



Water Supply District of Acton

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Board of Water Commissioners Meeting Agenda

Monday, February 23, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

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- **Comments from the public**
- **Approve minutes from the meeting of 2/9**
- **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
 - Bottled Water Rebate Update
- Review Draft Budget for FY'27 and proposed articles for 2026 Annual District Meeting Warrant
- Discussion of FY'27 Projected Debt Fee
- Annual District Meeting Presentation

NEW BUSINESS:

- Discussion of 2/14/26 Acton Exchange Article

Any agenda item(s) which did not come to the attention of the Board of Water Commissioners 48 hours prior to this meeting and were not reasonably anticipated.

Board of Water Commissioners & Finance Committee Joint Meeting

Meeting Agenda

Monday, February 9, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

- Comments from the public
- Approve minutes from the meeting of 1/12 and 1/14
- Appoint one Commissioner to sign warrants while conducting meetings virtually

NEW BUSINESS:

- Appointment of Treasurer/Collector
- Swearing in of Treasurer/Collector
- School Street Redevelopment
- Discussion of Finance Committee
- Discuss Commissioners' Annual report
- Annual District Meeting Presentation

OLD BUSINESS:

- Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)
 - Current sample data, if available
 - Discussion of Additional PFAS Upgrades
- Review Draft Budget for FY '27 and proposed articles for 2026 Annual District Meeting Warrant
- Discussion of FY'27 Projected Debt Fee

Present at Tonight's Meeting:

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

Finance Committee: John Petersen, Bill Guthlein

District Manager: Matt Mostoller

Deputy District Manager: Corey Godfrey

District Clerk: Joe Robb

District Treasurer/Collector: Ashley Pinard

Members of the Public: Kim Kastens; Gill Watt

START OF MINUTES

Mr. Stuntz opened the meeting at 7:01 p.m. and ensured that everyone could hear and be heard. Mr. Guthlein then opened the Finance Committee meeting at 7:02 p.m.

Comments from the public

Ms. Kim Kastens, representing the Green Acton Water Committee, provided an update regarding the Committee's analysis of long-term groundwater monitoring data surrounding the capped landfill in Acton. She explained that the group reviewed data from 2002–2024 and recently presented findings to the Acton Health Department. Ms. Kastens noted the Committee has been invited to present the analysis to the Board of Health at an upcoming meeting. Copies of the data were shared with District staff, and she offered to provide them to others as needed. The Commissioners thanked Green Acton for their work.

Approve minutes from the meetings of 1/12/2026 and 1/14/2026

Mr. Stuntz motioned to approve the minutes from the January 12, 2026 meeting. Ms. Lin seconded, and it was unanimously approved by roll call vote: Mr. Rosen, Ms. Lin, and Mr. Stuntz.

Mr. Stuntz motioned to approve the minutes from the January 14, 2026 meeting. Mr. Rosen seconded, and it was unanimously approved by roll call vote: Mr. Rosen, Ms. Lin, and Mr. Stuntz.

Appoint one Commissioner to sign warrants while conducting meetings virtually

Mr. Rosen motioned to authorize Commissioner Stuntz to sign warrants while meetings are conducted virtually, through the next regularly scheduled meeting. Ms. Lin seconded, and it was unanimously approved via roll call vote: Mr. Rosen, Ms. Lin, and Mr. Stuntz.

NEW BUSINESS:

Appointment of Treasurer/Collector

Mr. Mostoller introduced Ms. Ashley Pinard, noting it was her first day of employment with the Acton Water District. He welcomed her to the team and summarized her professional background, including experience in procurement at the Department of Fire Services, municipal administration, and prior service in law enforcement.

Mr. Rosen motioned to appoint Ms. Pinard as Treasurer/Collector of the Acton Water District. Mr. Stuntz seconded, and the appointment was unanimously approved by roll call vote: Mr. Rosen, Ms. Lin, and Mr. Stuntz.

