



## **DEDHAM-WESTWOOD WATER DISTRICT General Business Meeting**

### **Hybrid Meeting**

**In-person attendance: 50 Elm Street, Dedham, MA 02026**

**Tuesday, January 16, 2024 | 6:30 PM**

#### **Announcement of the Audio and/or Video Recording**

The Chair, Robert Lexander, called the meeting to order at 6:33p.m. and announced the meeting would be audio- and video-recorded.

Mark Phillips, Chair

Eric Merithew, Vice-Chair

Louis Kustwan, Clerk (remote)

Gary Yessaillian, Member

Robert Lexander, Member

Blake Lukis, Executive Director & Assistant Treasurer

Bob Marsh, Business Manager

Pauline Donoghue, Treasurer

Steve Locke, Operations Manager

#### **Absence**

John Healy, Member

#### **Roll-Call Attendance**

Messrs. Lexander, Phillips, Merithew, Kustwan, Yessaillian Present.

Mr. Lexander confirmed a quorum present.

#### **Public Participation**

No member of the public wished to speak at this time..

#### **Installment of 2024 Board Officers**

Mr. Phillips presented the slate of officers:

Mark Phillips, Chair

Eric Merithew, Vice-Chair

Louis Kustwan, Clerk

John Healy, Member

Gary Yessaillian, Member

Robert Lexander, Member

Blake Lukis, Executive Director & Assistant Treasurer

Pauline Donoghue, Treasurer

Kathy Reynolds, Recording Secretary

With no discussion offered, Mr. Phillips requested a motion for installation of the proposed slate of officers. Mr. Yessaillian motioned to accept the 2024 DWWD Board of Officers; Mr. Merithew seconded the motion, and a roll-call vote was taken.

Roll-Call: Messrs. Phillips, Merithew, Yessaillian, and Lexander voted Aye.

Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Lexander thanked the Commissioners for their assistance over the past year, having found Chairing the Board a good experience. He offered his assistance to the new Chair.

Mr. Lukis confirmed he sent the Officers' contact information to the Members.

### **Approval of Minutes of December 12, 2023**

Mr. Phillips called for a motion to approve the meeting minutes of December 12, 2023. A motion was made by Mr. Lexander to approve the minutes as reviewed for December 12, 2023; Mr. Yessaillian seconded the motion. With no additional discussion necessary, a roll-call vote was taken.

Roll-Call: Messrs. Phillips, Merithew, Yessaillian, and Lexander voted Aye.  
Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Kustwan joined the meeting at 6:40.

### **Discussion and Action on Water Rate Increase**

Mr. Lukis shared his screen and reviewed the implemented tier structure process. Analysis was performed of usage and the tier structure, implemented to promote conservation to allow reduction of water rate increase from 6.6% to 5.9%, as best for the District and rate payers. Inflation rates are still the driving factor for the rate increase, with the biggest budget increases being with electricity distribution, water-treatment chemicals, lab costs, and employee benefits. Monthly meter rates were reviewed, including the residential tier structure and commercial, municipal, & private fire services rates. Rate history for residential users, comprising 94% of the Districts customer base, for 2018-2024 (proposed) was displayed. District current and proposed rates were compared. A map details neighboring towns' rate increase over the past 2 years, confirming District rates three years below average and inflation. MWRA 2022 annual water rate survey was shared also confirming the District rates are below the average rate of all MWRA communities. Discussion took place regarding all presented, quality of service justification, timing, capital improvements projection, infrastructure, and equipment upkeep.

Mr. Yessaillian asked if any member of the public would like to offer input. Mr. Richard Irving of 235 Common Street in Dedham thanked the District for their service and asked for elaboration on how the anticipated rate increases tie to the November meeting discussion of the long range plan. Mr. Lukis informed that the long-range plan was reviewed in November, including a five-year outlook. The long-range plan for this year was a 6.6% increase, with other years greater, related to the significant projects of eliminating PFAS from White Lodge Treatment Plant in 2025 and Bridge Street Treatment Plant in 2026. Mr. Yessaillian asked Mr. Irving if he is familiar with PFAS and the stringent requirements to meet levels; Mr. Irving confirmed he is. Mr. Yessaillian elaborated, stating that the stringent requirements are down to four per trillion. Mr. Yessaillian asked Mr. Lukis if the proposed rates for dealing with PFAS include any assistance. Mr. Lukis answered that no assistance was accounted for in the proposed rates but that grant and zero interest loans are anticipated, based on the DEP project list for state revolving funding, to include a zero-percent 20-year loan and possible grants; once more funding

