

HB 495 Seacoast Drinking Water Commission Meeting Minutes, 14 Jan 22

Commission members present: Representative Jaci Grote, Representative Mike Edgar, Representative Dennis Malloy, Senator Rebecca Perkins-Kwoka, Peggy Lamson, Brandon Kernen, Pat Bickford, Danna Truslow, David Moore, Art Ditto, Anne Lightbody, Gretchen Young (Dover), Al Pratt (Portsmouth), and Pat Bushway

Guests: Paul Susca, DES and Amy Hudnor, DES

The meeting came to order at 2:00. Pat Bushway, commission clerk, explained that the commission webpage has changed, and is being updated. She will check to see if the work of the previous commission can be linked with the current one.

After an introduction of the topic by Chair Grote, Paul Susca and Amy Hudnor presented a briefing on the Seacoast Private Well Initiative (PWI). Mr. Susca explained the purpose of the initiative is reduce exposure to contaminants for qualifying private well users, and to promote well testing and treatment. It is also to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach, and if it proves effective in seacoast towns, it can be considered for wider use across the state.

Mr. Susca went on to explain that the first step in implementing the initiative is to form a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) that could include commission members as well as officials from the municipalities such as public health officials. Ideally the PAC will also include local coordinators that will assist in increasing participation and expediting the steps involved in the process.

Next Amy Hudnor, the DES private well coordinator, will develop a website and informational material, and prepare materials for the project. Once that's complete, six local workshops will be conducted followed by water testing. The local coordinators will assist with planning for the workshop on items such as locating a venue if the workshops are conducted in person, promoting the workshops and testing, and assisting with distribution of sample bottles, and collection and drop off of the samples. The testing will be done for standard parameters as well as for radon. The individual well owners will get the test results and they must give permission to the state to access those results. While testing will be at no cost to any private well users in the 12 towns, Mr. Susca emphasized that households must have at least one water quality exceedance and qualify for public assistance in order to be eligible for free filter pitchers.

Following the initial testing, there will be a water testing and treatment fair for all 12 towns. The fair will provide additional information for the participants and will include vendors that can provide treatment systems. The participants will then be followed for a year to address any issues and to track actions they take to address well water quality issues.

Mr. Susca went on to lay out the estimated costs for the program. The estimated number of households using private wells in the 12 towns is 6491. With an estimated 40% or 2596 households participating at a cost of \$105 per, the cost for testing is estimated at \$272.6K. Of the wells tested, it's estimated that 60% or 1558 wells will have exceedances for metals, and of those, it's estimated that 20% or 312 households will qualify to receive the filter pitchers and 2 cartridges. The cost of providing the pitchers and cartridges is estimated at \$289.8K.

Following the presentation of this information, Mr. Susca and Ms Hudnor took questions and comments from the commission members. Chair Grote asked about the timeline for getting the PAC established and if having that completed by the end of March would be adequate. Ms Hudnor said that would be consistent with the accelerated timeline which includes the six local coordinators on the PAC. That timeline would support planning through the spring and workshops in the summer. She went on to say that the workshops would be conducted for combinations of neighboring towns. Chair Grote suggested that combining municipalities that are adjacent to each other for the workshops would make sense.

Danna Truslow asked about which laboratories would be doing the testing, and Brandon Kernen said that there are two in the seacoast that DES has under contract to do the work. The most efficient way to do this is to use the labs that are already under contract and to avoid letting new contracts. However, the budget contemplates using the State lab, and if private labs are more costly, adjustments in the budget might be necessary if the anticipated levels of participation materialize.

Mr. Kernen went on to say that Senator Morse, chair of the Drinking Water and Ground Water Advisory Commission, believes that the testing on the seacoast should be treated as pilot program, and that if it's successful, it should become part of the budget rather than continued funding from the trust fund. Chair Grote said that more participants in the program could increase support for inclusion in the budget.

Mr. Susca stressed again that the PAC and the local coordinators will be key players in getting people to attend the workshops and to do the testing. Chair Grote said that the way ahead will be to send the slides outlining the program out to the commission members to generate support and get participants. The goal will be to have participants for the PAC and the local coordinators identified by the next commission meeting on February 11th.

Pat Bickford, Madbury, said that she has already briefed the Madbury Board of Selectmen on this program, and will serve as a local coordinator. David Moore, Stratham, offered his full support for the program and for moving forward with the DES plan. Mr. Susca said that he'll keep the commission posted and will continue to work with the commission.

Mr. Kernen brought up two related issues. The first is that the Drinking Water and Ground Water Advisory Commission approved \$5M to compensate well owners with PFAS contamination. The plan is for the owners to be eligible for up to \$1500 rebates to defray the cost of systems installed to address the exceedance. The second issue is that federal funding through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) can now be used for private wells rather than just for public water systems as it was previously. The use is subject to approval by the state.

The meeting adjourned at 2:40pm.