

Safe Water Advisory Group (SWAG)

A City Council Advisory Committee

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, December 4, 2025

For the zoom recording:

<https://youtu.be/pDgGBfqHF7I>

Attending: Chair Andrea Amico, Genevieve Becksted Muske, Councilor Rich Blalock, Councilor Vince Lombardi, Rep. David Meuse, Rich DiPentima, Kim McNamara. Staff: Al Pratt, Mason Caceres, Stephanie Seacord (recording secretary). Absent: Chief Bill McQuillen, Katrie Hillman, Laurel Schaider

1. **Welcome, Introduction & Approval of minutes – Andrea Amico, SWAG co-chair** -- On a motion by Rep. Meuse, seconded by Councilor Lombardi the minutes for October 7, 2025 were approved unanimously.
2. **Lead Testing updates – Ken Linchey, Portsmouth School Department** -- The School Department has conducted Rounds 2 and 3 of testing replaced fixtures and replaced 19 school water (17 at Little Harbour) outlets with reverse-osmosis filters. Additionally, all 36 of the school bottle-fill bubblers now have canister filters (green-yellow-red indicators, monitored by custodians and other staff for replacement at “yellow” level from in-stock supply of filters). Because of a positive test in a new unit at New Franklin it was replaced. This effort includes the water supply in the athletic trainer’s office that the athletic teams use. The School Department has now fulfilled the testing required by the State but plans an additional round (though not required within the next few months to have a year’s worth (Round 3 was 2024) of monitoring and ensure safe water for the kids. In discussions to include improvements in the CIP, particularly New Franklin where a major upgrade is planned for the whole facility. Long term, a solution, though expensive, is to replace all the plumbing in all the schools. Talk to test lab (new vendor) every month. Q. Any State funding? A. Reimbursement available for work that is done. But limited funds are available for construction.

Mason Caceres, Assistant Water Resource Manager -- The status of the Lead & Copper Service Line inventory has not changed significantly since the last report. Of 8700 service line connections, 2,327 are unknown and have received notification letters, same as last year, explaining the purpose, the risk from old galvanized lines and/or lead solder connections in home plumbing and funds that might be available to help homeowners with those replacements, that must be made by 2037. For the 1755 unidentified City lines, potholing was done for a statistically-significant 36 percent of lines in October in the Maple Haven neighborhood. The City has grant funding to hire a contractor for continued potholing in the spring. Sampling of Pease Water System customers identified 1 that exceeded 12 ppb (action level is 15 ppb) and was notified of those results.

Q. Health Director Kim McNamara asked if the Water Division is notified if the State Lead Program finds a child with elevated blood lead levels (generally caused by lead paint in the home). A. Not notified but could close the loop by offering water testing for lead if Water is informed. Sampling is done by the Water Division on the basis of priority tiers: first, any residences with identified lead, then multifamily with galvanized or lead, then single residence with galvanized. Portsmouth sampling takes place in Q3; Pease in Q4.

Q. What about testing at daycare centers? A. Daycare centers and schools are tested through the State’s “Get the Lead Out” program, not by the Water Division.

Q. There are commercial-sized food and beverage plants at Pease. If a high level is detected in their testing can Health be notified? Wouldn't any lead in the water be concentrated by long boiling of foods such as soup? A. All test results are reported on the Department of Environmental Services OneStop site. <https://www.des.nh.gov/onestop-navigation>

3. Quarterly Water Supply Update & Master Plan Project Update – Al Pratt, Water Resource Manager & SWAG co-chair

The drought continues but the Portsmouth and Pease Water Systems are continuing to meet the demand. Hopefully the watershed will receive enough winter precipitation to recharge, but recent years haven't quite restored the balance. Levels are at their lowest seasonally since 1998.

Groundwater is 1-4 ft. below average; last year groundwater levels were 1-2 ft. below average.

Bellamy Dam experience water over the spillway again on December 1, partly thanks to the annual drawn down of water from Swain's Lake.

Q. With all the development in Portsmouth, is anyone watching the water supply? A. Because the demand for water has decreased 6 percent, water levels from all sources are sustainable but yes, every project's Technical Review includes the water/wastewater/stormwater impact. Also, many of the new homes are being built as second homes with seasonal water demand. Water Division has the option of putting the Greenland Well back online but there are no other good water locations. All the gravel locations have been tapped; the remaining sites are granite bedrock.

Q. Health Director Kim McNamara referenced the Community Health Impact Profile and its finding that residents are concerned about the impact of development on wildlife and their habitats. A. Most Water Division projects are enhancing surface water environments through the preservation of the watershed (eg Bellamy Reservoir) or, for groundwater, relying on deep wells where drawing water has less impact than drawing from shallower wells.

