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Thursday, September 12, 2024

Hybrid Meeting

10:00 AM

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

A. Roll Call Attendance

A commencing roll call voted as follows:

Name	Community	Vote
Michael Rademacher	Arlington	Here (remote)
David Manugian	Bedford	Here
Jay Hersey	Brookline	Here
John Sanchez	Burlington	Here (remote)
David Pavlik	Lexington	Here
Yem Lip	Malden	Here (remote)
Nicholas Rystrom	Revere	Here (remote)
Brendan O'Regan	Saugus	Here (remote)
Richard Raiche	Somerville	Here
Sam Stivers	Southborough	Here
John P. DeAmicis	Stoneham	Here
Maurice Handel	MAPC	Here (remote)

Also in attendance:

Colleen Rizzi, Joe Foti, Lou Taverna, Andy Pappastergion, Matthew Romero, Christine Bennett, Kareen Sud, Nathan Côté

B. Proposed changes to MWRA Policy OP.05: Emergency Water Supply Withdrawals – Colleen Rizzi, MWRA Director of Environmental and Regulatory Affairs

Colleen Rizzi, the Director of Environmental and Regulatory Affairs, introduced proposed amendments to the MWRA's emergency water withdrawal policy. This policy governs how non-member communities can access water during emergencies, such as issues with their own water sources. The policy was last updated in 2007, which increased premium charges (the percentage communities pay above prevailing rate) for withdrawal periods 5 and onward, as well as increased the asset-value contribution payment for withdrawal periods 5 through 7.

Currently, withdrawals can be approved for up to 30 days without further oversight, while longer withdrawals need additional approval. The proposed changes seek to simplify this process. Additionally, the



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suggested modifications point to a recent emergency in Wayland due to E. coli contamination in their well. This led to a temporary 30-day approval for water withdrawal, which was later extended during an emergency meeting.

To address similar future situations, the proposed changes include extending the initial withdrawal approval period from 30 to 60 days, allowing more time for communities to manage emergencies without needing urgent Executive Committee meetings, especially during summer when meetings may be infrequent. Another proposed change is allowing designees of the MWRA Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer to approve withdrawals, ensuring quicker decision-making.

Executive Committee members expressed general support for these changes, noting that the extension should help prevent disruptions in emergency situations. The proposal aims to better align the policy with the current meeting schedule and operational realities.

Colleen Rizzi discussed the importance of having an emergency declaration in place for the MWRA to provide water during crises, emphasizing that the recent situation in Wayland highlighted the need for more flexibility in the approval process for emergency withdrawals. She noted that extending the approval period from 30 to 60 days could help alleviate pressure during emergencies, particularly in summer months when MWRA Board of Directors meetings may not occur.

Members raised questions about the frequency of emergency withdrawal requests, with Colleen Rizzi noting that this was the first emergency she dealt with in her year in the position. The discussion included various factors that influence emergency requests, such as weather and water quality issues like PFAS contamination.

The Executive Committee also explored the idea of providing asset value contribution credits for communities looking to become permanent members, suggesting that a time limit on these credits could encourage quicker resolution of water supply issues. Some members expressed concerns about potential misuse of the credit system, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that ensures communities address their water supply problems effectively.

Concerns were raised regarding potential inequities between current and future members, with a debate on the implications of allowing reimbursements for new communities. Colleen Rizzi explained that the proposed changes would only apply during the entrance fee waiver period, effective until the end of 2027, aiming to support communities actively working to join the MWRA, like Wayland, without unduly penalizing them.

John Sanchez expressed reservations about changing the policy, arguing that it could open a "can of worms" and create complications for existing members who are still contributing to asset fees. He felt that the small amount of reimbursement at stake didn't justify altering the established policy framework.



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The Executive Committee acknowledged these concerns while discussing the importance of encouraging new members to resolve their emergency situations and join the MWRA system effectively. This conversation underscored the balance needed between incentivizing new members and maintaining fairness for current members.