Swearing in of Treasurer/Collector

Mr. Joe Robb, District Clerk, administered the oath of office to Ms. Pinard. Ms. Pinard formally swore to faithfully execute the duties of Treasurer/Collector in accordance with District bylaws and the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

School Street Redevelopment

Mr. Mostoller provided an update regarding multiple redevelopment proposals along School Street in South Acton, including residential conversions, mixed-use development, and accessory dwelling units. He explained that the existing cast iron water main in this area is aging and may not support increased domestic and fire protection demand.

Mr. Mostoller noted that the District has limited information from developers at this stage, making it difficult to model future system impacts. He raised the possibility of pursuing state development-related infrastructure grants, which may require a 25% District match.

Commissioners discussed the importance of requiring developers to provide clearer project scope of information and potentially contribute toward infrastructure upgrades. Mr. Mostoller indicated the District would continue gathering project details, exploring hydraulic modeling with our consulting engineer, and evaluating grant opportunities before returning with recommendations.

Discussion of Finance Committee

Mr. Guthlein announced that Mr. Ron Parenti, Chair of the Finance Committee, had resigned, leaving only two remaining members. Commissioners expressed appreciation for Mr. Parenti's long service and institutional knowledge.

The Board discussed the increasing difficulty of recruiting qualified volunteers for District committees. Ms. Lin recommended broadening the search and taking time to find the right candidate rather than rushing an appointment. Mr. Rosen noted that volunteer shortages are affecting committees town-wide.

Commissioners briefly discussed whether committee structures should be revisited in the future, including combining the three-member Finance Committee and five-member Water Land Management Advisory Committee into a single three-member advisory committee. It was agreed that no bylaw changes should be pursued immediately before the Annual District Meeting.

Mr. Mostoller noted that outreach for Finance Committee recruitment would include the District website, social media, and the upcoming winter newsletter mailing.

Discuss Commissioners' Annual Report

Mr. Stuntz presented the draft Commissioners' Annual Report letter to ratepayers. He explained that the letter is intended to provide an annual summary of District operations, upcoming priorities, and key updates for customers. He noted that minor edits and comments had been received by staff in advance of tonight, and the document would continue to be refined prior to the Annual Report being published.

Mr. Rosen motioned to accept the Annual Report draft and authorize the District Manager and Chair to make minor changes as needed. Mr. Stuntz seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote: Mr. Rosen, Ms. Lin, and Mr. Stuntz.

Annual District Meeting Presentation

Mr. Peterson presented draft slides for the Annual District Meeting, including an updated water bill breakdown and new explanatory content regarding PFAS settlement funds.

Committee members discussed the importance of providing clear public background on the PFAS litigation and settlement process, as many residents may not understand the source of these funds. Ms. Kastens recommended explicitly stating that the District joined a multi-district lawsuit against PFAS manufacturers.

The Board agreed the presentation should provide introductory context without over-speculating about future settlement amounts.

OLD BUSINESS:

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)

Current sample data, if available

Mr. Mostoller reviewed January PFAS sampling results:

- South Acton remained in compliance at 15.2 ppt.
- North Acton showed detectable PFAS levels at 3 ppt, though still below regulatory thresholds; media replacement has been delayed pending completion of other plant upgrades.
- Center Acton measured 11.6 ppt, with bedrock wells continuing to effectively reduce concentrations through blending.

Mr. Mostoller noted February sampling was underway and that Mr. Godfrey had issued an email update to approximately 400 interested parties.

Discussion of Additional PFAS Upgrades

Mr. Mostoller reported that South Acton upgrades were nearing completion, with final analytical results pending, alarm and controls testing having been successfully completed, and now waiting for the MassDEP inspection to be rescheduled. He noted that Center Acton media conditioning had been successfully completed, and that startup inspection scheduling with MassDEP would follow shortly. Mr. Mostoller also acknowledged the Operations Team's efforts, guided by Mr. Godfrey, in disassembling the Concord interconnect pumping equipment under challenging winter conditions. Both emergency interconnections are closed and final costs are still being tallied, although Mr. Mostoller noted our total volume of water purchased was lower than initially expected.

Review Draft Budget for FY '27 and proposed articles for 2026 Annual District Meeting Warrant

Mr. Mostoller stated that the FY27 draft budget remained unchanged. He explained that PFAS settlement funds were proposed for several purposes, including the North Acton lease, media replacement planning, and reimbursement of unanticipated FY26 interconnection costs.