PFAS: Not much change in the testing results. Pease continues to be a Superfund site administered by the EPA and for which the Air Force has been responsible since 1991. NHDES supports the cleanup and has recognized the City of Portsmouth as an impacted stakeholder, including the City in quarterly stakeholder calls and reporting: <https://www.pfas.des.nh.gov/pfas-occurrences/pease-air-force-base>

Q. Health Director noted that there are thousands of chemicals impacting the environment and wondered how Portsmouth anticipates other emerging contaminants of concern. A. EPA updates its list of these every 5 years, and Portsmouth tests for the current list of 29 PFOAs plus lithium. Testing for other contaminants is difficult because the testing labs are not up to speed. Chair Amico noted that Portsmouth will continue to join testing opportunities to advance the science and will educate the public much as possible.

Water Projects:

- Smith and Harrison well cleaning and pump replacement (\$74k for treatment of the water involved)
- Bellamy Reservoir crack sealing is 70% complete during the low water season (some of the cracks have been there since shortly after the dam was built)
- Service line inventory potholing will move to the Elwyn Park neighborhood
- Greenland well PFAS treatment project anticipated to be constructed 2026-28
- Water storage painting: the interior of the Spinney Rd water tank in Spring 2026 and Newington Booster in Fall 2026. Spot repairs to Lafayette until replacement.
- Little Bay Transmission project: due to the unsupportable construction window and cost for the original PVC pipe design, a new ductile iron option is being pursued but is still estimated

as a \$14.5 million cost in a CIP outyear. In the meantime, to be shovel-ready should funding be available, by Spring 2026, permitting/review will be complete for NH DES wetlands, Watershed Bureau for Water Quality, Coastal Zone Management, NH Fish and Game and Army Corps of Engineers. Q. Are the landowners on board? A. All work impacting those landowners has been completed.

Full report: <https://www.portsmouthnh.gov/sites/default/files/2025-12/SWAG%20Meeting%20Slides%2012-04-25.pdf>

4. PFAS update - Andrea Amico

As part of the class action suit against the manufacturers of firefighting foam with PFAS, New Hampshire is receiving \$56 million in settlement that will go to the Drinking Water Trust Fund. The Phase 1 distribution of \$45k of those funds was made. Al Pratt noted that Portsmouth expects to see the procedures for future disbursements in the next few months and hopes the cost of the Greenland well PFAS treatment project will benefit.

In response to the Department of Defense's quiet announcement that it is delaying PFAS cleanup operations at military bases included Pease (NY Times reporting September), the NH Congressional delegation sent a letter to Secretary Hegseth on November 17 asking for an explanation by December 1, 2025. The Air Force responded that the delay report was an error and that their schedule is still on track.

5. SWAG end of year summary/recommendations to City Council - Andrea Amico

Andrea included the draft report in the Dec 4 meeting packet. Chief among the recommendations is that the Mayor reconstitute SWAG for another two-year term with the following composition:

City Councilors: **as assigned by the Mayor**
Community Members: **Andrea Amico, Katrie Hillman, Rich DiPentima**
City of Portsmouth Fire Department: **William McQuillen**
City of Portsmouth Water Department: **Al Pratt**
City of Portsmouth Health Department: **Kim McNamara**
City of Portsmouth School Board: **Genevieve Becksted-Muske**
Environmental Scientist: **Dr. Laurel Schaidler**
NH State Representative: **David Meuse**
NH State Senator: **Rebecca Perkins Kwoka**

SWAG members are asked to send Andrea suggestions for edits by Friday, December 12 so the report can be included the packet for the Dec 22 City Council meeting. Two suggestions:

- Rephrase recommendation #4 on page 1 to "Recommend that the Mayor appoint..."
- Move the activity reports for 2024 and 2025 to the front
- Remove the recommendation for monitoring athletic field runoff for PFAS as SWAG suggested that before and was advised there's no good way to separate source IDs for PFAS in Berry's Brook.
- Add continued updating on School lead monitoring
- Add ongoing drought monitoring

Chair Amico thanked the two SWAG members attending their last meeting -- Councilor Lombardi and School Board representative Genevieve Becksted-Muske -- for their contributions and service.

6. Public comment – None.

Adjourned at 8:26 pm

Next meeting: TBD

MEETING PURPOSE

Founded by City Council action on October 5, 2020, the group's stated mission is: 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, support and provide public education about drinking water topics, and take proactive stances to protect and conserve water quality and quantity.

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