



# Advocacy & Accountability

Representing over 3 million people in Massachusetts since 1985

Thursday, February 6, 2025

Virtual Meeting

(due to inclement weather)

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 (remote)
John Sullivan	Boston (BWSC)	Here (remote)
Jay Hersey	Brookline	Here (remote)
David Pavlik	Lexington	Here (remote)
Yem Lip	Malden	Here (remote)
Elena Proakis Ellis	Melrose	Here (remote)
Nicholas Rystrom	Revere	Here (remote)
Richard Raiche	Somerville	Here (remote)
Sam Stivers	Southborough	Here (remote)
John P. DeAmicis	Stoneham	Here (remote)
Maurice Handel	MAPC	Here (remote)

*Also in attendance:*

*Lou Taverna, Daniel Maurer, Christine Bennett, Nathan Coté, Matthew Romero, Keira Kishnani*

### B. Executive Director's Report

Richard Raiche, Chair of the Executive Committee, opened the meeting by introducing the Executive Director's Report and turning the floor over to Matt Romero, Executive Director of the MWRA Advisory Board.

Mr. Romero began with an update on debt service assistance, noting that the Governor's FY26 budget, unsurprisingly, did not include funding for it. He explained that this omission followed a



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Executive Director



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familiar pattern, as debt service assistance has rarely been included in the Governor's initial budget. The only exception in recent years, he recalled, was during one year of the Baker administration, when it had been included in the first House 1 budget. Along with the debt service assistance, the \$500,000 allocation for the Clinton Wastewater Treatment Plant was also absent. While this outcome was expected, the Advisory Board will once again engage with legislative partners to advocate for its inclusion as the budget process moves forward. He reminded the committee that in the previous year, the Legislature had successfully reinstated the funding, only for the Governor to veto it. The Legislature had subsequently overridden that veto, but in the end, the Governor had used her 9C powers to eliminate the funding again. With that history in mind, Mr. Romero said the Advisory Board would closely track developments and keep members informed as the process unfolds.

Turning to the MWRA's FY26 Current Expense Budget, Mr. Romero shared that the MWRA's finance team had met with the Advisory Board staff the previous day to provide an early preview of their proposal. After reviewing the numbers with MWRA Executive Director Fred Laskey, the agency had provided the Advisory Board with a high-level briefing, outlining a proposed combined rate revenue requirement increase of three percent. He noted that this figure was slightly lower than the 3.3 percent increase projected in last year's long-term budget outlook. Looking ahead, the MWRA Board of Directors would receive its formal presentation on the budget the following Wednesday and was scheduled to vote to transmit the budget to the Advisory Board for its required no less than sixty-day review period.

Mr. Romero also highlighted the timeline for the Advisory Board's public hearing on the MWRA budget, which would take place at the Advisory Board meeting next week. As in the previous year, this hearing would be a joint session with the Wastewater Advisory Committee and the Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee. He explained that the joint format had been adopted to streamline the process and ensure that MWRA staff would not need to give multiple identical presentations. Instead, all committees would receive the same information at the same time, with the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback together.

He anticipated that MWRA would release its staff summary on the proposed budget and, more notably, the preliminary community assessments by either the end of the week or early the following Monday. Once those numbers were available, the Advisory Board would send an email to all designees and members, ensuring that communities had early access to the figures as they began their own local rate-setting processes. While the MWRA Board of Directors would not take its final vote until the following Wednesday, Mr. Romero reassured the committee that in his more than twenty years of experience, he had never seen the preliminary assessments change after they were included in the Board materials for review and the formal vote. With that in mind, he suggested that communities could consider them reliable for their planning purposes.

Shifting to the ongoing staffing study, Mr. Romero announced that MWRA had finalized its agreement with the Collins Center for Public Management, solidifying the next steps in the process. A working group had been established to oversee the study, and he shared that Jennifer Wolowicz,



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Chair of the MWRA Board of Directors' Personnel and Compensation Committee, would be representing the Board. He himself would be serving as the Advisory Board's representative, and the final spot on the working group would be filled by an HR professional from one of MWRA's member communities. He was pleased to report that the City of Somerville's Director of Human Resources, Ann Gill, had confirmed her participation just the previous day. He thanked Mr. Raiche for facilitating the introduction, noting that it would be invaluable to have direct municipal representation in the process.