Mr. Mostoller reviewed warrant article concepts, including anticipated free cash appropriations totaling just over \$1M for distribution system improvements, emergency repairs, filtration media, residuals management, ADA website compliance. Additional articles include housekeeping such as accepting reports and fixing salaries of elected officials, reauthorizing revolving funds, accepting the budget, and establishment of a PFAS Settlement Fund. Mr. Mostoller noted that free cash certification was still pending due to the late audit completion and the staff transitions. The District may need to proceed with warrant language contingent upon certification.

Discussion of FY'27 Projected Debt Fee

Mr. Peterson prepared a memo which raised concerns that applying PFAS settlement funds entirely to operating expenses results in disproportionate bill impacts between low- and high-volume users. He suggested that some relief should also offset debt service to create more equitable increases.

Mr. Watt inquired what the relationship is between debt and infrastructure. Mr. Mostoller explained the history of the water system and how the pipes were installed and paid for,

how we replace and improve aging assets, and how we have paid for improvements to water quality through treatment plants and land protection. He went on to share the difference between variable operating costs and borrowed funds to pay for large projects. Mr. Stuntz discussed the positive impact on our bond rating, allowing lower borrowing costs, due to the stable revenue generation our fixed debt fee provides, independent of water sales.

Commissioners emphasized the importance of this predictable revenue stream for long-term financial health and bonding stability. Mr. Stuntz and Ms. Lin indicated they were not supportive of revising the FY27 budget allocation immediately prior to Annual Meeting, citing uncertainty about future PFAS costs and the need for maintaining reserves. Mr. Mostoller reminded everyone that we have a duty to think about the long-term financial health of the District and the current debt fee is a 3-year bump before other projects come off the debt role, naturally providing relief. Unknown additional PFAS costs were also discussed as a reason to not expend additional PFAS funds until we better understand a variety of PFAS related issues.

Finance Committee Budget Recommendation

Mr. Peterson motioned that the Finance Committee not recommend the FY27 budget as presented because it changes the fixed and usage percentages for low and high volume users. Mr. Guthlein declined to second this motion, therefore the motion failed resulting in no recommendation on the FY 27 budget from the Finance Committee.

Commissioners' Budget Vote

Mr. Rosen motioned to approve the FY27 budget as presented. Ms. Lin seconded, and the budget was unanimously approved by roll call vote: Mr. Rosen, Ms. Lin, and Mr. Stuntz.

Mr. Mostoller expressed concern that the lack of a Finance Committee recommendation could complicate the neutrality of the Annual Meeting presentation, and the Board agreed to revisit this at the next meeting.

Mr. Peterson motioned to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting. Mr. Guthlein seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Mr. Rosen moved to adjourn the Board of Water Commissioners meeting. Ms. Lin seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Meeting Closed at 9:22 p.m.

Acton Water District - PWS 2002000

Summary of Treated Water Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) 2026

| Sample Date | Sample Location | | | |
|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Clapp/Whitcomb WTP | Central Acton WTP | North Acton WTP | South Acton WTP |
| January 7, 2026 | Not Sampled | Not Sampled | Not Sampled | 15.2 |
| January 13, 2026 | Not Sampled | Not Sampled | 3 | Not Sampled |
| January 28, 2026 | Not Sampled | 11.6 | Not Sampled | Not Sampled |
| February 4, 2026 | Not Sampled | 12.5 | 2.9 | Not Sampled |

Notes:

WTP = Water Treatment Plant

Units are in parts per trillion (ppt) or ng/L

ND = below method detection limit

Not Sampled = PFAS samples are not collected at each WTP on the same date or when a WTP is not producing water for consumption

Results provided are the sum of 6 PFAS Compounds - PFOA, PFOS, PFNA, PFHxS, PFHpA, and PFDA

Exceeds Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) of 20 ppt or ng/L

All treated water data is shared with consumers to be transparent. Not all of the data presented here will meet MassDEP data acceptance standards.

