

HB 495 Seacoast Drinking Water Commission Work Session Minutes, 11 Feb 22

Commission members present: Representative Jaci Grote, Representative Mike Edgar, Senator Tom Sherman, Senator Rebecca Perkins-Kwoka, Representative Dennis Malloy, Representative David Meuse, Brandon Kernen, Pat Bickford, David Moore, John Storer, Art Ditto, Anne Lightbody, Al Pratt (Portsmouth), Carl, McMorran, Tim Roache, and Pat Bushway

Guests: Paul Susca, DES, Amy Hudnor, DES, Mark Connors, Statham

The meeting came to order at 2PM and began with comments and corrections of the minutes from the January work session. Following that, Carl McMorran of the Aquarion Water Company presented a briefing on the service that Aquarion provides throughout the region and specifically in Hampton, North Hampton, and Rye. Mr. McMorran stated that Aquarion, a subsidiary of Eversource, supports approximately 700,000 customers throughout New England. Aquarion is governed by rules established by NH Department of Environmental Services (DES) and rates are determined by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC).

The provision of water to the town of Hampton started at Hampton Beach and moved inward as the town grew. The initial wells were drilled to support firefighting and piping was laid to support the length of the beach and nearby neighborhoods. The Exeter Road tank was installed in the mid-80s when the wells were primarily sand and gravel and later gave way to bedrock wells. Currently in Hampton Aquarion has 16 wells, 4 treatment facilities, 140 miles of pipe, 640 hydrants, 2,000 valves to shut down sections of pipe, 4 tanks with pumps, and 9,000 service connections.

Water quality is generally good from sand and gravel aquifers throughout the area. There are a few contaminants with arsenic found in 5 bedrock wells, and of those, only well 22 is treated since the others meet the standard. A treatment system for PFAS was installed in an existing building to treat an exceedance in well 6. Most of the \$2M cost of the system was defrayed by a grant of \$1.7M from the Drinking Water and Ground Water Trust Fund and the PFAS Remediation Loan Fund which reduced the water rate impact of the project cost.

Quantity is also good, and as an example, Mr. McMorran cited the fire that destroyed the A Street block at Hampton Beach in February of 2010. The fire

required over 2 million gallons of water over a 9-hour period when the normal demand would have been 170,000 gallons.

Mr. Kernen, DES, said that Aquarion does a very good job operating and maintaining the system. Their efforts have helped the town to manage droughts and conserve water when necessary. The system has improved considerably in the past 20 years.

Senator Sherman asked about possible PFAS contamination from the Coakley Landfill acknowledging that there is little southward migration from the site. Mr. McMorran said that the system is not impacted by Coakley, but that other sources of PFAS are a concern that requires monitoring. Senator Sherman also asked about saltwater intrusion due to sea level rise, and Mr. McMorran said that well 22 is approximately 1 mile from the beach and is not drawing in any salt water at this time. He went on to say that while some of the pipes in the system date back to 1907, there is no lead in those pipes but that there could be lead in the plumbing within homes.

Mr. Kernen said that Aquarion is proactive in sampling for PFAS and provides good data to the state. Regarding the issue of saltwater intrusion, he said that water flows toward the ocean and there is more fresh water flowing to the ocean than the other way around. He also mentioned that another groundwater study with UNH is planned.

In response to a question about water loss in the system, Mr. McMorran said that some loss is in the nature of the system and that it's difficult to monitor accurately. Representative Edgar asked about the company's emergency response plans. Mr. McMorran said that emergency response plans were updated last year as required by DES. He also said that he anticipates that the water supply will be adequate to support future development in Hampton, but that will ultimately depend on the extent of the development.

Senator Sherman asked about redundancy in the system and Mr. McMorran that they currently have an interconnection with Seabrook and are in discussions about a similar arrangement with Rye. Senator Sherman also asked about regionalization and how that might be beneficial. Mr. McMorran said that regionalization should always be considered because the resources are regional.

Representative Grote asked how high the PFAS contamination level was before the treatment facility was installed, and Mr. McMorrان said that well 6 exceeded the MCL. The system in place now focuses on the regulated compounds, and while it could remove all compounds, that would exhaust the filters faster and requiring them to be replaced sooner. She asked about the maintenance plan for the system, and Mr. McMorrان said that it's mainly changing the filters as needed. The cost of that is reflected in the rates to customers. He went on to say that a developer is responsible for the cost of the initial connection to the system.

