

Safe Water Advisory Group (SWAG)
A City Council Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes Thursday, December 5, 2024
City Hall School Conference Room

Attending in person: Andrea Amico, co-chair, James Hewitt, Councilor Rich Blalock, Councilor Vince Lombardi, Rich DiPentima, Katrie Hillman, Rep. David Meuse, Kim McNamara, Al Pratt, co-chair; Excused: Elizabeth Barrett, Laurel Schaider, Chief Bill McQuillen. Staff: Mason Caceres, Mariah Habershaw, Stephanie Seacord PIO, recording secretary

Full SWAG meeting recording: <https://youtu.be/lak7k0CYE0Y>

Meeting presentation slides: https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/sites/default/files/2024-12/SWAG%20Meeting%20Slides%2012_5_24.pdf

1. **Introductions & Approval of minutes** – Andrea Amico, co-chair
Meeting called to order at 6:35 pm. Minutes for the September 10, 2024 meeting approved on a motion by Councilor Lombardi, seconded by Rich DiPentima.
2. **SWAG Co-chair Update** – Andrea welcomed Al Pratt as successor to Brian Goetz who has moved on to the Rye Water System, thanking Brian for his efforts.
3. **SWAG Mission – Andrea/Al.** Consideration of revising the SWAG mission, which would require Legal Dept. and Governance Committee review before going to City Council, if desired before SWAG renewal. Original mission: *To review and communicate the latest science on the health and environmental effects of PFAS, to monitor federal and state level legislative changes, and to anticipate policy changes that could impact the city of Portsmouth.* Proposed revised mission: *To review and communicate the latest science on the health and environmental effects of PFAS, to monitor federal and state level legislative changes, and to anticipate policy changes that could impact the city of Portsmouth. To discuss topics relevant to the City's water quantity, quality, preservation and conservation efforts, and projects pertaining to the water master planning through the City's annual Capital Improvement Plan process and other engineering studies.*
Committee member suggestions:
Pratt: Mission should talk about what the group is, has done and should be doing.
DiPentima: add "and public health aspects of water quality"
McNamara: in favor of 'public health' addition and SWAG support for public education about protecting the water supply; also proactive stance (e.g. recommendations to Legislative Subcommittee) on equity in water issues
Councilor Lombardi: reflect that water for Portsmouth is dependent on the entire cycle: groundwater, wastewater, source protection, but that the committee can't cover all of that.
Councilor Blalock: water protection is also addressed by the Conservation Commission, Trees & Greenery and the Sustainability Committee – we don't want to adopt a mission that is too big to cover in 4 meetings in the year.
Hewitt: a simple adjustment would be "relevant to the City's **drinking** water quality"
Andrea and Al to rework and share back with group.
4. **City Water Supply Update – Al**
Drought persists which is unusual for this time of year. City monitors status through
 - Weekly Drought Monitor (every Thursday): Southern NH is in "extreme" condition
 - Precipitation record: 17% below average for the year

- Reservoir condition: level is 3" below spillway – pattern of drought every 5-6 years
- Stream flow at Oyster River: black line on graph is current year, continues "below average"
- Groundwater levels (wells): difficult to recharge when ground is frozen.
- Demand vs. capacity: Have to balance water source between surface water (reservoir in Portsmouth system) and groundwater (wells). Water demand has decreased thanks to Water Dept efforts to identify/fix leaks and community water conservation efforts. Portsmouth relies on an integrated management strategy, using the reservoir and resting the wells. Water treatment has a capacity of pumping 4 million gallons/day but demand is currently at 3 million gallons/day so the delta is residual capacity. Were something to affect one of the sources, maxing out the capacity, then water use restrictions such as limiting irrigation would be implemented. DiPentima noted his concern that developments might outpace the water supply and need to be factored into land use approvals. Rep. Meuse noted that multiple Housing bills in the NH Legislature are recognizing the tension between the need for housing and the stress put on municipalities such as Nashua where high density development puts strains on the water supply.
- McNamara asked about testing other potential water contaminants – unregulated, emerging chemicals independent from the required list? Amico noted the example of testing for PFPrA with an independent lab and being similarly proactive if new tests become available.
- Councilor Blalock asked if there were any surface water quality concerns from the MA wildfires? None observed in the reservoir.
- Full report: [Water Supply Update](#)