022026 DRAFT for Discussion and Review

February 27, 2026

Dear Bottled Water Rebate recipient,

The Acton Water District has completed three major treatment plant upgrades to establish granular activated carbon (GAC) filtration for the removal of Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in compliance with Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection regulations for PFAS6 compounds. Given the completion of these measures, the need for the bottled water rebate program is no longer necessary. Upon receipt of final completion certificates from MassDEP, expected in early March 2026, the Board of Water Commissioners voted on **February 23, 2026**, to discontinue the program at the end of March 2026.

Your final abatement or check will be issued for the first quarter of 2026, and no additional rebates will be provided effective April 1, 2026. If you have any questions regarding PFAS, please visit our dedicated PFAS website at www.actonwater.com/pfas. If you have additional questions or require clarification, please call our office at 978-263-9107 between the hours of 7:30 am and 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

On behalf of the officials and staff of the District, your patience and support have been appreciated as we have worked to implement solutions to address PFAS in our community. This work is ongoing, but we are confident in the improvements made to date in increasing the safety of your drinking water.

Thank you,

Matthew Mostoller
District Manager

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

Middlesex, ss.



To the Clerk of the Water Supply District of Acton, GREETINGS:

You are directed to notify the inhabitants of the Town of Acton who are qualified to vote in elections and town affairs, to assemble at their precinct:

*All Precincts voting at Blanchard Auditorium
R.J. Grey Junior High School
16 Charter Road
Acton, Massachusetts*

On Tuesday, April 28, 2026
Between 7:00 A.M. and 8:00 P.M.

Then and there to bring their votes on one ballot for the following officers:

Commissioner for three years

Clerk for three years

You are further directed to notify the legal voters of the Town of Acton, as aforesaid, to assemble at:

**Acton Public Safety Facility
371 Main Street
Acton, Massachusetts 01720**

**On Wednesday, March 18, 2026
6:00 P.M.**

Then and there to act on the following Articles:

Article 1. To fix salaries of the elected officials.

Article 2. To act on the reports of the Commissioners, the Treasurer, and other officers and committees of the District.

Article 3. To see if the District will vote to authorize the Treasurer, with the approval of the Commissioners, to borrow in anticipation of the revenue of the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2026 in accordance with the provisions of General Laws, Chapter 44, Section 4, and to renew any note or notes as may be given for a period of less than one year, in accordance with the provisions of the General Laws, Chapter 44, Section 17, or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 4. To see what sums of money the District will vote to raise and appropriate to defray the usual expenses of the District.

Article 5. To see if the District will vote, pursuant to General Laws, Chapter 44, Section 53E½, to establish a \$100,000 limitation on expenditures from the revolving fund captioned "District Revolving Fund for Mitigation," or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 6. To see if the District will vote, pursuant to General Laws, Chapter 44, Section 53E½, to establish a \$100,000 limitation on expenditures from the revolving fund captioned "District Revolving Fund for New Service Meter Installations," or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 7. To see if the District will vote to transfer from Surplus Revenue the sum of \$100,000 to clean and rehabilitate existing wells throughout the District, or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 8. To see if the District will vote to transfer from Surplus Revenue the sum of \$75,000 for the purpose of replacing old water mains, renewing old water services, and replacing old fire hydrants, or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 9. To see if the District will vote to transfer from Surplus Revenue the sum of \$75,000 for the purpose of repairing emergency water main breaks, or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 10. To see if the District will vote to transfer from Surplus Revenue the sum of \$100,000 for the replacement of filtration media at the District's water treatment plants, or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 11. To see if the District will vote to transfer from Surplus Revenue the sum of \$30,000 for Website ADA compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA required by April 26, 2027, or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 12. To see if the District will vote to transfer from Surplus Revenue the sum of \$150,000 for the management of the North Acton Water Treatment Plant filtration residuals or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 13. To see if the District will vote transfer from Surplus Revenue \$250,000 for the engineering and costs associated with repairs and improvements to the Flagg Hill Tank, piping, disinfection systems, and access road or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 14. To see if the District will vote transfer from Surplus Revenue the sum of \$500,000 for improvements to the District's water distribution system and water mains in Acton or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 15. To see if the District will vote to accept the provisions of Massachusetts general laws Chapter 44 section 53 to establish a special revenue fund to be known as the "PFAS Settlement Fund", said funds upon appropriation to be expended for any purpose allowed pursuant to the 3M and Dupont settlements as voted by a future District meeting or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 16. To see of the District will vote to transfer the sum of \$330,000 from the PFAS Settlement Fund for the FY27 expenses for the North Acton Water Treatment Plant PFAS system lease, or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 17. To see if the District will vote to transfer the sum of \$150,000 from the PFAS Settlement Fund for PFAS Media Replacement, or to take any other action relative thereto.

