



Advocacy & Accountability

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Thursday February 13, 2025
Remote Connection Via Zoom
10:00 AM

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING SUMMARY

A. Roll call attendance

A commencing roll call was voted as follows:

Name	Community	Vote
Michael Rademacher	Arlington	Here (remote)
Dan Maurer	Ashland	Here (remote)
David Manugian	Bedford	Here (remote)
John Sullivan	Boston (BWSC)	Here (remote)
Jay Hersey	Brookline	Here (remote)
Brian White	Burlington	Here (remote)
Kathy Watkins	Cambridge	Here (remote)
Cate Fox-Lent	Chelsea	Here (remote)
James Finegan	Lynnfield W.D.	Here (remote)
Yem Lip	Malden	Here (remote)
Amy McHugh	Marblehead	Here (remote)
Timothy McGivern	Medford	Here (remote)
Elena Proakis Ellis	Melrose	Here (remote)
Marina Fernandes	Milton	Here (remote)

Name	Community	Vote
Tom Fitzgerald	Newton	Here (remote)
Mark Ryan	Norwood	Here (remote)
Paul Della Barba	Quincy	Here (remote)
Chris Cole	Reading	Here (remote)
Richard Raiche	Somerville	Here (remote)
Sam Stivers	Southborough	Here (remote)
John DeAmicis	Stoneham	Here (remote)
Joseph Conway	Wakefield	Here (remote)
Pat Fasanello	Walpole	Here (remote)
Michael Chiasson	Waltham	Here (remote)
Jeff Azano Brown	Wellesley	Here (remote)
Joseph Lobao	Wilmington	Here (remote)
J.R. Greene	Quabbin/Ware	Here (remote)

Other attendees included:

Nathan Côté
Keira Kishnani
Christine Bennett
Mike Cole
Tom Durkin
Matt Horan
Jim Coyne

David Coppes
Paul Rybicki
Moussa Siri
Katie Ronan
Susan Herman
Lou Taverna
Rebecca Weidman

Carolyn Francisco
Murphy
Leo Norton
Andy Pappastergion
Bill Cundiff
Paul Lauenstein
Sean Navin

Andreae Downs

B. Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Matthew Romero provided updates on key issues, including watershed protection, changes to the State Revolving Fund (SRF), and legislative developments. He began by discussing the annual Wachusett Reservoir inspection letter issued by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to the Division of Water Supply Protection (DWSP). This year's letter addressed an issue the Advisory Board has raised previously—the ability of DWSP



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rangers to issue citations for public access violations. DEP is now requiring DWSP to pursue the necessary authority to issue written citations and fines, which Mr. Romero described as a positive step forward. He credited General Meehan of the North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association and Quabbin Fishermen's Association, a previous speaker at an Advisory Board meeting, and Nathan Coté, Advisory Board staff member, whose data analysis played a key role in making the case for enforcement measures. Mr. Romero noted that past DEP inspection letters have been instrumental in addressing concerns, such as limiting off-trail mountain biking and securing additional staffing for DWSP. He added that while the Wachusett report has been released, the Quabbin and Ware River reservoir reports are still pending but expected soon.

Mr. Romero then shifted to an update on the State Revolving Fund (SRF), highlighting a policy change identified by Matthew Horan, MWRA Deputy Chief Financial Officer. Starting in 2025, SRF project funding will no longer carry over from one year to the next, meaning communities must fully utilize their allocations within the designated funding year. Existing projects approved under the previous framework will still be allowed to roll over, but new projects must conform to the updated rules. Mr. Horan noted that DEP has been reaching out to communities on the Intended Use Plan (IUP) to provide clarification. Advisory Board members were encouraged to review the changes and submit comments by the March 3 deadline. Mr. Romero also mentioned that Nate Keenan, Deputy Director of the SRF Program, will be the guest speaker at next month's Advisory Board meeting, providing an opportunity for further discussion.

