

Safe Water Advisory Group (SWAG)
A City Council Advisory Committee
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, June 18, 2025

For the Zoom recording go to: <https://youtu.be/upnZfcDOTA4>

For all of the meeting presentations go to:

<https://www.portsmouthnh.gov/sites/default/files/2025-06/SWAG%20Meeting%20Slides%206-18-2025.pdf>

Attending: Andrea Amico, SWAG chair, Fire Chief Bill McQuillen, Katrie Hillman, Councilor Rich Blalock, Councilor Vince Lombardi, Rich DiPentima. Staff: Al Pratt, Mason Caceres, Stephanie Seacord (recording secretary). Excused: Kim McNamara, Rep. David Meuse, Laurel Schaider.

1. Welcome, Introduction, Approval of minutes – On a motion by Chief McQuillen, seconded by Ric DiPentima, voted to approve March 5, 2025 minutes.

2. Membership update - Andrea welcomed Genevieve Beckstead Muske from the School Board as that body's representative, replacing Elizabeth Barrett, who was thanked for her service to SWAG.

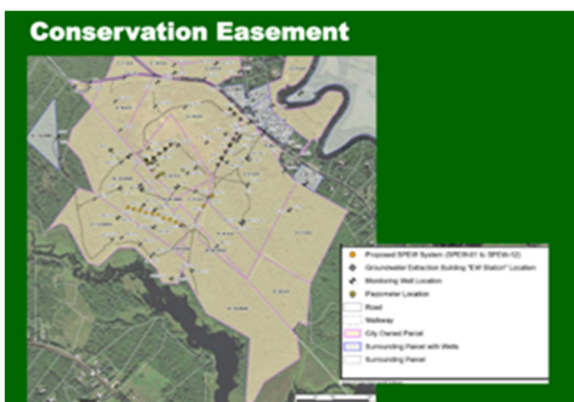
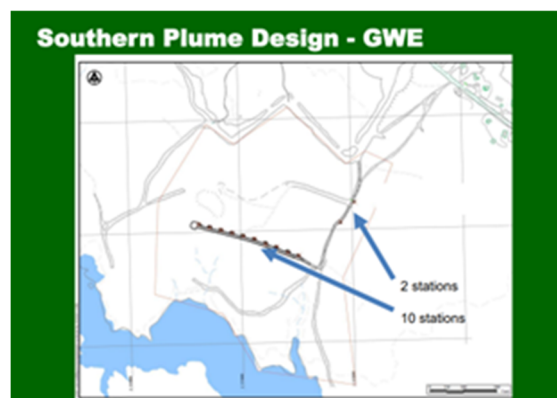
3. EPA PFAS Announcement re: MCLs - Brandon Kernen, NH DES Administrator of the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau – State of NH still regulates PFAS in drinking water under MCL standards set in 2019 and will work to adopt the EPA standards when they are finalized. On May 14, 2025 EPA proposed a change in their MCLs for PFAS that were established in 2024. The proposal maintains the limits for PFOS and PFOA, removes the limits for four of the previously regulated PFAS and extends the compliance deadline to 2031 from 2029. The new draft rules are now anticipated in Dec 2025. The EPA also added an exemption clause, “effective unless too complex or expensive to implement.” Litigation by American Water Works Association, the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies and others is ongoing. The State is acting on behalf of the water systems in securing claims and awards resulting from PFAS contamination. Those of the 700 sites in Phase 1, like Portsmouth who detected PFAS before June 22, 2023, are identified to receive a share of the \$55 million allocated to NH. Phase 2 is underway with raw water sampling from 1100 sites, with half at detectable PFAS levels. NHDES has also invested \$2 million to collect data for groundwater PFAS in 14,355 private wells, 57% of which tested over the 0.4 ppt MCL level. The state continues to offer a \$5000 private well remediation rebate (or \$10k rebate to connect to a public water supply.) PFAS is pervasive, especially in Southern NH. NHDES is now working with consumer product manufacturers (e.g. shampoo, detergent, stain remover) to help them eliminate sources of PFAS in the surfactants they add, of which they are often unaware. The goal is to help them green their chemistry. The

challenge is putting too much faith in any particular number at such low detection levels as the error is +/- 30%. Hard to even see trends. But PFAS shows up in people as part-per-billion levels when they are consuming drinking water with part-per-trillion levels. The goal is still zero.

4. Cyber Security Presentation - Brandon Kernen & Al Pratt, City of Portsmouth Water Resource Manager & SWAG co-chair – NHDES is working with their own Commissioner Bob Scott and CISA (Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency) to assess the cyber risk in the water provider sector. Since 9/11 the NHDES has implemented \$2 million in 30 physical security projects, but until recently had not invested too much in cybersecurity. CISA has been providing detailed assessments of cybersecurity for water systems. Funds have been provided to suppliers to address the deficiencies identified by CISA. The DES has contracted with the Overwatch Foundation to provide “cybersecurity in a box” (hardware, software and training) for a three year project. NH is leading the country in this effort. Then funding will need to come from Federal or municipal sources. This will be a continuing expense as the technology changes every few years. Portsmouth keeps SCADA systems physically isolated from City IT. Chief McQuillen noted that as Emergency Management Coordinator he continues to work with CISA. Andrea noted that Federal budget and agency cuts put this expertise and funding at risk.

5. Dover Municipal (Tolend) Landfill Update – John Storer, Community Services; Dean Peschel, Peschel Consulting LLC & Christene Binger, Verdantas LLC. The team provided an update since their March 2023 briefing (www.portsmouthnh.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/SWAG%20Minutes%202023.03.07.pdf).