Article 18. To see if the District will vote to transfer the sum of \$150,000 from the PFAS Settlement Fund to reimburse the FY26 General Fund for emergency water interconnections with Littleton and Concord, or to take any other action relative thereto.

Hereof fail not and make due returns of this Warrant with your doings thereon to the Water Commissioners on or before the time of holding of said meeting.

Given under our hand this 23rd day of February in the year two thousand and twenty-six.

Erika Lin
Barry Rosen
Stephen C. Stuntz, Water Commissioners

A true copy. ATTEST:

Joe Robb
District Clerk

Free cash is a revenue source that results from the calculation, as of July 1, of a community's remaining, unrestricted funds from its operations of the previous fiscal year based on the balance sheet as of June 30. It typically includes actual receipts in excess of revenue estimates and unspent amounts in departmental budget line items for the year just ended, plus unexpended free cash from the previous year. Free cash is offset by property tax receivables and certain deficits, and as a result, can be a negative number.

Free cash is not available for use until after the accountant, auditor, or comptroller submits a prior-year balance sheet to the Division of Local Services (DLS) and the Director of Accounts certifies the free cash. The DLS certification protects communities from relying on free cash that might not materialize due to inaccurate local estimates.

The Financial Management Resource Bureau (FMRB) recommends that communities understand the role free cash plays in sustaining a strong credit rating and encourages them to adopt policies on its use. Under sound financial policies, a community strives to generate free cash in an amount equal to five to seven percent of its annual budget. This goal helps deter free cash from being depleted in any particular year, which enables the following year's calculation to begin with a positive balance. To do this, the community would orchestrate conservative revenue projections and departmental appropriations to produce excess income and departmental turn backs.

As a nonrecurring revenue source, free cash should be restricted to paying one-time expenditures, funding capital projects, or replenishing other reserves. If a community incorporates free cash into revenue source projections for next-year operational expenses, it is prudent to place a percentage restriction on the total free cash to be used.

Overall, FMRB recommends that communities adopt a free cash policy that avoids supplementing current-year departmental operations. By eliminating the expectation of additional resources later in the fiscal year to backfill budgets, department heads will produce more accurate and realistic annual appropriation requests.

Any free cash use requires an appropriation approved by the city council on the mayor's recommendation or by town council or by town meeting but only after DLS has certified the free cash total. The same rules apply to DLS's certification of retained earnings, which is the enterprise fund equivalent of free cash.



THE Acton Exchange

ACTON'S LOCAL NEWS SOURCE

Water District Board of Commissioners approves budget despite Water District Finance Committee concerns over rate equity

February 14, 2026 | Greg Jarboe and Kim Kastens

At a joint meeting of the Acton Water District (AWD) Board of Commissioners (the Board) and the AWD Finance Committee (the FinCom) on February 9, the FinCom declined to make a recommendation on the proposed FY27 AWD budget, citing concerns about its disproportionate impact of costs on low-volume water users. Despite this unusual lack of FinCom endorsement, the Board unanimously approved the \$8.9 million budget, which includes a 34.2% increase in the annual debt service fee.

The lack of agreement centers on how the district should allocate settlement funds received and expected from lawsuits against the manufacturers of PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), a suite of dangerous chemicals found in [public water supplies in Acton](#) and

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elsewhere. The AWD is coming down the home stretch on its ambitious, multiyear effort to treat all of its water for PFAS. But the costs have been high in stress as well as dollars. The current dispute has exposed questions about rate fairness and sparked broader discussions about water district governance.