On the legislative side, Mr. Romero reported that the Governor's FY26 budget proposal does not include Debt Service Assistance (DSA) or the \$500,000 allocation for Clinton, a significant omission. He assured members that the Advisory Board will work with legislative partners to advocate for the restoration of these funding lines in the next budget cycle. He also provided an update on the Quabbin Equity Bill, which has been refiled with some notable changes. The previous proposal to impose a per-gallon charge on MWRA ratepayers has been removed; however, it has been replaced with a \$35 million fund, indexed for inflation, to support Quabbin host communities. The revised bill also includes provisions to add additional Quabbin-area representatives to the MWRA Board, impose 12-year term limits, and require an expansive system expansion study that goes well beyond MWRA's core mission. Mr. Romero expressed concerns about the bill's potential impact on MWRA governance, noting that last year's estimate placed the study's cost at \$2.3 million, an expense ultimately borne by ratepayers.

During discussion, J.R. Greene voiced his disagreement with some of Mr. Romero's remarks, arguing that the current structure of the MWRA Board provides inadequate representation for the watershed region. He also suggested that the communities included in the MWRA expansion study are reasonably close to the Quabbin Reservoir or the Chicopee Aqueduct and should not be dismissed outright. In response, Mr. Romero acknowledged Greene's perspective, noting that they had previously discussed the matter at the Advisory Board's December gathering. John DeAmicis then asked whether the proposed \$35 million fund would come from general state funds or from MWRA ratepayers. Mr. Romero confirmed that it would be funded by ratepayers and pointed out



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that the legislation includes an inflation-based indexing provision, meaning the amount could grow over time.

Paul Lauenstein raised concerns about the state's approach to funding water infrastructure. He cited Sharon's \$30 million PFAS treatment plant, which received substantial state subsidies, while the town was unable to secure financial assistance for a pipeline connection to MWRA's system. Lauenstein argued that state policy should better support MWRA expansion, particularly for communities that border the existing service area. Mr. Romero acknowledged the challenge, stating that regional expansion and associated funding remain priorities for the Advisory Board. He added that securing state support is always an uphill battle but assured members that the issue is firmly on their radar.

As discussion concluded, Mr. Romero reiterated the Advisory Board's commitment to keeping members informed and advocating for their interests. He encouraged members to stay engaged on these key issues, particularly as budget negotiations progress and legislative proposals take shape.

C. Advisory Board Public Hearing on the MWRA's Proposed FY26 CEB & CIP- Tom Durkin, MWRA Director of Finance; Michael Cole, Budget Director; Matt Horan, Deputy Director of Finance/Treasurer; James Coyne, Budget Manager

The Advisory Board's public hearing on the MWRA's proposed FY26 Current Expense Budget (CEB) and Capital Improvement Program (CIP) began with an introduction by David Manugian, Advisory Board Secretary, who outlined the hearing's format and procedures. Conducted remotely in accordance with state guidelines, the hearing was recorded for the official record. Mr. Manugian noted that the MWRA must adopt its budget by June 30, 2025, and that the Advisory Board is empowered by statute to provide comments and recommendations. Written comments will be accepted until May 1, 2025.

Following this introduction, Tom Durkin, MWRA Director of Finance, opened the presentation alongside Michael Cole, MWRA Budget Director, Matthew Horan, MWRA Deputy Director of Finance/Treasurer, and James Coyne, MWRA Budget Manager. Mr. Durkin set the stage by discussing economic conditions impacting the FY26 budget, highlighting inflation trends, fuel costs, and potential tariff implications on steel and aluminum. He noted that while inflation appears to have stabilized in some areas, MWRA remains cautious about cost fluctuations in key sectors, including energy and construction materials.

