

HB 495 Seacoast Drinking Water Commission
Meeting Minutes
February 11, 2021

Commission Members present: Representative Mike Edgar (Vice Chair), Senator Tom Sherman, Senator Rebecca Perkins Kwoka, Representative Dave Meuse, Brandon Kernen, Brian Goetz, John Storer, Arthur Ditto, David Ciccalone, Garret Ahlstrom, Ann Lightbody, Kyle Pimental, Carl McMorrان, Steven Smith for Representative Dennis Malloy, and Pat Bushway (Clerk).

Guests: State Representative Joan Hamblet, Rockingham 31 and Mr. Paul Susca, DES.

The Vice Chair opened the meeting at 2:05, the Clerk read the instructions pertaining to the conduct of a remote meeting, the Vice Chair led the members in the Pledge of Allegiance, and the Clerk called the roll.

Representative Meuse presented an overview of legislation before the General Court for the current session that has the potential to be of interest to the Commission. The list of bills discussed will be posted to the Commission's page on the General Court website. Several comments were made pertaining to HB 611, a bill to abolish the fluoridation in drinking water throughout the state. Brian Goetz from Portsmouth made the point that implementing such a decision is relatively easy but noted that municipalities that currently fluoridate their water voted to do so and that this bill would override that vote. He further noted that there is support for and against fluoridation. Senator Sherman stated that while high levels of fluoride can be toxic, the level in water systems is not likely to be problematic. He further pointed out that fluoride in drinking water promotes good dental health which is essential to overall health, and that poor dentition can be costly not only to the individual but can have economic impacts for the community. The Vice Chair reiterated a point he had made earlier that the Commission can choose to support or oppose a bill.

Brandon Kernen of NHDES presented an update on the drought explaining that conditions in the area remain abnormally dry, and that the snowpack is approximately 1/3 of the desired level. He reiterated that snowpack is essential for peak recharge in the spring. Carl McMorrان of Aquarion said that relatively low demand this time of year makes the situation manageable, but that the summer months have the potential to be challenging. Arthur Ditto, Rye Water Commissioner, said that the overburden well is low, and that the bedrock wells are being monitored. Mr. Goetz said that the Portsmouth system is seeing some recovery but will also be challenged later in the year due to the lack of snow.

In keeping with the decision from the January work session, Mr. Kernan presented an overview of the Rye water system. He pointed out that most Rye residents get their water from public water systems with a small percentage, primarily near the beach, use private wells. Rye also has three landfills that can or do present risks such as contamination from PFAS, and wellhead protection areas must be observed. The use of protections created by zoning ordinances, implementation of best practices, and public education all help to protect water sources in Rye. Senator Sherman brought up the issue of prime wetlands and the role they play in keeping water safe. Mr. Susca said that wetlands are most valuable in hydrologic areas of concern, less for stratified drift aquifers. Because of the importance of wetlands, future municipality presentations will include maps showing wetlands. Mr. Kernan also mentioned that sea level rise could impact surface water sources and infrastructure, but that saltwater incursion is not a big concern in Rye.

Mr. Kernan discussed water usage trends, and made the point that even with population growth, in many towns the usage is fairly stable. The reasons for this are difficult to pinpoint and could include everything from more efficient appliances that use water to the amount of rain in each season. Mr. Goetz said that not all municipalities in the region see an increase in summer usage due to seasonal residents. Portsmouth has more industry and usage tends to remain stable. Mr. Ditto and Mr. McMorran agreed that a large percentage of water provided by a municipality's system is utilized for irrigation in the warmer months. This large usage stresses the water system's capacity to provide water for the overall system.

Mr. Kernan raised the issue of potential contaminants in water that includes uranium, manganese, iron, arsenic, and PFAS. Manganese which was regarded as a nuisance in drinking water is now the subject of a federal health advisory due to the impact that it can have on infants at low levels. Mr. Ditto stated that manganese is an issue for bedrock wells and that Rye has been monitoring it since 2015. Arsenic is also a problem and may contribute to skin, bladder, and lung cancer as well as developmental problems in children. Radon is also a carcinogen that is found in air and water and should be monitored. Rye and towns throughout the area are testing regularly for PFAS.

The Commission will continue the review of town water systems, and will include discussions about wetlands, capacity, demands, and potential for interconnection.

The session adjourned at 3:45.