The backstory

The Acton Water District is a separate municipal entity from the Town of Acton government, with its own [separate charter](#) from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Board is analogous to the Town's Select Board, the FinCom is analogous to the Town FinCom, and the District Annual Meeting is analogous to Acton's Annual Town Meeting.

[AWD bills comprise three parts](#): a service fee, steady at \$15 per water-taking unit; a debt fee, which is the same for every water-taker and has risen in recent years as the costs of water treatment have accrued; and a usage fee, which depends on amount of water used. To incentivize conservation, the [usage fee is progressive](#), meaning larger volume users pay more per cubic foot, and it is higher in summer than winter. There are also [discounts](#) or [rebates](#) available for certain categories of low-income and hardship. When the debt fee was introduced in 2013, it was a small fraction of any customer's total bill. But as debt accumulated to pay for treatment plants, the debt fee became a more burdensome fraction of the bill, especially for low-volume customers.



How the costs of providing safe, legal drinking water should be allocated across the various rate-payers has been the subject of much discussion and some tension between AWD FinCom and Board for years. At the Nov. 21, 2021 Board meeting ([minutes](#)) the FinCom recommended that the debt service fee be converted to a per cubic foot fee. The Board did not accept the FinCom's recommendation, arguing that the fixed debt fee ensured a reliable income to pay the debt service, even as water volume sold fluctuated from year to year. After extensive discussion, the Board agreed to engage "a consultant to help figure out debt fee structure."

No such consultant was engaged, and the issue re-emerged a year later. At the Dec. 22, 2022 Board meeting ([minutes](#)), FinCom member Ron Parenti presented to the Board members a different proposal to restructure AWD rates and fees. Again, there was extensive discussion, which ended with Board Chair Steve Stuntz saying, "We appreciate all the work of the Finance Committee, but the Board is not going to move forward with any changes to the debt service or the rate structure."

The budget debate has been playing out against the backdrop of the AWD's massive investment in PFAS treatment infrastructure — an expense that was neither anticipated nor desired, but has become unavoidable as the district responds to contamination from per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. The district has borrowed nearly \$19 million for PFAS-related projects across three treatment facilities: \$1 million borrowed for the North Acton plant, \$10.35 million for Central Acton,

and \$7.57 million for South Acton. The AWD succeeded in obtaining favorable loans through the [Massachusetts Drinking Water State Revolving Fund](#), with zero percent interest, no requirement for repayment until construction is complete, and approximately \$2.7 million in principal forgiveness. However, the remaining debt still needs to be repaid, driving increases in debt service fees.

The current controversy emerges

In 2020, AWD joined many other public water suppliers in [litigation against PFAS manufacturers](#), seeking partial compensation for contamination the District did not cause. Major settlements have been reached: \$10.3 billion from 3M (approved March 2024), \$1.185 billion from DuPont, Chemours, and Corteva (approved February 2024), and additional agreements with Tyco Fire Products (\$750 million) and BASF Corporation (\$316.5 million) awaiting court approval.

AWD received its first settlement payment in May 2025, of approximately \$2 million. Payments from the various settlements are expected to continue through 2036.

The district formed a PFAS working group to determine how to use these funds. The working group recommendations were discussed at length at the Board meeting of December 8 ([minutes](#)). The working group recommended “using a portion of the funds currently in hand to supplement the upcoming FY27 budget for PFAS-related costs, such as the lease

payments for the North Acton PFAS treatment system and media replacement. The balance of settlement funds would be invested, with the intent that each year, the District would review ongoing PFAS needs and determine how much of the invested funds should be drawn down to support operating or capital expenses.” This is similar to the Grace fund established after earlier W.R. Grace litigation. It was reported that FinCom had seen the recommendations at a December 5 meeting (minutes not yet available), and had voted to support the PFAS working group recommendations, with two votes in favor and Bill Guthlein abstaining. The Board voted unanimously to accept the PFAS working group recommendations.

Staff and Board members worked to develop and refine a FY27 budget in alignment with the PFAS working group recommendations, with drafts provided at meetings throughout December and January. At a joint meeting of the Board and FinCom on January 12 ([minutes](#)), Mostoller explained that the budget would include an increase in the FY27 debt fee to reflect “the transition from construction financing, which previously carried no cost, to permanent financing.” There would be no increase in the volumetric rates, made possible by covering some operational expenses from the PFAS settlement funds.