Mr. Cole then provided an overview of the proposed \$922.2 million FY26 Current Expense Budget, breaking down its three major components: direct expenses (\$329.5 million, 36% of total budget), indirect expenses (\$80.1 million, 9%), and capital financing (\$512.6 million, 55%). Year-over-year, the budget reflects a \$21.6 million increase (2.4%). He detailed significant cost drivers, including a \$6.7 million increase in services related to sludge pelletization due to ongoing regulatory uncertainty regarding PFAS disposal. Wages and salaries are set to increase by \$3.5 million (2.6%),





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reflecting cost-of-living adjustments and collective bargaining expectations. Conversely, MWRA expects a \$3.3 million (7.1%) decrease in maintenance costs, largely due to the completion of major projects such as the Norumbega Tank cleaning, Deer Island CTG control system upgrade, and wicket gate replacements.

Moving to indirect expenses, Mr. Cole noted a \$4.6 million (6.2%) increase, driven by rising pension obligations and watershed reimbursement costs. The pension contribution is set to increase by \$2.8 million (13%), including an additional \$5.75 million to support MWRA's goal of full pension funding by 2030. The HEEC payment is projected to decrease by \$1.4 million (16.8%), but Mr. Cole cautioned that final costs will be determined later in the year based on Eversource's true-up process.

Mr. Horan then discussed capital financing, which remains the largest component of the budget at \$512.6 million. Thanks to strategic debt management, the capital finance increase is limited to 1.7%, helping MWRA absorb broader economic pressures. He explained MWRA's multi-tiered debt structure, which includes senior debt, subordinate debt (variable rate bonds), and State Revolving Fund (SRF) loans. While higher interest rates have impacted borrowing costs, MWRA's long-term financial strategy has helped stabilize rate increases.

Mr. Cole outlined revenue projections, noting that the combined rate revenue requirement is set to increase by 3% in FY26, slightly lower than the 3.3% previously anticipated. However, MWRA expects a \$4.9 million (17.4%) decline in investment income due to lower interest rate assumptions. Mr. Durkin emphasized that the 3% assessment increase is a key financial metric, guiding MWRA's long-term planning. He highlighted MWRA's focus on sustainable, predictable rate increases, acknowledging the Advisory Board's past role in managing debt-driven rate spikes. The FY26 assessment increase is 3.9% for water and 2.4% for sewer, with individual community impacts varying based on their usage and cost allocations.

On the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), Mr. Durkin explained that FY26 marks the third year of MWRA's five-year spending cap (FY24–FY28). The total projected CIP spending for the period remains just under \$1.4 billion, with only minor adjustments since the cap's initial approval. Mr. Cole highlighted major projects driving over 40% of FY26 CIP spending, including ongoing facility upgrades, energy projects, and infrastructure rehabilitation. MWRA has also added five new projects to the CIP, including the Chelsea Admin Building heat pumps, Deer Island wind turbine replacement, Ward Street air handling replacement, Lonergan intake improvements, and a pipe bridge inspection structural analysis. Two of these projects—the heat pumps and wind turbine replacement—are expected to be reimbursed through DEP's \$20 million Climate Mitigation Trust grant.

Mr. Durkin concluded by outlining MWRA's spring budget review process, during which assumptions, contract updates, and revised financial data will be incorporated into the final



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budget. He noted that MWRA will continue working closely with the Advisory Board and its members throughout this process, leading up to final budget adoption in June.

During public testimony, Paul Lauenstein raised two questions: first, regarding the status of methane utilization at Deer Island, and second, whether MWRA's budget includes a dedicated water conservation line item. Mr. Durkin confirmed that MWRA integrates water conservation education into its Public Affairs outreach, which includes school programs and community engagement. On methane utilization, David Coppes, MWRA Chief Operating Officer, provided an update on the Combined Heat and Power project, which aims to maximize electricity generation from methane while repurposing excess heat for facility operations. The project is still in the design phase, with site selection currently under discussion.

Patrick Fasanello of Walpole questioned whether the 3% assessment increase disproportionately affects sewer-only communities, potentially leading to a cross-subsidy from sewer to water customers. Mr. Durkin clarified that MWRA maintains separate financial structures for water and sewer operations, ensuring that costs remain allocated strictly within each system. He advised Fasanello to review the draft assessment allocations provided by MWRA staff, as individual community impacts vary based on usage and infrastructure needs.