The conversation shifted to a motion regarding proposed changes to MWRA Policy OP.05. John Sanchez expressed concerns about the potential complications of extending reimbursement options for new communities, emphasizing that the costs involved seemed minimal compared to the broader financial commitments already undertaken by current members. Other members echoed this sentiment, noting that introducing new layers to the policy could lead to confusion.

David Pavlik requested additional data on emergency connections in the system, including the total number of emergency interconnections available, the communities that have these connections and the frequency of their activation, the operational readiness of these connections along with the protocols for activation, historical usage data that details past instances of emergency withdrawals and their reasons, and an evaluation of the impact of these connections on emergency management.

David Pavlik emphasized that this information would help the Executive Committee understand the existing infrastructure and the needs of communities looking to join the MWRA. Colleen Rizzi highlighted that, at the upcoming MWRA Board of Directors meeting, they would present information about communities with emergency interconnections, which could aid in their discussions.

John Sanchez then proposed a modified motion to recommend the changes related to the date extension and other edits but excluded any changes concerning reimbursements during the entrance fee process.

A motion was put forward to recommend that the Advisory Board approve the proposed changes to the MWRA Policy OP.05 as related to the date extension from 30-days to 60-days, and all other edits to the document, but not related to any type of reimbursements during the entrance fee process. It was moved by Moe Handel, seconded by David Manugian, and added to the omnibus vote at the end of the meeting.

The Executive Committee continued discussing the upcoming meeting, with plans to prepare a presentation on emergency interconnections. They mentioned that the map of these connections had recently been shared and committed to cleaning it up for clarity. Colleen Rizzi expressed confidence that they could provide useful information ahead of the full presentation.

C. Staffing introductions and office updates

Matthew Romero gave an overview of the Advisory Board staff, which included Christine Bennett, who has been with the Advisory Board full-time since January, Nathan Coté, a former co-op who is now a full-time staff member while completing his master's degree, and Kareen Sud, the part-time Northeastern University



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co-op for the semester. Kareen will transition to full-time through December after previously working part-time over the summer. She contributed significantly to organizing the recent field trip.

Since the June 2024 Executive Committee meeting, Matthew Romero was tasked with looking into salary increases at MWRA, particularly looking into how the MWRA determines its Executive Director's salary adjustments. Currently, the only approved salary increase is for Fred Laskey, a contract employee managed by the Board of Directors. Non-union managers and employees are on hold regarding salary increases until union negotiations are concluded. A budget placeholder of 3% for FY 2025 has been included, but additional adjustments may arise from ongoing salary adjustment discussions at the Commonwealth. Joe Foti, who is part of the negotiating team for MassDOT, indicated that these discussions could influence future salary recommendations.

It was clarified that the Advisory Board does not typically provide Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) for staff, but rather only annual salary step increases, except for the Executive Director whose salary increases are determined by the Executive Committee. Moving forward, the Advisory Board will monitor the outcomes of the union negotiations and keep members informed about developments regarding salary recommendations and staffing plans.

The MWRA Advisory Board is currently evaluating its lease situation regarding its office space in Chelsea, which it occupies without making direct rental payments. This discussion was initiated by a question from Mr. Terry, a representative from Needham, concerning the contractual agreement, or lack thereof, between the MWRA and the Advisory Board. The MWRA's legal team is preparing a written opinion on the lease arrangement, and preliminary discussions with Miss Francisco Murphy indicate that there are no issues, as the MWRA Retirement Board has a similar setup that has operated without complications.

John Sanchez proposed reinstating a budget line item for lease payments, which had existed when the Advisory Board previously made direct payments for office space. He suggested including a hypothetical amount (e.g., \$100,000) in the budget that would be paid to the MWRA but effectively remain a placeholder. This approach would provide financial flexibility should the Advisory Board decide to relocate in the future or if circumstances with the MWRA change, allowing them to avoid a sudden budget increase if a move becomes necessary.

Moe Handel raised concerns about the legality of setting aside funds for potential future needs, questioning whether the Advisory Board could bank any of that money. He suggested that having a reserve might be prudent if relocation becomes necessary. In response, John Sanchez clarified that the proposal is not about saving funds but ensuring that a budget line exists to account for a lease payment, noting that no direct cash transfers were made after the Board moved to the MWRA facility.