FinCom met on January 21 ([minutes](#)). FinCom member John Petersen presented an analysis showing a consequence of the decision to use settlement funds to support operating expenses but not debt costs: the draft budget would cause the water bill for low-usage

customers to increase by 20%, while high-usage customers would experience a 9% increase, placing a larger burden on low-usage customers. The other FinCom members agreed that the budget could be revised to better balance the use of PFAS settlement funds between operating expenses and debt service. The committee agreed that Chair Ron Parenti should request another joint meeting of the Board and FinCom to discuss several topics, including the debt fee.

That requested joint meeting was [scheduled for January 26](#), but was then canceled. In a testy email exchange (made public in the Feb 4 FinCom meeting packet), Board Chair Stuntz wrote to FinCom Chair Parenti “... there are no substantive issues for the Board to address ... Please give us the courtesy to believe that we are capable of making good decisions. It seems that the debt fee keeps being questioned, and the Board continues to provide a clear answer...”

Parenti then resigned his position as AWD FinCom Chair.

FinCom met again on February 4. Minutes are not yet available, but an Acton Exchange reporter was at the meeting. The meeting began by electing Bill Guthlein to replace Parenti as FinCom Chair. FinCom member John Petersen reflected on Parenti’s contributions: “People in this room know, but not everybody realizes, how important volunteers are to the operation of the water district. Ron has done just a fantastic job in lots of ways.”



Left to right: AWD FinCom member John Petersen, newly elected FinCom Chair William Guthlein, Jr., District Manager Matthew Mostoller, and Deputy District Manager Corey Godfrey, at the Feb. 4 meeting of the AWD FinCom. Note the empty chair at the head of the table; Ron Parenti had resigned as chair of the FinCom. Photo: Greg Jarboe

Petersen then presented a detailed version of his analysis showing that the proposed FY27 budget would hit different customers very differently. Under the draft budget, low-volume users — those consuming about half the average — would see their bills increase by 20.2%, from \$531 to \$638 annually. Average users would face a 14.3% increase, from \$747 to \$854 annually. Meanwhile, high-volume users would see a 9.1% increase, from \$1,180 to \$1,287 annually.

District Manager Matthew Mostoller expressed concern about continuing to revisit the issue. “I’ve had this conversation multiple times now,” he said. “I don’t think there’s a lot of value in continuing to pursue it.” Nonetheless, the remaining two members of the FinCom, Guthlein and Petersen, agreed to once again

request a joint meeting with the Board to discuss the issue.

“I Made a Mistake”

That joint meeting took place on February 9. Minutes are not yet available, but the Acton Exchange had a reporter at the meeting and was provided with a transcript of the zoom call. Whereas the 2021 and 2022 FinCom/Board disagreements had centered on how to fairly apportion the pain of rising PFAS costs, the 2026 disagreement centers on how to fairly apportion the benefits from the PFAS lawsuit settlements.

Petersen opened the debt fee discussion with a striking admission. In a prepared statement made available to the Acton Exchange, he acknowledged that he had made an error in initially supporting the budget approach.

“I made a mistake when I reviewed and recommended the DRAFT AWD FY27 budget,” Petersen told the group. “I considered the budget only from the perspective of the District, not its customers.”

He explained that while the revenue requirement is the same regardless of how PFAS funds are applied, the impact on customer bills varies significantly. The current approach, he argued, provides one policy for regular charges — a mix of usage and fixed fees – but a different policy for ratepayer relief through PFAS funds, which goes entirely to usage-related costs.

“The draft budget, which essentially provides one policy for charges – a mix of usage and fixed fees – and a different policy for rate payer relief through the use of PFAS funds – usage only – is inconsistent and should be revised,” Petersen stated.

His recommendation: apply PFAS settlement funds “in the same way the District charges for water as a mixture of usage and fixed fees,” which would mean splitting the funds between operational and debt service costs, then increasing water usage rates modestly to maintain the same total revenue.

