

CAMBRIDGE WATER BOARD

MEETING MINUTES

September 13, 2022

Due to COVID-19, this meeting is available virtually on Zoom. This meeting is being recorded.

This meeting was called to order at 5:04 p.m., those in attendance via *Zoom* were:

Cambridge Water Board (CWB): James Burress, Kathleen Kelly, Mike McNeley and Ann Roosevelt.

Cambridge Water Department (CWD): Sam Corda, Dave Kaplan, Krystyna McNally, Fred Centanni, Julie Greenwood-Torelli, Jamie O'Connell, Mark Gallagher and Linda Vierboom.

Cambridge Day (CD): Sue Reinert

A. MINUTES OF JUNE 14, 2022, MEETING

Ms. Kelly moved, and Mr. McNeley seconded the motion to approve the June 14, 2022, minutes as amended. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

B. MANAGING DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Covid-19 Update: Status quo. No issues related to Covid-19 from a staffing perspective. Mr. Corda said, with the board's permission, this will be the last update unless something unusual happens. The board agrees.

Drought /Water Conservation Update: We are continuing at Level 3 Critical Drought conditions. The current US Drought Monitor has moved up to Extreme Drought as of 9/8/2022. The US Seasonal (Oct, Nov, Dec) Drought Monitor indicates the drought will persist. We are at 44 % capacity in our reservoirs and -5" below average rainfall this calendar year. We are taking less water from our reservoir system as we are now using MWRA water.

Questions/Comments: The recent rains helped this week. September is the start of our recharge cycle. Hoping that although the drought predictions are getting worse, we are on the upswing.

Ms. Kelly asked what the City and CWD can do to educate residents who are feeling alarmed when they see neighboring towns undergoing water bans and asking why Cambridge isn't. Ms. Kelly feels we need to talk in depth about continued drought and its social and cultural context. She asked if there is a way people could look at their bill and understand what part goes towards irrigation versus other usual uses. Perhaps seeing this could prompt people to change the culture somewhat and get people thinking differently about planting, lawns and landscaping.

Mr. Corda said irrigation isn't a large consumption factor in the City. Based on the Automated Meter Read System (AMR) reports, irrigation accounts used approximately 0.5 million gallons per day (MGD). There simply is not a lot of grass/gardening areas in the city. We will try and figure out where specifically the water is going in the summer. Cooling systems in buildings could make up a significant part of that. If we can determine that, we can require super-efficient chillers when systems are upgraded. We have continued our water conservation efforts via social media, our webpage, drought status and stuffers in the bills and cable tv notices. We will continue to do so to preserve our natural resource.

Key Topics: Distribution System, Drought, Covid-19, PFAS6 & Filter Media Updates

We have a contract with the vendor and are getting closer (next 6 months) to when people could go online with the same log in as paying their bill and see their daily usage. We are also upgrading our AMR software.

Although the population is increasing, Cambridge continues to have low water consumption. “That’s a good accomplishment,” said Mr. Corda. CWD sends out “Leak Alerts” when customers typical water thresholds are exceeded. The leak alert system is a manual system, and it does work, which Ms. Roosevelt can attest to. Recently she received several alerts and thanked the department for these. Her building had a huge spike in water usage, and she received a leak alert letter. The first plumber missed half the leaks, and she got a second letter. This saved money and saved water. Ms. Roosevelt thanked Ms. Kelly for bringing this topic up and would welcome going into this more at a future meeting.

PFAS6 and Filter Media Update: July tested at 16.2 parts per trillion (ppt) and August tested at 21.6ppt. The August sample was rejected by MassDEP and is not valid and we were able to re-sample in August. The resample was a split sample and sent to two different labs. The first re-sample result tested at 20.8ppt and we are awaiting the second result. Once received the two sample results will be averaged. Since the August PFAS results are tentatively above 20ppt and historically the September PFAS result is the highest of the year, Cambridge reacted promptly and swiftly, and we pre-emptively switched over to Massachusetts Resources Water Authority (MWRA) water as of August 30, 2022. This put the health and safety of all water users in Cambridge as the number one priority. The Public notice came out from the city manager’s office prior to the switch over. Mr. Corda was interviewed by several news outlets. We are still waiting for the second sample result from the contract lab which are due on September 14th. As defined by MassDEP regulation the quarterly average must be under 20ppt. There were no September samples to collect as we were not on “Cambridge” water. The decision to switch to MWRA water was made with an abundance of caution and the transition to 100% MWRA water was successful. We are operating the treatment plant two days a week, without putting any water into the system, to keep the system ready for switch back after the new Granulated Active Carbon (GAC) filter media is installed.

Questions/Comments: Ms. Roosevelt asked why the first lab’s test results were deemed invalid at 21.6 ppt. Testing of PFAS is still a relatively new science and difficult for labs. One part per trillion (ppt) is infinitesimally small, as one ppt is equivalent to one drop of water in 20 Olympic sized pools. Ms. Greenwood-Torelli said that when we re-sampled, we sent the samples to two labs. The second is more consistently being approved by MassDEP quality control. Ms. Greenwood-Torelli said the error was based on lab error and not collection error on our part. We have new GAC filter media coming in and we need a laboratory that will give accurate and reliable results.