Rich Raiche noted that the MWRA Advisory Board does not have stabilization accounts for retained earnings, meaning that annual residuals are not typically saved for future use. Matthew Romero noted that while there are specific accounts for liabilities, such as vacation time, and legal/consulting fees, these serve different purposes. The Executive Committee members agreed to wait for the legal opinion before taking further action, expressing a consensus that having the option to move could be beneficial. The meeting concluded with an understanding to keep this topic on the agenda for future discussions as they evaluate their office space and budgetary considerations.



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D. Executive Director's Report

Matthew Romero opened the executive director's report with updates on legislative and operational matters. Notably, the House's override of the Governor's veto on debt service assistance was not supported by the Senate, leaving fiscal year 2025 assistance at zero—a disappointing outcome. There was also a failed housing bill that aimed to provide a billion dollars for South Shore communities, resulting in uncertainty for future system expansion funding.

The discussion shifted to Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Division of Water Supply Protection ranger citations. Rangers lost their ability to issue citations in 2022, raising concerns about the enforcement of regulations. An analysis conducted by the Advisory Board using data from fiscal year 2024 indicated a significant decrease of over 20% in recorded encounters, which refer to interactions with DCR rangers, compared to fiscal year 2018. Meanwhile, violations have more than doubled, with some instances nearing a tripling. This alarming data prompted plans to address the issue during the upcoming Water Supply Protection Trust meeting.

October 2024 will have an Advisory Board meeting featuring Steve Estes-Smargiassi, MWRA Director of Planning and Sustainability, doing a deep dive on the Lead and Copper Rule, highlighting the need for communities to complete inventories of their water service lines by October 15. This water service line inventory is essential for complying with EPA regulations, which require notifying residents about potential lead exposure. The board expressed particular concern over thousands of unknown service lines, complicating responses to lead issues. They are committed to providing support for smaller communities and the October training session in October is to help them navigate these new responsibilities.

E. MWRA budget update/preview of new Budget Dashboard

Matthew Romero initiated a presentation on the introduction of a new “dashboard.” The MWRA Advisory Board had previously provided monthly updates on the MWRA’s CEB (current expense budget) and CIP (capital improvement plan), but this practice had diminished in recent years. The Advisory Board developed a one-page dashboard which includes interactive data cards that allow users to quickly access key metrics, such as the wholesale water rate and overall budget expenses, and is designed to aid in budget analysis for the fiscal year.

Christine Bennett explained that while the dashboard being presented is still conceptual and contains preliminary data, it aims to integrate visualizations from their previous reports. The dashboard will also feature sections for tracking capital projects and narratives explaining budget variances, particularly underspending and overspending drivers. There was a discussion about how the MWRA's approach to budgeting has evolved, focusing on the need for realistic targets rather than aspirational ones, and concerns were raised about whether recent adjustments to budget projections are genuinely reflective of spending capabilities. David Manugian noted that in place of using the word “aspirational,” instead he uses “optimal” because in theory in a long-term plan, such as that which the MWRA does, the optimal spending on capital minimizes the spending on operations. You might not hit your optimal number, but it’s not necessarily a failure.





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John Sanchez suggested including additional data points, such as water volumes compared to previous years, to provide context for fluctuations in expenditures. The overall goal of the dashboard is to enhance transparency and facilitate better understanding of the budget performance, allowing board members to visualize and track important financial metrics throughout the year. Christine and the advisory board welcomed input on further enhancements to the dashboard, underscoring their commitment to improving fiscal oversight and communication.

F. Advisory Board FY25 goals and objectives

Matthew Romero highlighted the upcoming CSO program deadline in December 2024, where he emphasized the need for updates from MWRA staff regarding the CSO program's implications. He also mentioned ongoing legal discussions surrounding the NPDES permit, noting the potential for legal action in response to recent court rulings. Additionally, he briefly touched on pressing matters related to pension funding deadlines, watershed management, and legislative issues, including monitoring efforts to prevent a proposed water tax on communities.