Mr. McMorrان explained that the PUC approves the rates, and that the company must show their expenses and how they're arrived at. Mr. Kernan said that some might feel like the rates charged by a company are higher than those of a municipal system, but due to elements like taxing of a company's facilities, a simple comparison of rates is not adequate, and more detail must be considered.

Representative Malloy asked about the cost of well 6 PFAS treatment facility as compared to the cost of the treatment facility for the Haven well at the Pease Tradeport. He asked if the treatment system is the same and if the difference is generally just the size of the systems. Mr. McMorrان said the technology is the same, but it's a smaller system. Mr. Pratt, Portsmouth, commented that the Pease facility treats 3 wells so it's much bigger and was more expensive.

Representative Malloy asked how big a system would be needed to remediate Berry's Brook and Senator Sherman said that initially the plan was for a pump and treat system which is different from the one at well 6 and the one at Pease. Senator Sherman referred to the Coakley clean up and asked if charcoal addresses short chain compounds. Mr. McMorrان said that will remove all PFAS at first, but the short chain compounds will break though faster, which shortens the operating life of the granular activated carbon (GAC). More effective types of GAC and resin will likely be developed in the years ahead that will improve performance and lower operating expense. Senator Sherman went on to say that there is also the problem of disposal of the filtration materials and Mr. McMorrان mentioned incineration.

Following Mr. McMorrان's presentation, Mr. Kernan had three items that he wanted to present to the group:

- 1) The state is offering a \$1500 rebate for treatment of PFAS in private wells. The funding can cover all or some of the cost, depending on the system.
- 2) Four seacoast towns – Exeter, Newfields, Newmarket, and Stratham – will meet to discuss water requirements and possible regionalization efforts that could benefit all four.
- 3) The Epping wastewater treatment facility failed and as a result, marginally treated water is flowing into the Lamprey River, a source of drinking water for the town of Durham. Durham is now using only water from Oyster River and will continue to do so until the Epping facility is repaired which is likely to take time. Senator Sherman asked if DES is looking at facilities so that something similar doesn't happen in other locations. Mr. Kernan said that there is not a review of all systems but that they are looked at during upgrades, and the Department of Health and Human Services is monitoring for health problems, and none have been identified. Senator Sherman commented that this situation reiterates the need for redundancy.

Mr. Storer mentioned that Dover currently has a \$15M PFAS treatment facility being installed.

The next topic for discussion was the upcoming Seacoast Private Well Initiative. Amy Hudnor from DES discussed the next steps:

- Establish the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) that will include commission members and possibly community members
- Identify 6 local coordinators that will organize and facilitate the 6 workshops to be conducted through the spring and summer

Ms Hudnor and Paul Susca from DES explained that the PAC should begin meeting in March and continue through the spring to be prepared for a program launch in late May, workshops and testing in the summer, and treatment in the fall. In response to a question, Mr. Susca said that the role of the local coordinator will be to connect with community members so that they understand what the program can do for the community, promote the project, and arrange the venues for the workshop and for the distribution and return of the test bottles. He furthered explained that while there can be overlap between the PAC members and the coordinators, the PAC will stay active throughout the project and the coordinators will be limited to the workshop and sample collection. He also

explained that the commission members can assist by helping to organize the effort, identifying eligible well-owners, and communicating with the owners.

Mr. Kernan emphasized that this is an important program, especially for those wells that require treatment for arsenic. He reiterated that this is considered a pilot project to determine if similar efforts should be undertaken statewide and if the state should budget for it in the long term. Tim Roache said that the RPC is willing to assist, and several others said that they would be willing to take the proposal to the appropriate governing body in their community. The group discussed the possibility of a presentation being put together that can be used for those town/city meetings.

The group briefly discussed the way ahead for the commission for the upcoming year, and Tim Roache suggested taking one topic from the tasks to the commission and focusing on that topic for the year. That will make addressing the commission's task more manageable. Additional topics such as issues related to sea level rise including zoning and flooding were also mentioned.

The meeting adjourned at 3:50.