Before wrapping up, Mr. Romero provided an update on regulatory matters, specifically regarding language that had been reissued in Fall River's NPDES permit. He explained that he would be meeting the following day with MWRA's internal legal team, outside counsel from Beveridge & Diamond, and possibly additional outside counsel to review the permit language. The goal of the discussion would be to assess whether any of the newly issued provisions could have implications for Deer Island's upcoming permit renewal. If the same language were applied, it could shape the Advisory Board's approach to commenting on the permit. He noted that, as with many ongoing issues, the recent change in administration added an element of uncertainty to the regulatory landscape, but he assured the committee that the Advisory Board would continue to monitor developments closely.

At this point, Lou Taverna raised a question about the cost of the Collins Center study, asking whether a specific price had been determined. Mr. Romero responded that he did have access to the contract details but wanted to confirm the final executed version with MWRA before sharing any figures. Rather than providing a draft agreement that might have undergone additional revisions, he said he would obtain the finalized version and send it to Mr. Taverna once it was available. He also noted that he would check with MWRA's Director of Administration Michele Gillen to confirm whether the contract details were confidential before distributing them.

David Manugian inquired whether MWRA would be willing to release the preliminary wholesale water rate in addition to the assessment figures, noting that the wholesale rate was a particularly useful reference for Bedford and a few other communities. Mr. Romero responded that the wholesale rate should be included in the same staff summaries that would be released alongside the assessments. Since MWRA had occasionally split the figures across multiple staff summaries, he wanted to double-check that both were provided together. If they were in separate reports, he assured Mr. Manugian that he would make sure the Advisory Board distributed both versions so that he and other communities would have access to the necessary data. Mr. Manugian thanked him for the clarification, and Mr. Romero acknowledged that it was an important detail to remember, admitting that he sometimes forgot how frequently communities relied on that particular number.

With no further questions, Mr. Raiche thanked Mr. Romero for his updates and moved the meeting to the next agenda item.

## C. Public Comment Policy



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Mr. Raiche opened the formal discussion on the Public Comment Policy. Mr. Romero explained that, following last month's meeting, he had spoken with several Executive Committee members about the issue, including Mr. Pavlik, who had requested that the item be tabled for now. While he was happy to provide additional background, he invited Mr. Pavlik to add anything he felt was necessary.

Mr. Romero then summarized the proposed path forward, explaining that after discussions with the Chair, it was agreed that rather than continuing the lengthy and freewheeling debate in full committee meetings, a more focused approach would be beneficial. The plan was to form a small working group consisting of members who had expressed the most interest in the topic and had been particularly vocal about different approaches. This smaller group would conduct more detailed discussions offline before bringing a refined version of the policy back to the full Executive Committee for consideration. He noted that this method would allow for a more structured and efficient conversation before the policy returned to the committee for a final decision.

Mr. Pavlik confirmed that he supported this approach and thanked Mr. Raiche for considering the request to table the discussion. He added that after speaking with stakeholders in Lexington, there was broad consensus that the current public comment process was working well and should continue in its current form. While open to refining the process, he emphasized that many felt the existing framework was effective and did not require substantial changes.

Mr. Pavlik reiterated that forming a working group was the best way forward, allowing for a thorough discussion of the issue while ensuring that any adjustments to the policy would be mutually beneficial for both the Advisory Board and its member communities. Mr. Romero agreed and said he would begin reaching out to members who had previously expressed strong interest in the topic to coordinate the discussion.

Wrapping up the conversation, Mr. Raiche stated that the working group would be assembled quickly so that discussions could take place and a draft policy could be reviewed at next month's meeting. He invited anyone interested in joining the group to email either himself or Mr. Romero to be added. With that, he moved the meeting on to the next agenda item.