5. Water Projects Update:

- Lafayette Road tank – nearing completion of the study to determine improving water pressure and quality. Installed a mixer to improve chlorine levels. Looking at Spinney Road and Newington tank repair and interior resurface.
- Greenland well PFAS treatment – Costs for PFAS treatment going up. Design will take 8-12 months and anticipate building in 2026.
- Portsmouth and Collins wells – reported preliminary costs to the Air Force. McNamara asked about how PFAS is destroyed once removed. RAB meeting Dec 11 to include a report.
- Hydraulic model – will help continued assessment of new development impact
- Little Bay Transmission line – due to expense, did valve work but have not abandoned plan to add a third water pipe
- Little Bay Road bid for construction in Spring 2025
- PFAS treatment designs in progress for Portsmouth and Collins wells
- Reliability project draft due in early 2025 assessing an interconnect for Dover, Durham, Portsmouth and Rye. Councilor Lombardi: maybe provide a detailed presentation in a 2025 SWAG meeting?
- Bellamy Dam – intake project to address cyanobacteria issues if they arise
- Energy audit – being conducted on water facilities
- Master Plan update – evaluating the timing and prioritization of Capital Improvement projects for the Water System. McNamara: Can Portsmouth enact more stringent requirements when it comes to water use in new developments, e.g. all Energy Star appliances?

6. Lead Testing & Service Line Inventory for Lead Regulations update – Mason Caceres, Assistant Water Resources Manager

- Free Lead Testing: Required EPA letter notifications to residents with galvanized service lines or connection to “unknown” water lines raised concerns and 157 requests for free lead testing kits. Lead testing offered through these notification letters is funded by the NHDES and only allows customers with an unknown or galvanized service to participate. City originally allocated funds for 100 kits for any qualified consumer interested in having their water tested (65 residents have responded; 33 have provided samples). Notification letters included EPA fact sheet on lead to help participants interpret their results and provide options for filtration if lead is detected. Hillman noted the owner must disclose galvanized service line if they sell or leave. New owner would receive the notification letter as these must be sent annually until the line is replaced. McNamara asked if there were risks of using plastic water pipes and if the City should recommend copper lines instead.
- Service Line inventory continues: As of the Oct 16, 2024 deadline, 594 unknowns remain out of the 8,382 total services. No lead found to date. 87% of lines are copper. The 135 galvanized lines found so far must be replaced in 10 years. City will conduct outreach on replacement guidelines if State funding is available. Cost varies \$6-10k; State may fund up to 71%. City supplies pitcher filters for 6 months to those replacing galvanized lines. City must identify all ‘unknowns’ and replace any LSR or galvanized by 2037.
- Lead & Copper rule compliance – The sample sites for monitoring must include all the galvanized service locations as of January 2025. Portsmouth sampling: 29 non-detect and 1 (a galvanized service line) had elevated lead level of 6.6 ppb, however this sample was collected from an unused bathroom fixture. 12 of the 30 sample locations have galvanized service lines, and 11 did not have a detection of lead in the collected samples. Pease sampling: 1 of 22 samples had 2.6 ppb detection, 21 were non-detect. City started its corrosion control program in 2003, adding poly/ortho-phosphate which coats all water lines to reduce possibility of contamination from corrosion.

7. DoD Policy Update on EPA PFAS MCLs -- Andrea: The EPA finalized the PFAS standards in April with a 5-year deadline to implement treatment. But as of August 2024, the Air Force had no policy on how they would prioritize their mitigation. Issued a policy in September identifying those wells with 3x or more levels of PFAS. Portsmouth and Collins wells are below that limit, so will have to continue to apply pressure since design/build takes 3+ years. DoD rule: <https://www.acq.osd.mil/eie/eer/ecc/pfas/docs/policies/epa-mcl-implementation-memo.pdf> DoD's community engagement session with 500 attendees from around the country on 11/19/24 re: the implementation of their 9/3/24 policy ((link to video & slides:

<https://www.acq.osd.mil/eie/eer/ecc/pfas/po/quarterly-events.html>)

8. Legislative Update – Rep. Meuse reported that 40 percent of the environmental bills were passed and signed into law by the Governor, including: the requirement that any property seller notify the buyer of known PFAS; broader recognition of cyanobacteria in NH Clean Lakes Project; transfer of unused environmental mitigation settlement funds (eg. Monsanto PCB \$25 million) to an environmental settlement holding fund whose use is authorized by the DES commissioner; requirement that insurance companies cover blood lead testing without any co-pay or deductible. Also provided a spreadsheet of Legislative Service Requests for bills in the new session. Seeing desire for regulation on things we can do as a state whether the desire is there on the national level or not.

9. Public Comment – None.

10. Other comment: Councilor Lombardi recommended the Metropolitan Waterworks Museum (1880s) in Boston which he visited. Councilor Blalock reported that all Portsmouth High School teams are now drinking filtered water and that the Fire Department is now purchasing PFAS-free firefighting gear.

Next Meeting: TBD March 2024.
Meeting adjourned at 8:29 pm.

DRAFT