



Advocacy & Accountability

Representing over 3 million people in Massachusetts since 1985

Thursday, April 10, 2025

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
David Manugian	Bedford	Here (remote)
Yem Lip	Malden	Here (remote)
Elena Proakis Ellis	Melrose	Here (remote)
Richard Raiche	Somerville	Here
Sam Stivers	Southborough	Here
John P. DeAmicis	Stoneham	Here
Maurice Handel	MAPC	Here (remote)

Also in attendance:

Christine Bennett, Nathan Coté, Matthew Romero, Keira Kishnani, Lou Taverna, Andy Pappastergion, Joe Foti

B. Executive Director's Report

Legislative Update

Executive Director Matthew Romero updated the committee on the Advisory Board's Quabbin Equity legislation letter, previously approved and submitted to MWRA. The MWRA Board will discuss the letter at its upcoming meeting, but a formal vote has been delayed at the request of the Secretary of Environmental Affairs, who chairs the MWRA Board.

Mr. Romero expressed doubts about the bill's passage, referencing its quiet failure last year, but said the Advisory Board acted due to renewed interest in western Massachusetts. Mr. DeAmicis raised concerns about prior legislation affecting PILOT payments to western communities. Mr. Romero clarified that while certain costs were included in original MWRA legislation, they were not inserted covertly.



2 Griffin Way, Suite A, Chelsea, MA 02150



(617) 788-2050



mwra.ab@mwraadvisoryboard.com

mwraadvisoryboard.com

Matthew A. Romero
Executive Director



Advocacy & Accountability

Representing over 3 million people in Massachusetts since 1985

Mr. Pappastergion confirmed support from the Advisory Board's three MWRA Board representatives and underscored the importance of gauging other members, especially Boston's representatives. He added that the three gubernatorial appointees are expected to oppose the Advisory Board's position. He encouraged Chair Raiche to attend the MWRA Board meeting in person.

Mr. Romero reported MWRA is submitting budget priorities to the Speaker's office, including debt service assistance and \$500,000 for Clinton. In follow-up, Speaker staff inquired about the Weymouth Naval Air Station redevelopment.

Mr. Romero explained that although the state has pledged \$35 million and the developer will contribute, a ~\$50 million shortfall remains. With projected demand at just 1MGD, the project does not justify such a subsidy under MWRA's financial framework. The Advisory Board cannot support it under the current entrance fee waiver policy, but Mr. Romero noted political pressure is high and said potential alternatives would be previewed in the upcoming Comments & Recommendations.

CSO Public Meeting and Messaging Strategy

Mr. Romero recapped his recent presentation at the CSO public meeting, noting that a blog post and slide deck would be posted shortly, with a video link to follow if available. He and Chair Raiche will meet later in the month to develop messaging to help elected officials understand the CSO program's limitations in non-technical terms.

Mr. Raiche called the meeting more civil than past sessions, though noted the absence of alternate perspectives on issues like flooding or system capacity. Mr. DeAmicis and Mr. Stivers agreed public confusion and misinformation remain. MWRA will provide a future presentation to the Advisory Board on CSO planning.

Lynnfield Center Water District Application

Mr. Romero concluded by reporting that MWRA has completed its review of the Lynnfield Center Water District system expansion application. The district is awaiting required enabling legislation and has requested a contingent Advisory Board vote. MWRA will not bring the item to its full Board until legislation is enacted. The Operations Committee will convene to review the application, with materials open to all members.

Action Items:

A brief audio disruption occurred just as voting items were being introduced. Mr. Handel noted he would need to leave by 11:00 AM. Ms. Proakis Ellis and Ms. Bennett reviewed the agenda and prioritized time-sensitive items: the opening of nominations and executive session. Audio was restored, and motions and seconds were taken in rapid succession. A formal vote was deferred to an omnibus roll call after executive session.





Advocacy & Accountability

Representing over 3 million people in Massachusetts since 1985

- **Opening of Nominations – MWRA Board of Directors Representative**

The committee opened the nomination period for election of the Advisory Board representative to the MWRA Board of Directors. A motion and second were made; the vote was deferred to an omnibus roll call following executive session.

- **Approval of the April 17, 2025 Advisory Board Meeting Agenda**

The committee moved and seconded approval of the upcoming Advisory Board meeting agenda. No discussion was held. The vote was deferred to the omnibus roll call.

- **Approval of the FY24 Independent Financial Audit**

The committee moved and seconded approval of the Advisory Board's draft FY24 audit report. Vote deferred to the omnibus roll call.

- **Approval of March 13, 2025 Executive Committee Minutes**

A motion was made to approve the March 13 minutes. Mr. Raiche requested a correction, clarifying that his reference to "New Bedford" in the prior meeting should have been "Fall River." The amendment was accepted, and the item was included in the omnibus roll call vote.