## **D. Budget Dashboard**

Mr. Raiche introduced the next agenda item, the Budget Dashboard, and invited Mr. Romero to begin the discussion.

Mr. Romero explained that this was the third and final installment in a series of dashboards the Advisory Board had been developing. He reminded the committee that the Current Expense Budget (CEB) Dashboard had been introduced in November, followed by the Quick Reference Guide Dashboard last month. Now, as promised, the Advisory Board was presenting a new dashboard focused on Capital Improvement Program (CIP) spending for the current fiscal year. With that, he turned the floor over to Christine Bennett, who had led the effort in developing the dashboard.





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Ms. Bennett began by sharing her screen to display the MWRA Advisory Board's dashboard webpage, where all the dashboards were housed. She noted that users could view the dashboard directly on the site or download it for more interactivity. The downloaded version included embedded hyperlinks for quick navigation to relevant documents.

Providing an overview of the layout, Ms. Bennett explained that the dashboard was structured by category, with wastewater metrics on the left, waterworks metrics on the right, and a central table highlighting major projects over \$5 million in the current CIP budget. This table, she noted, was based on a similar one found in the MWRA's published CIP document, but had been adjusted to rank projects by variance between actual and budgeted spending, with the largest variance at the top.

She pointed to the Metro Tunnel Redundancy Project, which had the greatest variance, and worked down the list to the Application Improvement Program within Business and Operations, which had the smallest variance. She also noted that projects were color-coded: blue shades for waterworks projects and orange for wastewater to allow for easy visual differentiation.

Continuing her presentation, Ms. Bennett demonstrated how embedded hyperlinks in the dashboard allowed users to click through to MWRA's website, taking them directly to the relevant section of the CIP document. She emphasized that this feature was designed to save users from navigating the 270-page document manually.

Focusing on wastewater spending, Ms. Bennett highlighted Deer Island's Asset Protection Program, which was by far the largest wastewater project. She explained that this category encompassed multiple projects, the largest of which was a \$50 million second-phase rehabilitation of the clarifiers at Deer Island. The dashboard also included a graph tracking projected spending across the five-year capital plan (FY24–FY28) to provide long-term context.

Turning to waterworks projects, she noted that waterworks spending currently represented 42% of the total CIP budget, though this percentage would likely shift in future years. She then highlighted the Metro Tunnel Redundancy Project, describing it as a long-term, high-cost initiative with a total budget of \$180 million within this CAP period. While current FY25 spending on the project remained low at 1% of the total projected cost, she pointed out that funding would ramp up significantly in future years, with \$1.34 billion budgeted for FY29–FY33 CAP period. She reiterated that this project, much like Deer Island, was a multi-decade investment, with completion projected for FY42.

Ms. Bennett then walked the committee through the bottom section of the dashboard, which tracked monthly CIP spending compared to budgeted amounts. This section, she noted, was particularly valuable in monitoring spending trends over time. She explained that for clarity, certain in-and-out spending programs, such as the Local Water Assistance Program and the I/I Program, had been excluded, since their budgeted figures fluctuated unpredictably.





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At this point, Mr. Handel raised a question about the Waterworks Program Spending vs. Budget chart, noting that he found it difficult to interpret. Ms. Bennett explained that the chart displayed actual spending as bars and budgeted spending as a dotted line, with the intention of making trends clear at a glance. Mr. Handel acknowledged the explanation but suggested that reformatting the chart so that "actual" and "budget" were labeled side by side might improve clarity for less experienced readers. Ms. Bennett thanked him for the feedback and noted that the team would explore the change.

Mr. Raiche then added that month-to-month capital spending variances were expected, given the unpredictable nature of construction projects. He suggested that instead of displaying monthly spending, the dashboard might offer a three-month rolling average to smooth out fluctuations and provide a clearer picture of long-term trends. Mr. Romero agreed, noting that MWRA had recently incorporated an adjustment spending factor in its five-year capital plan after recognizing that it historically underspent by about 20% on its capital program. He explained that tracking actual spending over time would help determine whether that 20% assumption remained accurate and whether it was a useful forecasting tool.

