

Safe Water Advisory Group (SWAG) A City Council Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes Wednesday, September 20, 2023 City Hall Conference Room A and via Zoom

Attending in person: Brian Goetz, co-chair; Councilor Vince Lombardi, Andrea Amico, co-chair, Rep. David Meuse, Elizabeth Barrett, James Hewitt, Laurel Schaidler, Katrie Hillman, Al Pratt, Chief Bill McQuillen, Kim McNamara, Amy Hudnor, M.S., Private Well Coordinator, NHDES Drinking Water & Groundwater Bureau, Brandon Kernan DES. Remote: Anna Lindner, Mason Caceres. Absent: Councilor Rich Blalock. Staff: Stephanie Seacord PIO, recording secretary

Full SWAG meeting recording: [9.20.2023 Safe Water Advisory Group - YouTube](#)

Meeting presentation slides: [SWAG Meeting \(cityofportsmouth.com\)](#)

1. **Welcome** – Co-chair Andrea Amico welcomed new SWAG member Jim Hewitt.
2. **Minutes for the June 7, 2023 meeting approved.** Moved: Chief McQuillen; second: Councilor Lombardi
3. **Seacoast Private Well Testing Initiative** -- Amy Hudnor, Private Well Coordinator NH Department of Environmental Services. **Presentation:** [PowerPoint Presentation \(cityofportsmouth.com\)](#)
 - Stratham – workshop for 276 of 291 who responded to the survey (10-13% town participation). High arsenic and radon levels typically found in NH. Shared information for low income households on the ZeroWater initiative and PFAS removal treatment rebates. Follow-up 2 months later received 193 replies of 468 test participants.
 - Drinking Water Trust Fund provides funding.
 - There are under 100 private wells (perhaps 40) in Portsmouth many of which are for irrigation. City is aware of those having checked for City water system connections during last year’s drought.
 - Drinking Water Commission towns are included. Next up will be Seacoast private wells in Greenland, Newington, Rye and Portsmouth (in that order) who will be offered free testing. Introductory meeting November 15 at Greenland Central School. Program will do outreach with postcards, flyers, social media, providing information to overcome resistance to testing or responding to results. Brandon noted that there’s a roughly 20 percent response to letters but a 90 percent response to one-on-one conversations with neighbors.
 - PFAS data collected by DES. Dover testing program in mid-March 2024.
 - Laurel noted that the Be Well Informed tool is easy to read and helps residents understand the health effects of water contaminants.

4. Water Supply Update – Al Pratt

Full presentation: [Portsmouth Water Supply Update September 20, 2023](#)

- Surface water supply in good shape due to rain: average rainfall is 45” but 55” recorded through Sep 20. Water is flowing over the Bellamy dam.
- 50 percent of the water supply used. Demand is down due to rain.
- Little Bay waterline bidders unable to achieve the Nov 15 – Mar 15 schedule except at significant cost. City is pursuing contingency plan to replace the valves on the two waterlines.
- Dover emergency interconnect to receive \$3.5 million in Federal grant through Sen. Shaheen. This is half the cost. The balance is split between Dover and Portsmouth.
- Finishing the Fernald property easement. All Bellamy easements are perpetual.
- Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day Sep 28 – anticipating approximately 300 participants. Historically 25 percent at each event are new participants.
- Southern portion of water system Master Plan Study – updating 2006 study with hydraulic model of southern part of city and whether development has affected water supplies. Received \$50k NHDES grant towards \$150k cost. Hydraulic model update will include the whole water system.

- Water Quality Reports mailed.
- PFAS – EPA regulation guidance expected in December. City discussing with Air Force covering the potential cost for PFAS treatment on Collins Well once there’s a regulatory standard to meet. Treatment is taking more staff time for adjustments and maintenance. Air Force accepts our reports. Still a lot we don’t know about these regulatory impacts.

5. Lead update –

City will offer water testing for qualified Portsmouth customers with the goal of raising awareness of lead/lead solder in private plumbing and to reduce/eliminate childhood lead poisoning. City continues outreach to communicate to all customers. State requires all schools to be tested for lead in their water systems. All children are required by the State to be tested for lead but Governor vetoed a bill that would have added a checkbox to school enrollment applications. Testing rates dropped between 2017 and 2021 adding concern to the fact that NH, especially Portsmouth, has a large number of pre-1978 (lead ban instituted) housing stock.

6. PFPrA update – Andrea Amico

Presentation in Full Presentation slides. Technology to filter short chain PFAs is available but not as effective as resins. Portsmouth maintains a filter replacement schedule every four months (which is when breakthrough is detected historically). For homeowner – reverse osmosis filter. Andrea continues test sampling for PFPrA as potential EPA limit of 10 ppt is considered, but results from Eurofin are indeterminate:

Jun 21	35 ppt
Mar 22	2.1 ppt
Mar 22	non-detect
Apr 23	15 ppt
Jun 23	non-detect

7. End of year report to City Council

Andrea and Brian will work on draft of achievements compared to 2021 SWAG objectives. Accepting suggestions from committee members for discussion at next meeting.

Question & Answer

- Q. Jim Hewitt asked about the next steps if the EPA health advisory PFAS levels are adopted.
 A. NH would have to adopt Federal standards. 2-3 years allowed for implementation. Many towns have not even begun to consider and costs will be significant. Perhaps there will be consolidated treatment among the towns in Southern NH. Legal challenges are expected. Water systems cannot make claims because the State filed suit on behalf of all water systems.
- Q. Rep. Meuse asked about MTB settlement monies being redirected to the General Fund rather than the Drinking Water Trust Fund.
 A. Monies went directly to the Drinking Water Trust Fund and are currently being used for a variety of drinking water programs and projects.
- Q. Kim asked about ultimate disposal of PFAS

A. No real solution yet. Can't remove the contaminated soil at Pease because it can't be taken off-site.

Q. Elizabeth asked about contaminants being washed into water supply in the flooding from heavy rains.

A. Bellamy flushes quickly (weeks). Pavement drainage going to surface not wells.

Q. Little Bay waterline costs

A. Rep. Pappas enabled \$600k but current bid was very high. Staff and consultant exploring possible adjustment of work window by regulators, splitting project up into phases, along with other alternatives.

Q. How often are the Pease filters changed?

A. Continue to collect data on carbon resin effectiveness so as to anticipate and budget for changeout before breakthrough (i.e. when samples exceed the regulatory limits.) Portsmouth continues to pilot and adopt other filter media when found to be more effective.

Q. Master Plan study?

A. The Capital Improvement Plan is based on a 10-year rolling plan. Hydraulic model of area from Lafayette to South Street to assess water availability, e.g, for firefighting.

Q. Odors in summer from Lafayette tank and in South End?

A. City in process of replacing the circulators in the clarifying tanks.

Adjourned at 8:45 pm