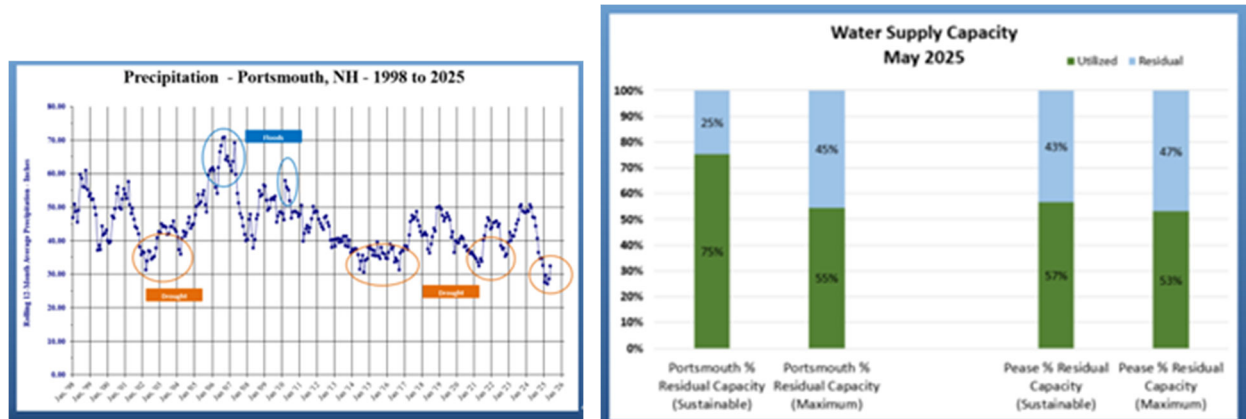
Dover has studied the movement of 1,4-dioxane and PFAS in groundwater from the Tolend Landfill since the 1990s, recognizing and working to keep separate two streams: east to the Cocheco River and south to the Bellamy Reservoir. The results of those quarterly sampling assessments show that the plumes and the impact on the Bellamy shoreline are stable. Dover is now implementing a two-part Southern Plume Remedial Action system (below, left) designed to block migration to the Bellamy Reservoir without changing either flow. The system uses 12 wells, clustered in four stations, to extract groundwater from aquifer and discharge it to the Dover wastewater treatment facility. Prep work on site clearance and utility infrastructure started in 2025 with construction anticipated during low water periods in Jul-Aug-Sep 2026.



Conservation – Dean reported that Dover is partnering with South East Land Trust (SELT) and

US Fish & Wildlife on a conservation easement for two parcels (above, right) to add to the 250 acres the town has protected to separate the landfill from the reservoir. SELT will hold the easement.

6. Quarterly Water Supply Update - Al Pratt. Full report: The supply of water is recharging thanks to rain since November 2024 and southeast NH is now out of drought conditions.



Levels at the Reservoir and in the supply wells are back up allowing the Water System to source surface water and allow the wells to recharge. Al has created a new capacity report showing that demand on the Portsmouth Water System is currently 75% of its sustainable capacity, leaving 25% reserve, although that proportion varies seasonally due to changes in demands. The Pease Water System has 43% reserve capacity based on its sustainable yield.

Water Projects update:

- Storage tank painting: Spinney in fall 2025 or spring 2026, then Newington, then Lafayette
- PFAS treatment Greenland well – CIP funded for design in 2025 and construction 2026-27
- Little Bay Road – water main project will be completed by the end of July.
- Little Bay Transmission line – now estimated at \$14 million and in the Safe Water Drinking Fund queue for funding.
- Hydraulic model complete and data on pipe replacement projections added to the asset management plan.
- Smith well – cleaning and repairs in the fall
- Collins well – awaiting Air Force approval of \$600k design
- Service line inventory replacement plan - \$3.5 million loan request goes to Governor & Council next week.
- Seacoast Reliability Interconnect – studying the Madbury-Dover opportunity

Fernald easement completed. Awaiting Congressionally Directed Spending reimbursement for City advance of funds to supplement \$750k from Drinking Water Trust and \$25k from NHDES.

Andrea – Requested for next SWAG an update/map showing all the land around the Bellamy now protected by Portsmouth and Dover.

7. Legislative Update – Rep. David Meuse. No legislation on lead testing, landfill locations, PFAS mitigation. Budget is still in flux.

- HB 691 on fluoride -- deemed inexpedient to legislate.
- HB 756 on testing for lead in children entering school -- deemed inexpedient to legislate
- SB 115 appropriation for regional water infrastructure -- tabled
- SB 240 appropriate to NHDES for funding eligible water projects -- tabled

8. **Mission discussion** - SWAG agreed that the best way to proceed with revising its mission without extra governance or staff time is to finalize the revision at the September meeting and then submit it in the end-of-the-term report in Dec with the recommendation to “reappoint SWAG with this mission” under the new Council term starting January 2026. Andrea asked the group to review the following edits preparatory to the next meeting:

Existing 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 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 drinking water quantity, quality, preservation and conservation efforts, and water infrastructure projects. To discuss public health aspects of water quality, to support and provide public education about drinking water topics, and to take proactive stances to protect and conserve water quality and quantity

9. **New/old business** – Topics for future SWAG meetings.

Raising awareness of SWAG at the state level (e.g. NH DES Surface Water Protection Conference) and among residents (e.g. advance publicity for guest presentations, expanded titles on YouTube recordings, presence at Farmers Market and Sustainability Fair).

10. **Public Comment** – None.

Adjourned at 8:20 pm