



WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes
September 1, 2022
7:00 PM
Virtual Meeting

Present: Barry Rosen, Ron Parenti, Joe Robb, and Mike Geis

Chairperson: Mike Geis

Clerk: Ron Parenti

Others in Attendance: Himaja Nagireddy (Select Board Liaison), Erika Amir-Lin (Water District Commissioner), Ron Beck, Richard Doherty, and Kim Kastens.

1. Opening

WRAC chair Mike Geis opened the meeting at 7:05 PM.

2. Regular Business

- A. Review Minutes – Kim Kastens submitted a request to amend the 26 July, 2022 draft minutes that had been circulated to the members earlier in the week, and those changes were implemented. A motion to approve the amended minutes was made by Ron Parenti and seconded by Joe Robb. The minutes were subsequently approved by a unanimous roll call vote of the members in attendance.
- B. Public Remarks/Comments – None
- C. Discussion of Wastewater Treatment Approaches – After many years of service on the WRAC, Ron Beck recently retired from that position. Because of his long experience with wastewater issues, he was asked by the Committee to speak on this topic. Beck made the following points.
 - 1) In 2004 Woodard & Curran completed the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan (CWRMP) under contract by the Town of Acton to assess future wastewater management strategies. That report recommended the installation of a town-wide sewer system (part of which has been implemented) as well as wastewater districts for the management of privately-owned septic systems. Currently, about 80% of the Town is serviced by septic systems. The purpose of establishing wastewater management districts is to ensure that septic systems are properly maintained, which at minimum requires that these systems be pumped and inspected every other year.
 - 2) Beck expressed his opinion that many people do not maintain their systems as instructed by the Town, and that records of systems that have been pumped are not well maintained. He indicated that he and his neighbors have never received a warning from the Town, even when they had failed to pump for a number of years.



3) One of the reasons that a town-wide sewer system would be very expensive is the high cost to bring a sewer line across Rt. 2 in order to connect North Acton to the Town's wastewater treatment plant on Adams Street. The construction of a second treatment plant on property owned by the State near the Concord Rotary has been discussed, but the State has not given approval to use the property for that purpose. In view of the projected construction costs, it is unlikely that a town-wide sewer system will be installed at any time in the near future.

4) Since it is likely that the vast majority of Acton's residents will continue to be served by private septic systems for the foreseeable future, the proper maintenance of these aging systems is important to protect the Town's water supply. The useable lifetime of a well-built system is very long, assuming that it is regularly pumped and inspected. Beck listed several mechanisms for ensuring that privately-owned septic systems are properly maintained: a) requiring homeowners to submit proof that their systems have been pumped at the frequency specified by the Town; b) allowing the Town to manage and enforce pumping schedules; c) enabling Town officials to gain access to private property for the purpose of performing regular maintenance; and d) giving ownership of septic systems to the Town so that maintenance would be the Town's responsibility. Beck indicated that the approach that would most likely be accepted by Acton's residents would involve mandated inspections verified by Town officials.

It was noted that the long-term cost of regular maintenance is much lower than the cost of a system replacement. When asked when the Select Board had last discussed the issue of septic system management Himaja Nagireddy responded that the Board had raised this topic most recently in a meeting a few months ago, and she suggested that WRAC present its recommendations to the Select Board at a future meeting. Beck offered to provide the WRAC with a list of local towns that have implemented a structured septic system management program.

- D. Logistics and Cost of Connecting to MWRA – Barry Rosen reviewed the recent discussions held between a number of MA public water suppliers including the Acton Water District regarding the issues associated with a connection to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) water supply. He noted that as a former member of the Water District's Water Land Management Advisory Committee (WLMAC), he had been involved in discussions about the possibility of connecting to MWRA 5 years earlier. Rosen reviewed the formation of the MWRA, the towns that are currently members, and the supply capability of the water sources that originate at the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs. Although the number of member towns has grown steadily since its creation, the water supplied by the MWRA has decreased substantially since 1990 due to the implementation of a demand management program. The MWRA's safe yield is estimated to be 300 million gallons per day (mgd), and it is currently supplying approximately 200 mgd. Acton's current peak demand is about 2.5 mgd, which is a small fraction of the available supply. Rosen noted that since the time it was established in 1980, the MWRA has never been placed in draught warning status, despite the fact that there have been many years of low rainfall since that date.



The cost to connect to MWRA would be very high using the current fee schedules. The current entrance fee is \$4.3m per mgd, and the wholesale water rate (before distribution expenses are applied) is \$0.0046 per gallon. Mike Geis asked about the cost of a physical connection to the system. Rosen responded that the connection would be problematic, since none of the adjacent towns are currently connected. However, several nearby towns are discussing MWRA membership, including Concord and Sudbury. It might be possible to daisy-chain through one of these towns, but if that proves to be impossible a direct connection to the Carroll Treatment Plant in Marlborough may be Acton's only option.

In response to a question by Ron Parenti, Rosen verified that the recent interest in the MWRA is driven primarily by the anticipated costs of meeting the State's new water quality standards for PFAS chemicals. The MWRA system has the advantage of drawing from a source that has very low PFAS levels, and it is serviced by a very sophisticated centralized treatment system that can be upgraded to satisfy the more restrictive regulations that might be issued in the future.

- E. Methodology Used to Compute PFAS Limits – Due to the late hour, it was decided to postpone the discussion of this topic until the next WRAC meeting. Ron Parenti suggested that the members read the report that he had generated relating to this topic prior to that meeting,
- F. Any other new business –Parenti noted that the Great Road Study Contract should be fully executed before the date of the next WRAC meeting, which would allow the details of the proposal submitted by Wright-Pierce to be disclosed to the Committee.

3. **Adjournment**

The Committee members decided that the next meeting would be scheduled for 15 September, 2022. A motion to adjourn was made by Mike Geis and seconded by Ron Parenti. Adjournment was approved by a roll call vote of the WRAC members in attendance, Joe Robb, Barry Rosen, Ron Parenti, and Mike Geis, at 8:40 PM.