J.R. Greene inquired about the potential for hydroelectric power generation at the Windsor Dam (Quabbin Reservoir). Mr. Coppes explained that while MWRA has previously explored this option, the existing infrastructure would require significant modifications, and regulatory complexities present additional barriers. Consequently, MWRA has no active plans to pursue hydroelectric redevelopment at this site.

With no further public comments, Mr. Manugian formally closed the public hearing and returned the meeting to Richard Raiche, Advisory Board Chair, who thanked MWRA staff for their comprehensive presentation and ongoing collaboration with the Advisory Board.

D. Committee Reports

- **Executive Committee Report**

Richard Raiche, Advisory Board Chair, reported that the Executive Committee met last week but had no significant updates beyond those covered in the Finance and Operations Committee reports. He provided advance notice that nominations will open next month for the election of an Advisory Board representative to the MWRA Board of Directors, a seat currently held by Mr. Foti, who plans to seek reelection. While Mr. Foti intends to run, the election remains open, and members are encouraged to consider candidacy. Mr. Raiche also announced that the Operations and Finance Committees are seeking new members



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and invited interested members to contact Advisory Board staff to ensure broad participation.

- **Finance Committee Report**

Elena Proakis Ellis, Finance Committee Chair, announced that the next Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 24 and encouraged members to attend for budget discussions. She highlighted ongoing improvements to the financial dashboards, with Christine Bennett, Advisory Board staff, leading efforts to integrate Executive Committee feedback. Ms. Bennett then presented the latest Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Dashboard, designed to improve accessibility and transparency. Key updates include a new homepage navigation aid, an interactive PDF format, and a ranked list of projects over \$5 million sorted by budget variance. She highlighted major projects such as Metro Tunnel Redundancy, which extends through FY42, and Deer Island Treatment Plant Asset Protection, including a \$50 million clarifier rehabilitation contract. Ms. Proakis Ellis praised the dashboard as "fantastic" and user-friendly, while Matt Romero noted that additional refinements are underway based on feedback from Mr. Taverna and Mr. Handel.

- **Operations Committee Report**

Michael Rademacher, Operations Committee Chair, provided a summary of the committee's January 2 meeting, which featured several key presentations from MWRA staff. Colleen Rizzi, MWRA Director of Environmental and Regulatory Affairs, presented on the increasing number of wastewater expansion requests and emphasized that MWRA has limited capacity for new connections due to climate change and regulatory pressures. She asked the Advisory Board to help communicate these constraints to communities seeking additional capacity. Rebecca Weidman, MWRA Deputy Chief Operating Officer, provided an update on the 8M construction permitting process, highlighting the need for better coordination with municipalities to prevent infrastructure damage, citing the Dorchester Tunnel incident as an example. The Advisory Board is collaborating with Matt Dam and Ms. Weidman to launch an outreach effort aimed at improving municipal compliance with 8M permitting.

Also presenting at that January meeting, Ethan Wenger, MWRA Director of SCADA, Metering, and Monitoring, gave an update on the wastewater metering upgrade project, explaining that 173 meters were installed in 2021 and became active for billing in 2022. He reviewed how flow calculations impact community assessments. The meeting also included a presentation from Steve Estes-Smargiassi on the FY24 Annual Inflow & Infiltration Report, which has been posted on the Advisory Board's website. He stressed the importance of I/I reduction to free up capacity within the system. Mr. Rademacher thanked MWRA staff for their presentations and directed members to the Advisory Board's website for additional



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information. Mr. Raiche then opened the floor for questions, but Mr. Romero confirmed that no hands were raised.