information is provided, how projects are funded going forward will be reviewed. Mr. Irving thanked the Board for their insight. Mr. Merithew commented that exact expense could not be known since it is impacted by construction costs, and requested Mr. Lukis continue to update the neighboring-communities map with 2024 rates. Mr. Locke added that the construction index shows no major increase.

Mr. Lukis shared an email received from a 320 Dover Road, Westwood, resident stating the District offers the best service value, which rate-payers should appreciate. The Commissioners thanked the resident for this input.

Mr. Phillips requested a motion for the water rate increase. Mr. Lexander read the motion: The Dedham-Westwood Water Commissioners vote to amend the Schedule of Water Rates as presented herewith as Schedule A, Metered Rates; Schedule B, Fire Protection Rates; Schedule C, Other Charges including Access and Change of Use Fees; and Schedule D, Meter Charges. Amended rates shall be effective on all bills issued on or after February 1, 2024.

Mr. Merithew seconded the motion, and a roll-call vote was taken.

Roll-Call: Messrs. Phillips, Merithew, Kustwan, Yessaillian, and Lexander voted Aye.

Motion passed unanimously.

## **Financials and Warrant**

### Treasurer's Report

Ms. Donoghue presented:

1. The last warrants of year-end December 31, 2023 - Warrants 86-91, for December 11<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> activity, including the Ford Explorer purchase, the water main project, and the Blue Hills development's Route 128 easement. Some discussion was held.
2. The first warrants of 2024 - Warrants 1-4, for January 2<sup>nd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> activity, including the Brookfield water main, the security upgrade, and the garage project survey consulting fees.

Ms. Donoghue highlighted cash receipts for three months, noting October and November have been reconciled and December is in draft-form:

- Unreconciled cash balance at December 31<sup>st</sup>, decreased from November - The District's water bond loan and interest were paid.
- Reconciled cash balance as of November 30<sup>th</sup>, decreased from October.
- Monthly summary of reconciled cash and disbursements through November 30, 2023.
- Monthly summary of reconciled cash and disbursements for prior year 2022.

Ms. Donoghue added that the in-bank cash is holding steady.

## **Business Manager Report**

Mr. Lukis displayed reports for Mr. Marsh to reiterate November budget and forecast points including MWRA additional purchase over budgeted for water treatment. The cash balance position is good going into 2024. Capital spending is at 50% spent through November. Still

holding for year-end, but a loss is forecast. Discussion took place regarding T-bills and MWRA water purchase forecast & rates.

Mr. Marsh reported that Capital spending actuals are being formulated, with carryover being reviewed to plan borrowing while maintaining in-bank cash; the audit is being worked on; the insurance agent is performing policy appraisals; health benefits are being formulated; and year-end employee reviews are being completed.

### **Operations Manager Report**

Mr. Locke reported:

#### Pumping and Operational Report

- Pumpage – The past five weeks ranged from 3.65 to 3.86 million gallons per day.

MWRA usage increased to over one million - The reason is proactive monitoring and sampling of non-compliant THMs, the highest at the Getty gas station sampling location, and the weather necessitating increased chlorine residual which increased THMs.

For the public, Mr. Yessaillian informed that MWRA water is purchased for blending to bring TTHM levels below a certain threshold. Mr. Locke added that other operational changes have also been made and that adding an auto flusher at the Bridge Street area is being considered; Mr. Lexander offered reasoning explanation for the auto flusher.

