

HB 495 Seacoast Drinking Water Commission
Work Session Minutes
January 14, 2021

Commission Members present: Representative Jaci Grote (Chair), Representative Mike Edgar (Vice Chair), Senator Tom Sherman, Senator Rebecca Perkins Kwoka, Representative Dave Meuse, Representative Aidan Ankarberg, Brandon Kernen, Tim Roache, Jen Czysz, Brian Goetz, John Storer, Arthur Ditto, David Moore, David Ciccalone, Garret Ahlstrom, Danna Truslow, Peggy Lamson, Lindsey Carmichael, Ann Lightbody, Carl McMorrان, Greg Lane, and Pat Bushway (Clerk).

Guests: Representative Joan Hamblet, Rockingham 31
Jonathon Ali, Ph.D., Toxicologist, NHDES
David Cuzzi, President, Prospect Hill Strategies

The Chair opened the work session at 2:02, the Clerk read the instructions pertaining to the conduct of a remote meeting and called the roll. Each commission member gave a brief introduction including their current position and relevant background.

Brandon Kernen of NHDES presented an update on the drought explaining that conditions have improved, and the area can now be characterized as abnormally dry. However, there is still a deficit and the lack of snow has the potential to result in a return to drought conditions later in the year as melting of the snowpack in the spring supports spring and summer planting and growing seasons.

Mr. Kernen provided an update on the Emergency Drought Assistance program to assist low-income households that have experienced problems with residential wells because of the drought. Approximately 57 applications for assistance have been submitted and 51 of those have been approved. In some cases, the assistance includes providing new wells. Additional information about the program is available on the Drought page of the DES website.

Mr. Kernen also provided information about two meetings hosted by DES. The first will provide information for water systems operators, and the second will discuss manganese in water and the need for a standard. He provided details on accessing the meetings on Jan 15th.

Chair Grote brought up the issue of the need for an inventory of water resources by community to serve as part of the baseline for the commission's work going forward. The inventory would include a presentation of water resources by each town represented on the commission. The suggestion was made that DES begin the process by providing an overview of the region that would include but not be limited to water sources, protection areas, and distribution infrastructure. Mr. Roache of the Rockingham Planning Commission and Ms. Czysz of the Strafford Regional Planning Commission also have summary information for their counties that can assist with the inventory and avoid redundant effort on the part of the town/city commission members. Mr. Kernan presented a pie chart as an example of the information by county that is available. The consensus was that these high-level presentations should precede those of the towns/cities.

Chair Grote asked about reports of the costs of water going up, and if costs should be a topic for the commission. Mr. McMorrin of Aquarion stated that their water rates are determined by the Public Utilities Commission. Mr. Storer of Dover said that their water and sewer rates are established annually with the budget. Mr. Goetz of Portsmouth said that the rates for all communities supported by Portsmouth are set by the city council annually. Mr. Ditto of Rye made the point that water rates must include costs for infrastructure maintenance.

The discussion returned to the topic of regionalization that was introduced at prior meetings. Mr. Kernan said that regionalization efforts could prove to be more beneficial in the years to come depending on the extent to which communities are interested in pursuing it. Mr. Storer of Dover shared his experience with the development of the Southern Maine Regional Water Council and stated that their efforts helped to optimize the use of the available resources, and that the NH seacoast region could consider a similar effort.

Chair Grote asked that State Representatives Meuse of Portsmouth and Ankarberg of Rochester provide a review of relevant legislation being considered in the current session. That will be presented at the February meeting.

The session adjourned at 3:10.