E. **MWRA Executive Director Update**

Fred Laskey, MWRA Executive Director, provided an update on several key issues. He began by noting that the DEP filtration waiver for the Wachusett Reservoir was a positive development and that efforts will continue to secure similar findings for the Quabbin Reservoir. He also highlighted a recent MWRA Board presentation on the future of the CSO program, which outlined the next steps in what remains a major long-term initiative. Mr. Laskey reiterated concerns about proposed legislation related to the Quabbin, noting that the price tag for the initiative has now increased to \$35 million. The bill, sponsored by local legislators, seeks to establish a regional entity for economic development, and MWRA continues to monitor its progress.

Mr. Laskey then provided an update on the ongoing Quinapoxet Dam project, describing it as an impressive effort that aligns with MWRA's environmental stewardship responsibilities. He noted that despite expectations of a winter shutdown, the contractor has continued work through the season, allowing for steady progress. MWRA is planning a public event in the spring to mark the project's near completion. With the aid of drone images, he illustrated the scale of the restoration work, highlighting a newly constructed swale designed to facilitate fish passage while keeping them out of the intake building. He expressed appreciation for the Advisory Board's support, acknowledging that while the project extended beyond MWRA's core mission, it was an important step in restoring the river's natural ecosystem. Mr. Romero added that MWRA secured external funding to help finance the project.

J.R. Greene, referencing an earlier discussion, indicated that he would like to revisit the topic of the Windsor Dam hydroelectric facility, which was damaged by fire in 1991 and never rebuilt. Mr. Laskey acknowledged the request and said he would follow up separately for a more in-depth discussion. Mr. Romero then thanked Mr. Laskey for his updates, and the meeting proceeded.

F. **Approval of Advisory Board meeting minutes from January 16, 2025**

A motion was put forward to approve the Advisory Board minutes from January 16, 2025. It was moved by David Manugian, seconded by Elena Proakis Ellis, and moved to the omnibus vote at the end of the meeting.

G. **New business**

None.

H. **Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn was put forward. It was moved by J.R. Greene, seconded by David Manugian, and added to the omnibus roll call vote at the end of the meeting.

I. **Omnibus Roll Call Vote**





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A motion to approve the omnibus vote was put forward. It was moved by David Manugian and seconded by Michael Rademacher.

An omnibus vote on the following items took place:

- Approval of the Advisory Board meeting minutes from January 16, 2025
- Adjournment of the meeting.

The omnibus vote was as follows:

Name	Community	Vote
Michael Rademacher	Arlington	Yes (remote)
Dan Maurer	Ashland	Yes (remote)
David Manugian	Bedford	Yes (remote)
John Sullivan	Boston (BWSC)	Yes (remote)
Jay Hersey	Brookline	Yes (remote)
Brian White	Burlington	Yes (remote)
Kathy Watkins	Cambridge	Yes (remote)
Cate Fox-Lent	Chelsea	Yes (remote)
James Finegan	Lynnfield W.D.	Yes (remote)
Yem Lip	Malden	Yes (remote)
Amy McHugh	Marblehead	Yes (remote)
Timothy McGivern	Medford	Yes (remote)
Elena Proakis Ellis	Melrose	Yes (remote)
Marina Fernandes	Milton	Yes (remote)

Name	Community	Vote
Tom Fitzgerald	Newton	Yes (remote)
Mark Ryan	Norwood	Yes (remote)
Paul Della Barba	Quincy	Yes (remote)
Chris Cole	Reading	Yes (remote)
Richard Raiche	Somerville	Yes (remote)
Sam Stivers	Southborough	Yes (remote)
John DeAmicis	Stoneham	Yes (remote)
Joseph Conway	Wakefield	Yes (remote)
Pat Fasanello	Walpole	Yes (remote)
Michael Chiasson	Waltham	Yes (remote)
Jeff Azano Brown	Wellesley	Yes (remote)
Joseph Lobao	Wilmington	Yes (remote)
J.R. Greene	Quabbin/Ware	Yes (remote)

Respectfully submitted,

David Manugian, Secretary

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



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