- Main & Service Lines
  - 1/15 - 1" corporation main leak at 106 Cleveland Street in Dedham
  - Customer leak at 23 Lauren Street in Westwood - Contractor repairing
  - 1/5 - Customer leak at Two Westchester Drive in Westwood
  - 1/3 - 3/4" retired service line leak at 84 Ware Street in Dedham  
New employee found
  - 12/18 - 8" longitudinal main crack at Carol Avenue at Westdale
  - 12/18 - Power lost - Much affected

#### Update on New & Existing Projects

- Customer Service
    - Mr. Lukis displayed the meter age report. Mr. Locke informed that 172 meters were installed in December, with a total of 1,435 installed in 2023, exceeding the goal of 1,200 per year. Discussion took place regarding meters target and employees.
    - 191 backflow tests were conducted in December.
- Mr. Lukis referred to meters over 13 years old, below 3,000 meters, with backlog due to COVID and the Districts inability to enter homes for a 2 year period.

- Route 128 Easement Crossing Main Relocation
  - Purchased pipe is onsite
  - Start date should be known this week
  
- Dedham Country Polo Club
  - 300-foot extension, then to School Master Lane
  - Meeting with contractor - Weather prevented 1/16 start
  
- Distribution Supervisor
  - Experienced District employee will begin a 90-day probationary period on January 29. This required a discussion with the Union in which they agreed to criteria around the probationary period
  
- PFAS Design
  - White Lodge treatment plant design is 30% completed
  - Operational preventative maintenance and filter media change for discharge basin will be reviewed
  
- Filter Media Replacement from White Lodge Treatment Plant
  - Removal planned for March
  - New installation in April
  
- Purchases
  - New plotter scanner
  - New forklift - The 1986 forklift has been put out for bid on Municibid, and a reasonable offer has already been received

Mr. Phillips asked a question regarding the pilot study. The different media being piloted and their results to date were discussed.

Mr. Lexander asked a question about the White Lodge treatment plant air towers changeout; Mr. Locke answered that the work will be bid in 2024, however the exact timing is unknown. Discussion was held regarding timing, design, 2024 replacement, etc.

The Northeastern Co-op Intern is interested in the water industry. Talk was of what is being provided to the intern, offering exposure to the Board, prior interns, meter history, and water volume.

### **Executive Director Report**

Mr. Lukis informed that there were three vehicles approved for purchased in 2024, with two having been received in January.

### Contracts Signed by Executive Director

Mr. Lukis informed that three contracts have been signed:

1. Blue Hill Development easement
2. Weston & Sampson yearly on-call services
3. Weston & Sampson Burgess Avenue modeling study to be reimbursed by Aquarion Water Company

Mr. Phillips asked if Mr. Lukis is still in contact with Aquarion; Mr. Lukis responded that he has been, and this coming week there would be a kickoff meeting on the modeling study.

Mr. Lexander asked about the Everett Street development. Discussion took place regarding pipe sizes and the contractor's process.

### Discussion and Action on 2025 Power Pricing

Mr. Lukis informed that two electric contracts have been locked in until December 2024. This week we had a meeting with Constellation which included a ten-year lookback on when the lowest rates have been. The Annual Low Points for New England Energy tend to be in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the year; quotes have been received. Mr. Kustwan asked of pricing, and Mr. Lukis responded that it is partially variable. Mr. Lukis requests authority to lock into a flexible agreement. Discussion included Westwood being part of a group, solar, opt-in versus opt-out, rates, history, and budgeting.

Mr. Phillips requested a motion regarding Mr. Lukis' authority for signing an electric contract. Mr. Yessaillian motioned to give authority for Mr. Lukis to sign a three-year term for collective electric rates; Mr. Lexander seconded the motion, and a roll-call vote was taken. Roll-Call: Messrs. Phillips, Merithew, Kustwan, Yessaillian, and Lexander voted Aye. Motion passed unanimously.

### **Old/New Business\***

### **Next Meeting**

After discussion, it was decided the next District Board hybrid meeting will be held Wednesday, February 21 at 6:30 pm. Mr. Merithew offered that Basecamp could be used for anything requiring review before the next meeting.

Mr. Phillips requested a motion to close the open meeting and move to Executive Session. A motion was made by Mr. Lexander to close the open meeting and move to Executive Session pursuant to MGL c.30A Sec. 21(a) Exemption 3 - To discuss strategy with respect to litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares and that the open session meeting will not resume. Mr. Yessaillian seconded the motion, and a roll-call vote was taken.

Roll-Call: Messrs. Phillips, Merithew, Kustwan, Yessaillian, and Lexander voted Aye.  
Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Kathy Travers Reynolds  
Recording Secretary