the Master Plan Update. Mr. Petersen asked if they collect information about the cost of the incident. Mr. Mostoller explained they don't usually collect that, but they have a general idea especially when there's a large impact event. He explained most water main breaks have minimal additional cost to the District when they're repaired in house.

Mr. Mostoller and the board discussed who they would send a letter to in the delegation.

### **OPEB Trust Roll Forward Report**

Ms. McCarthy reported to the board that OPEB is 95% funded in FY 25. This is much better than FY 24 where it was funded 76%. The pause from withdrawing seems to be working in their favor. They are considering how to plan for FY 27.

Mr. Petersen commented that he was pleased to see OPEB in good condition and asked what the current number of retirees covered is. Ms. McCarthy did not have the exact number on hand but said it's around 15, and there were no changes.

Mr. Petersen commented that he was very impressed with the exact precision applied to the change in the discount rate.

Ms. Lin motioned to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Rosen seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved via a roll call vote, Ms. Lin, Mr. Rosen, Mr. Stuntz.

**Meeting Closed at 7:40 p.m.**