Matthew Romero mentioned plans for enhanced community outreach to improve data collection on water and sewer rates which may help future efforts to engage residents about issues like lead service lines and NPDES permits. He expressed the intention to re-establish legislative connections and modernize internal processes for financial matters, such as documentation and segregation of duties. Notably, they previewed an upcoming Advisory Board podcast entitled ABTV set to launch in November. The podcast will feature audio content and visual elements available on their website and popular platforms like Spotify and YouTube.

Kareen Sud, an Advisory Board co-op from Northeastern University, presented ideas for revitalizing the Advisory Board's social media presence and utilizing platforms like Substack for broader outreach. This includes repurposing existing content and creating new articles focused on past but relevant water and sewer issues, such as PFAS contamination. The overall goal is to improve communication with residents and ensure they are informed about critical programs affecting their water and sewer supply and services.

G. Water & Sewer Rate Survey

Nathan Coté provided an update on the 2024 Water and Sewer Retail Rate Survey, indicating that research has begun, and this year the Advisory Board plans to include comparisons with cities previously not included, like Portland, Las Vegas, and Phoenix. He noted that they are refining data collection methods and will compare their findings with a similar survey from the University of North Carolina. He shared a collection of previous survey questions in the Executive Committee's shared folder and invited feedback on additional questions for MWRA communities, mentioning a form on their website.

H. Meeting format discussion

Matthew Romero addressed the future format of Executive Committee and Advisory Board meetings, particularly focusing on the viability of hybrid versus in-person formats. He pointed out that moving meeting locations pre-pandemic often led to decreased attendance, as many members found it difficult to travel long distances. He highlighted that some members had better attendance at meetings held in their local areas,





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underscoring the logistical difficulties of commuting in traffic. He expressed concerns that members have become accustomed to the convenience of remote participation, which allows for greater flexibility in their schedules.

Moe Handel contributed to the discussion by advocating for a fully Zoom format for larger Advisory Board meetings, citing the disruptions of hybrid meetings with larger groups. He emphasized the convenience of remote attendance, especially for members with back-to-back meetings. Moe suggested that while the social aspect of in-person gatherings is valuable, the challenges of hybrid setups may outweigh the benefits.

Nick Rystrom echoed Moe's sentiments, acknowledging the value of in-person meetings but emphasizing the importance of convenience and accessibility for members who have busy schedules. He appreciated the ability to attend meetings virtually when faced with overlapping commitments.

The consensus leaned towards maintaining exclusively Zoom meetings for regular Advisory Board sessions to enhance attendance. However, they discussed the possibility of hosting one annual in-person meeting, designed as a less formal gathering that would not require a quorum or formal voting. This approach would allow members to network and socialize, reminiscent of past meetings where informal interactions were encouraged. The Executive Committee meetings, because of their smaller size, will be hybrid.

In summary, the discussion reflected a shared understanding of the need to adapt to current preferences for virtual engagement while also recognizing the potential value of occasional in-person events to foster community connections.

I. Bylaw amendment

Matthew Romero aimed to address the growing size of the Executive Committee, which had increased to 19 members over time. This expansion occurred as previous Executive Director Joe Favaloro added members in response to interest, intending to foster greater engagement. However, the ongoing pandemic has made it challenging to maintain quorum during meetings, prompting the decision to reduce the committee size back to 15 members. This adjustment comes alongside some recent attrition due to the passing of members, retirements, and shifts to new positions.

It was emphasized that current members who wish to continue will retain their spots, alleviating concerns about competitive reappointments. In addition to this change, housekeeping amendments were proposed for the subcommittees. The existing language implied that subcommittees would dissolve automatically after the annual meeting, which could disrupt continuity. To remedy this, the new language will clarify that committee members serve until they are replaced or removed, allowing for a smoother transition and less downtime in committee activities.

A motion was put forward to recommend that the Advisory Board amend the bylaws as presented and filed with the records of the meeting. It was moved by Moe Handel, seconded by David Manugian, and added to the omnibus vote at the end of the meeting.