Questions/Comments: Mr. Gallagher said the switch over to MWRA involved mechanically closing our valves, opening MWRA valves and allowing water to flow from MWRA. The MWRA water pressure is about 10 PSI higher than ours. This boosted our pressure slightly which created a few (6) water main breaks. We are balancing the two systems and Payson Park tanks are floating on the system. Our next process will be preparing for switching the water back over once the new filter media is installed.

Mr. McNeley commented on the swift response by CWD and asked about the impact to costs of using MWRA water. Mr. Corda said it is 2.9 times more expensive to use MWRA water than for us to produce it; at an additional cost of ~2 million dollars per month. The long-range financial impact is unknown currently. Typically, our water fund balance would be used to pay for this extraordinary expense. We are meeting weekly with the GAC supplier. Most of the filter media replacement work will be done between October and December 2022. It is anticipated that Cambridge will be partially or possibly totally on our own water in December 2022.

C. OPERATIONS

Transmission and Distribution:

Questions/Comments: Ms. Roosevelt reminded CWD she would like all references to the new water main work at Northpoint Extension to always include the standard pipe material which is “ductile iron cement lined pipe”.

Watershed:

Questions/Comments: The Pine Forest Survey will be the base plan on which we will be able to draw out construction plans. After the “existing conditions” survey is completed, we will start the public process to make sure the scope is more inclusive. The process could take about a year.

Questions/Comments: Would it help, while on MWRA water, if we could fast tract the Winter Street gatehouse outlet repairs? Permitting takes time, said Mr. Kaplan and we will be able to take advantage of being “offline”.

Questions/Comments: Little Fresh Pond Reconstruction is in the permitting phase. Ms. Kelley says she doesn’t recall seeing the final design. Mr. Kaplan said the board saw the final rendering but not the final specifications that were written into the final contract. Mr. Kaplan will send the final design to the board.

Questions/Comments: Location 40 Sylvan Road, Waltham – What is antidegradation authorization? Antidegradation reviews are required, as part of the discharge permitting process, for any action that has the potential to degrade water quality. Permission for discharge is required from Mass DEP before the proponent can go forward because the intended discharge area is a tributary. Ms. O’Connell said the water going out should be better than the water coming in and they will be treating it for PFAS.

Questions/Comments: Ms. Roosevelt commented on the large number of projects going on in our watershed and thanked the watershed division for keeping on top of it.

Questions/Comments: Ms. Kelley asked what the drawbacks were to the proposed solar field. Ms. O’Connell said the private parcel is landlocked, sloped and relatively wooded, making for a challenging site for a developer. There are concerns of denuding the slope and getting rid of what is currently a protected area of land for our watershed. The designs do not trigger the wetlands protection act. Their plans have not been submitted to the Lexington planning board/or new communications from the developer at this point. This developer has appeared before the water board previously to ask for permission for this and other projects. The board refused.

Questions/Comments: What is Scour on watershed property?

An erosive channel that formed from an outfall on Sibley Road, Weston, degrading the flow path.

Water Operations:

Questions/Comments: Mr. Corda said the Demand Study contract is being defined and will start within the next few months.

Engineering:

Questions/Comments: Ms. Roosevelt commented on the large number of developments going on in the City

Business/Billing:

Questions/Comments: Ms. Roosevelt asked why billing quarters vary. Mr. Centanni said it depends on the time of billing. For example, one cycle may be processed at the end of month, one at the beginning of the month. “We look at whole numbers and not month by month.”

The water fund balance is at \$8.69M. Mr. Centanni said we have already allocated in this budget 3.4 million dollars for our SCADA upgrade. That’s why we built a fund balance to help us when we need it.

D. ACTION ITEMS

None

E. MISCELLANEOUS CORRESPONDENCE AND ITEMS OF INTEREST

The Fresh Pond Mobil proposed 2,000-gallon diesel fuel underground storage denial upheld: Ms. O’Connell said the way the regulation is written, for Zone A, the water supplier must give permission, or not. In-kind replacements are allowed, only. We interpreted the regulations, and their proposal was not in-kind and is not allowed. The law department signed off on the letter. We were the “decider” in this instance. The proponent accepted our decision.

Ms. Roosevelt thanked Ms. O’Connell for the (40 pages) Site Monitoring Program Report. It was agreed the (internal) site monitoring tool will make a big difference for data management. The site monitoring tool is not yet complete by the consultant. The interactive water quality report should be available by the next water board meeting.

F. NEW BUSINESS

None

G. NEXT MEETING DATES/AGENDA – Meetings via Zoom

- October 11, 2022: Approved/TBD
- November 15, 2022: Approved/TBD
- December 13, 2022: TBA/TBD

Ms. Kelly moved, and Mr. McNeley seconded the motion to adjourn the Zoom meeting at 6:30 pm. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.