Mr. DeAmicis then weighed in, commenting that Deer Island Asset Protection was so large compared to other projects that it might be helpful to break out individual projects within that category rather than lumping them together. He also suggested ranking projects by total spending rather than variance to provide a clearer sense of project priorities. Additionally, he requested that the Advisory Board develop a summary chart tying back to the total capital budget of \$401 million, noting that MWRA's existing reports did not always present the data in a way that was easy to follow. Mr. Romero agreed that this was a valuable suggestion and would be considered for future iterations.

Mr. Taverna then offered feedback on the pie chart visualizations, noting that the current design placed color-coded sections within gray rectangles, which made them difficult to interpret. He suggested displaying full circles, with the applicable portion colored in and the remainder grayed out, to create a more intuitive visual representation. Ms. Bennett agreed and said her team would work on implementing that change.

Mr. Taverna also inquired about the dashboard's visibility on the Advisory Board website, noting that he had difficulty finding it through the homepage. Ms. Bennett explained that while the dashboards were live, they were not yet directly linked on the homepage. Mr. Romero suggested that they create a blog post each time a new dashboard was released, ensuring it was prominently featured in the top news section of the website. Mr. Taverna agreed that this would be helpful.

As the discussion wrapped up, Ms. Bennett encouraged members to continue providing feedback, reiterating that the goal was to make the dashboard as useful as possible. Mr. Romero added that the Advisory Board would incorporate the suggested refinements and present an updated version next month.







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Mr. Raiche concluded the discussion by thanking Ms. Bennett for her work, noting that the dashboard was an informational item with no action required. With that, he moved the meeting to the next agenda item.

**E. Approval of the February 13, 2025 Advisory Board meeting agenda**

*A motion to approve the February 13, 2025 Advisory Board meeting agenda was put forth. It was moved by Maurice Handel, seconded by David Manugian, and added to the omnibus roll call vote.*

**F. Approval of Executive Committee meeting minutes from:**

**a. January 9, 2025**

**b. November 14, 2024 (Executive Session)**

*A motion to approve the January 9, 2025 Executive Committee meeting minutes was put forth. It was moved by Maurice Handel, seconded by David Manugian, and added to the omnibus roll call vote. A motion to approve the November 14, 2024 Executive Committee Executive Session meeting minutes was put forth. It was moved by Maurice Handel, seconded by David Manugian, and added to the omnibus roll call vote.*

**G. New business**

None.

**H. Omnibus and Adjournment**

*A motion to adjourn was put forth. It was moved by Maurice Handel, seconded by John DeAmicis, and added to the omnibus roll call vote.*

*A motion to take an omnibus roll call vote was put forth. It was moved by Maurice Handel and seconded by David Manugian.*

*An omnibus vote took place on the following items:*

- Approval of the February 13, 2025 Advisory Board meeting agenda.
- Approval of the Executive Committee Executive Session meeting minutes from November 14, 2024.
- Approval of the Executive Committee meeting minutes from January 9, 2025.
- Adjournment of the meeting.

*The roll call vote was as follows:*

Name	Community	Vote
Michael Rademacher	Arlington	Yes (remote)



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David Manugian	Bedford	Yes (remote)
John Sullivan	Boston (BWSC)	Yes (remote)
Jay Hersey	Brookline	Yes (remote)
David Pavlik	Lexington	Yes (remote)
Yem Lip	Malden	Yes (remote)
Elena Proakis Ellis	Melrose	Yes (remote)
Nicholas Rystrom	Revere	Yes (remote)
Richard Raiche	Somerville	Yes (remote)
Sam Stivers	Southborough	Yes (remote)
John P. DeAmicis	Stoneham	Yes (remote)
Maurice Handel	MAPC	Yes (remote)

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Manugian".

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.



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