The Commissioners and Staff Respond

The commissioners indicated they had not been persuaded to change their earlier decision about how to allocate the settlement funds. District staff defended the approach on both technical and practical grounds. Deputy District Manager Corey Godfrey noted at the earlier FinCom meeting on February 4 that water utilities typically try to recover fixed costs through fixed fees, and that conservation incentives may have limited additional impact in a community like Acton where water use is already quite low.

At the February 9 meeting, Stuntz made the point that, “Part of bonding is getting the kind of bond rating we have, which is predicated on a known source of funding to pay for those. That’s why bond agents were particularly pleased to see that the debt fee was not dependent on usage volumes, but on a fixed fee to the users.”

An Unprecedented Vote

The Board then moved to approve the budget at the in-progress (February 9) meeting rather than waiting for additional information about insurance costs and free cash status. However, it was pointed out that proper procedure requires the FinCom to first make its recommendation.

Petersen then moved that the Finance Committee “not recommend the FY27 budget as presented because it changes the fixed and usage percentages for low and high volume users.” Guthlein said, “Well, I will not second that motion. So, we have a kind of a deadlock. No recommendation on the budget from the Finance Committee.”

The Board then voted unanimously to approve the FY27 budget.

Looking Ahead to Annual Meeting

The FY27 budget will now proceed to the Annual District Meeting, where voters will have the final say. That meeting is scheduled for March 18, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. at the Town of Acton Public Safety Facility, 371 Main St. To vote at the AWD Annual District meeting, you must be a registered voter in the Town of Acton; you do not need to be an AWD customer.

The fundamental questions raised by this debate are likely to persist: How should the water district balance the need for reliable revenue in order to service debt, with the goal of equitable rate structures? What role should conservation incentives play in a community where water use is already relatively low? And, in the

future, how should the District allocate settlement funds that continue to arrive years after the capital expenses were incurred?

For now, the Board has made their decision. But with the annual meeting just weeks away, Acton residents will have the opportunity to weigh in on whether the approved budget strikes the right balance.

The Good News: PFAS-free drinking water coming soon

The good news is that after long years of escalating costs, tough decisions large and small, engineering challenges, negotiations with neighboring towns and state regulators, juggling of water sources — and now this controversy about how to distribute costs and benefits — the prospect of nearly PFAS-free water is finally upon us. At the Feb. 9 Board meeting, Mostoller announced that the conditioning of filtration medium at both the South Acton and Central Acton Water Treatment plants is now complete, and the temporary interconnect that had been bringing in purchased water from Concord is being disassembled. All that remains on the to-do list is to complete water quality testing at Central Acton and pass inspection of both plants by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.

Water from the North Acton Water Treatment Plant has been [treated for PFAS since June 2024](#), and PFAS levels in that water have usually been below the laboratory detection limit. With completion of the South Acton and Central Acton PFAS systems, all of

the water going into the AWD distribution system is expected to have similarly low levels of PFAS. Few public water suppliers in Massachusetts have reached the milestone of successfully treating all of their water for PFAS.

Disclosure: Ron Parenti, prominent in this article, is an occasional writer for the Acton Exchange.

Greg Jarboe is a member of the Town of Acton Finance Committee, which is completely separate from the AWD Finance Committee. He writes frequently for the Acton Exchange on varied topics of community interest. He was the editor of The Acton Minuteman in 1977, and was a member of the Acton Select Board in 1980, when W.R. Grace and the EPA entered into a Consent Decree regarding cleanup of the W.R. Grace site in Acton.

Kim Kastens is a member of the Acton Exchange Board and an associate editor. She is also the Chair of the Green Acton Water Committee, and has previously published on the Green Acton website both a backgrounder and an opinion piece about charging for water. At the 2023 AWD Annual District Meeting, she was the advocate for a Citizen's petition warrant article requesting that the AWD commission an external expert study of options for structuring future water rates. Living in the far northeast corner of Acton, she is not a customer of the Acton Water District.

Editor's Note: The Acton Water District Finance Committee (FinCom) is seeking a new member to fill the vacancy created by Ron Parenti's resignation. Interested residents can contact District Moderator William Mullin

or District Manager Matthew Mostoller for more information about the FinCom position.



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