

Groton Water Commission
Regular Meeting of the
Board of Water Commissioners
Tuesday, February 18th, 2024
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Minutes

Present are Chairman John McCaffrey, Vice Chairman Greg Fishbone, Member James Gmeiner, Superintendent Tom Orcutt, Business Manager Lauren Croy.

Mr. McCaffrey called the meeting to order at 7:33pm. He stated that the meeting is being recorded and everyone introduced themselves.

Water Conservation Program

Mr. Orcutt spoke about the current drought situation. Due to the information on the recent precipitation charts and updates from MA DEP, we have been moved to a more significant drought status. MA DEP has found that reservoir, stream, and pond elevations are down. Mr. Orcutt said that despite the drought report we are off to a good winter season and is optimistic that things will rebound. Mr. McCaffrey asked about the aquifer levels at Whitney and Mr. Orcutt said they have been level throughout February.

Long Range Planning -MWRA Metrowest Connection

Mr. Orcutt said there are about ten communities interested in connecting to the Quabbin Reservoir. Groton Water Department will need \$10,000 to contribute in FY26 for the first steps of planning. Mr. Gmeiner asked what that is for and Mr. Orcutt asked if we would be participating in this cost study. Mr. Gmeiner said it looked like only four communities and Mr. Orcutt said it is now up to at least 10 communities. Mr. Gmeiner would like to see the Selectboard contribute. This would be a long-term plan and if we do not start planning now, we would be out of the plan.

Mr. Gmeiner asked if they are subject to the interbasin transfer under MWRA and Mr. Orcutt said you are exempt through being a member of the MWRA. Mr. Gmeiner would like to confirm this and see if it could be another funding source. Mr. Gmeiner said if we could get MWRA water and we did not have to jump through all the hoops about limiting capacity and sewage, maybe sewer commission would help. Mr. Gmeiner is interested, but concerned about money. Mr. Orcutt told them we could not commit anything until FY26. Mr. Fishbone thinks it sounds good and is not much commitment in the immediate future to set up for long term planning. Mr. McCaffrey asked if West Groton is in this and Mr. Orcutt said they are not. Mr. McCaffrey wants to support this but puts a cumulative cap on the amount we can contribute.

Operational Updates: Whitney, Baddacook, SCADA

Mr. Orcutt said the SCADA upgrades at Baddacook start tomorrow and will be offline for 2-3 weeks while they upgrade the computer system to mirror Whitney Well Treatment Plant. Whitney Well Treatment plant has the new check valves in place but was delayed due to a missing coupling.

The greensand media issue has a partial resolution. The cost to Groton will be installation and disposal of the new media. We will try to recoup those funds. The media itself will be no cost and this is to take place early March. Mr. Gmeiner asked if there are new parameters on how to run the treatment plant. Mr. Orcutt will seek new training and oversight. Mr. Orcutt thinks they may have gotten a bad batch of media. Mr. Orcutt said every scenario they tried to prove has been proven incorrect. Mr. McCaffrey said our run time went up and maybe it could not handle that increase. Mr. Gmeiner wants that to be added to their manual to make sure its being run at a written specification.

Accept New Truck Bid

Mr. Orcutt said a truck has been selected and it will go to Mr. Maloney. \$57,804 from Chelmsford.

Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Updates

Mrs. Crory reviewed a forecasted budget which shows rates and interest income exceeding budget. We also were able to sell some excess pipe so gained an extra \$24,000 in this year's income due to that sale. The deficit charge helped to bring in additional rate income. Construction Income was going to be \$140,000 short and is now about \$120,000 short due to a new project at Lawrence Academy. Overall, the income is forecasted to be about \$17,000 short which is much better than our original assumption.

Mr. McCaffrey asked about the \$400,000+ transfer in the income budget and Mrs. Crory explained that was from our Manganese Fund that was built up to make a large debt payment this year. Mr. Gmeiner reiterated that it did come out of reserves but we planned to do so. Mr. Fishbone asked if it gets better after this year and Mrs. Crory explained that old debt will start to fall off the books after this year.

Mrs. Crory said the general expenses are up and down in various categories as expected with the new treatment plant estimates. Mr. McCaffrey asked about the electricity budget and Mr. McCaffrey asked if we were still getting a reduced rate and Mr. Orcutt said we are but the new pumping regime gets very difficult to manage the time of use and always avoid peak times. Mr. Orcutt said there may be some overage at Whitney because we have pumped more. Mr. Orcutt will try to investigate how much the solar is saving us and Mr. Orcutt estimates about \$10,000 per year. The overall general expenses are coming in at \$46,000 left which is basically our built in \$50,000 capital fund.

Mrs. Crory explained that our debt was overbudgeted this year so there is an excess of about \$70,000 but Mrs. Crory is going to need to reserve about \$60,000 of this into FY26 and FY27.

Mrs. Crory said this forecast does not force us to transfer anything but it does not hurt to put a transfer in place in case something changes.

Mrs. Crory reviewed the free cash tab which showed a beginning balance of \$407,000, \$50,000 of funds were taken out for the truck, \$21,000 taken out for the FY26 budget for the new Superintendent, \$63,000 to manganese fund.

Mrs. Crory is estimating \$371,000 will be our FY26 Beginning Balance and Mrs. Crory will reserve about \$60,000 of that for for FY27.

Mr. Gmeiner explained that we have been saving up our manganese fee income in our reserve fund and have been taking it out at needed for the past few budgets. Mrs. Crory added that we only need to do this until all old debt is paid off (FY28).

Mrs. Crory asked if the commission would like to plug in spring transfer number. Mr. McCaffery would not want to transfer if we have about \$311,000 of free cash estimated. Mr. Orcutt said it rolls back to reserves if you do not use it. Mr. Gmeiner said you can have it in place for unforeseen expenses. Mr. Orcutt recommends transferring some amount just in cast needed. Mr. Fishbone and Mr. Gmeiner agree. Mr. McCaffrey thinks \$50,000 is high. Mr. Orcutt recommends \$75,000. Mr. Fishbone feels comfortable with \$50,000 since it is a contingency would feel ok with \$75,000 also. Mr. Gmeiner feels like \$50,000 would be sufficient.

Mr. Orcutt said we should start with \$50,000 then see where we are in a month.

Other Business

Next Meeting is March 4th, 2025.

Mr. Gmeiner made a motion to approve the minutes of January 14th 2025, Mr. Fishbone seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Gmeiner made a motion to approve the minutes of January 28th 2025 as amended, Mr. Fishbone seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Fishbone made a motion to adjourn at 8:36pm, Mr. Gmeiner seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lauren Crory

February 18th, 2025