J. Nomination of Executive Committee



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Matthew Romero reminded everyone about John Sanchez's impending resignation as Chair, noting that Mr. Sullivan, Mrs. Proakis-Ellis, and Mr. Rademacher would remain in their positions, while Mr. Raiche and Mr. Manugian had submitted their interest in Chair and Secretary, respectively.

Matthew Romero asked whether there were additional nominations from the floor but received none. It was suggested that each candidate say a few words before formal nominations. Mr. Raiche expressed his eagerness to serve as chair, highlighting the significant tasks ahead, such as the Deer Island treatment plant permit, CSOs, PFAS, and system expansion. Mr. Manugian, interested in the secretary position, echoed Raiche's sentiments and humorously mentioned his role in seconding motions.

A motion was put forward to nominate Rich Raiche as Chair of the Advisory Board. It was moved by Moe Handel, seconded by David Manugian, and added to an omnibus vote, separate from the end of meeting omnibus, to take place shortly.

A motion was put forward to nominate David Manugian as the Secretary of the Advisory Board. It was moved by Moe Handel, seconded by John DeAmicis, and added to the omnibus vote mentioned above.

A motion was put forward to nominate all other current members of the Advisory Board who are continuing to serve their current roles as officers and as at-large members. It was moved by Moe Handel, seconded by David Manugian, and added to the omnibus vote mentioned above.

Nathan Coté conducted a roll call vote which included the three preceding motions above. *It passed unanimously.*

K. Approval of the September 19, 2024 Advisory Board meeting agenda

A motion was put forward to approve the Advisory Board meeting agenda for September 19, 2024. It was moved by Moe Handel, seconded by David Manugian, and added to the omnibus vote at the end of the meeting.

L. Approval of the June 13, 2024 Executive Committee meeting minutes

A motion was put forward to approve the meeting minutes from the June 13, 2024 Executive Committee meeting. It was moved by Moe Handel, seconded by David Manugian, and added to the omnibus vote at the end of the meeting.

M. New business

John Sanchez expressed his gratitude to the committee during his farewell, thanking everyone for their support over the years, especially Matt for his assistance while he served as Chair. He humorously mentioned his desire to be invited on future field trips. David Pavlik then acknowledged Mr. Sanchez's contributions, highlighting his help during challenging times and recognizing their closer working relationship as neighboring community representatives.

John Sanchez also mentioned that the next meeting would involve the election of the new Executive Committee and the transition process for handing over the Chair position.





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N. Omnibus and Adjournment

A motion was put forward to adjourn the meeting. It was moved by Moe Handel, seconded by David Manugian, and added to the omnibus vote at the end of the meeting.

A motion was put forward to approve the omnibus vote by roll call. It was moved by Moe Handel, and seconded by David Manugian.

An omnibus vote took place on the following items:

- A recommendation that the Advisory Board approve the proposed changes to the MWRA Policy OP.05 as presented and amended on the floor.
- A recommendation that the Advisory Board approve the amendment of the bylaws as presented and filed with the records of the meeting.
- Approval of the September 19, 2024 Advisory Board meeting agenda.
- Approval of the Executive Committee meeting minutes from June 13, 2024.
- Adjournment of the meeting.

The roll call vote was as follows:

Name	Community	Vote
Michael Rademacher	Arlington	Yes (remote)
David Manugian	Bedford	Yes
Jay Hersey	Brookline	Yes
John Sanchez	Burlington	Yes (remote)
David Pavlik	Lexington	Yes (remote)
Yem Lip	Malden	<i>Left the meeting</i>
Nicholas Rystrom	Revere	Yes (remote)
Brendan O'Regan	Saugus	<i>Left the meeting</i>
Richard Raiche	Somerville	Yes
Sam Stivers	Southborough	Yes
John P. DeAmicis	Stoneham	Yes
Maurice Handel	MAPC	Yes (remote)

Respectfully submitted,

David Manugian, Advisory Board Secretary

These minutes reflect the discussion of the meeting. The Advisory Board maintains audio recordings of Executive Committee meetings that are available upon request.

