

Seacoast Drinking Water Commission Work Session – Sep 24 2020

Meeting was called to order at 2:05. Script for remote meeting was read, roll call was taken, and all joined in the Pledge of Allegiance

Meeting began with a discussion of the findings remaining to be addressed from the previous commission and the need, if any, for sub-committees to address specific topics. Six areas were presented as still requiring completion:

1. The ongoing need to fund, develop, and implement regional water supply planning in the seacoast region
2. Improving coordination between the state, towns, and water suppliers during drought conditions
3. Expand household hazardous waste programs to decrease the volume of hazardous material entering the waste stream and consider including medical waste
4. Expand groundwater/source water protection education programs under the direction of DES in conjunction with the regional planning commissions
5. Review recommendations of the 2006 Seacoast NH Emergency Interconnection Study and consider implementation thereof
6. Continue to emphasize the importance of water efficiency and the impact on all consumers of demand versus supply and seasonal water demands

The group discussed the issues to determine the way ahead. The point was made that regional water supply planning and interconnectivity could probably be combined and might be best addressed by the regional planning commissions. However, current funding of the RPCs is probably not adequate to take on an issue of that scope.

There was considerable discussion of hazardous waste and medical waste. The consensus seemed to be that medical waste is a separate issue and should continue to be treated that way. There was discussion about disposal of prescription drugs and how to keep those out of the water supply. Rep Grote is looking into the packets that can be used to destroy drugs at home and keep them out of the water. Hazardous waste disposal days are conducted by the towns, and some do that more frequently than others. Part of the problem is that the state has limited funding to help the municipalities leaving it to them to fund most of the program.

The drought was discussed in terms of the need to inform people of the seriousness of the problem. It might be possible to combine water source protection education and drought management. The point was made that as this commission has a long-term charter, we could focus on one issue at a time rather than try to address several at once. It was also mentioned that being a relatively small group, sub-committee participation could prove difficult so we should consider the commission working on one topic at a time.

Following the discussion about the issues from the previous commission, there was a presentation on water source protection and the role of wetlands in protecting drinking water. Brandon Kernen began with an overview of what wetlands are and what they contribute to adequate and safe water. He talked about the functions of wetlands and mentioned that the permitting process is designed to protect

wetlands while allowing for development. Rep Chuck Grassie discussed continuing efforts to enact legislation that will protect prime wetlands. He explained the efforts that have been made to make sure that adequate protections are in place. He discussed the problem of attempting to delineate wetlands as a geographic shape without including the “fingers” and “toes” that feed into the main body. Designating a shaped area would cut off these important areas that are part of the wetland. He also discussed the efforts to get an outdated manual for use by municipalities updated. Funding is a factor in this effort as well.

The last topic of discussion was the upcoming annual report that is due November 1st, and how best to get that done given that we have not been able to get meeting minutes approved due the lack of a quorum. The recommendation was to have an executive summary that provides an overview of what the commission has done and append the unapproved work session minutes to provide the detail. The draft report will be prepared that way and will be made available to the commission members for their review and input with the goal of submitting the report on November 1st. The meeting adjourned at 3:30.

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