C. Executive Session

A motion was made, and seconded, to move into Executive Session for the purposes of potential litigation. The following roll call vote took place to move into Executive Session:

Name	Community	Vote
Michael Rademacher	Arlington	Yes
David Manugian	Bedford	Yes (remote)
Yem Lip	Malden	<i>Not present at vote</i>
Elena Proakis Ellis	Melrose	Yes (remote)
Richard Raiche	Somerville	Yes
Sam Stivers	Southborough	Yes
John P. DeAmicis	Stoneham	Yes
Maurice Handel	MAPC	Yes (remote)

The Executive Committee came out of Executive Session and reported no votes because all matters discussed and votes taken related to potential litigation matters.

D. **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 April 17, 2025 Advisory Board meeting agenda.
- Approval of the Executive Committee meeting minutes from March 13, 2025 as amended





Advocacy & Accountability

Representing over 3 million people in Massachusetts since 1985

- Approval of the FY24 Independent Audit
- Approval of the opening of nominations to the MWRA Board of Directors

The roll call vote was as follows:

Name	Community	Vote
Michael Rademacher	Arlington	Yes
David Manugian	Bedford	Yes (remote)
Yem Lip	Malden	<i>Not present at vote</i>
Elena Proakis Ellis	Melrose	Yes (remote)
Richard Raiche	Somerville	Yes
Sam Stivers	Southborough	Yes
John P. DeAmicis	Stoneham	Yes
Maurice Handel	MAPC	Yes (remote)

Loss of Quorum and Transition to Information-Only Session

Following Mr. Handel's departure at 11:00 AM, the committee lost quorum. Mr. Romero advised that the remainder of the meeting would proceed as an information-only session in compliance with the Open Meeting Law. No deliberation or voting could occur, though members were welcome to ask clarifying questions.

Mr. Raiche confirmed that the only remaining agenda item was the draft FY26 Advisory Board operating budget, which could be presented without formal discussion. Mr. Romero reiterated the importance of avoiding deliberation and reminded members that input could still be provided offline.

Draft FY26 Advisory Board Operating Budget

Mr. Romero presented the draft FY26 operating budget, highlighting several updates and structural changes. He explained that the budget includes funding for a fourth full-time staff member, to be hired midway through the fiscal year. This acceleration was made possible by Mr. Coté's decision to remain with the Advisory Board following his co-op term, which allowed staff planning to move forward more quickly than originally anticipated. In addition, Mr. Romero proposed funding a part-time administrative assistant to handle financial and administrative tasks that Mr. Coté currently manages, such as processing payroll, paying bills, and tracking leave. While Mr. Coté has done this work well, Mr. Romero noted that the goal is to ensure that an analyst can focus on policy and research rather than day-to-day operations. He also shared that his former part-time assistant from his time at the Massport CAC is interested in the position and, if the committee is amenable, he hopes to use some of this year's surplus to bring her on early for training before the new fiscal year begins.





Advocacy & Accountability

Representing over 3 million people in Massachusetts since 1985

The draft budget also reflects modest increases to training and meeting-related expenses in anticipation of increased participation in industry associations such as NEWWA, NACWA, and other water-focused groups. These conferences and partnerships have already yielded valuable ideas for staff work, and Mr. Romero indicated that greater engagement would continue to inform initiatives like the Comments & Recommendations. At the same time, the meetings budget was reduced by \$4,000 to reflect the Advisory Board's decision to continue holding regular meetings remotely. In-person events such as the December gathering and Advisory Board field trip remain funded. Some of those funds were redirected to a new leasing arrangement for iPads, which will support remote access and communications for Executive Committee members. Mr. Romero remarked that the leasing process has been more complicated than expected and another reason he hopes to shift administrative tasks away from policy staff.

Mr. Romero and Mr. Coté plan to conduct a thorough review of the Advisory Board's expenses over the summer, working with their CPA and auditors. Many of the existing line items have not changed in over twenty years and no longer reflect the office's evolving expenses, particularly with the growing number of online services and software subscriptions. The goal is to reorganize the budget into more meaningful categories and provide greater transparency and usability in future cycles. Mr. Romero emphasized that no action was required at this time, but staff will circulate a corrected version of the draft after the meeting, due to a formula error discovered by Mr. DeAmicis. Specifically, an incorrect column showing unexplained figures had not been updated properly and caused confusion. Mr. Romero apologized for the oversight and committed to issuing a clean version.

Finally, Mr. Raiche asked whether early hiring of the administrative assistant would require formal approval. Mr. Romero confirmed that staffing changes fall within the Advisory Board's discretion and do not require additional approval beyond staying within budgeted amounts. He noted that due to the loss of quorum earlier in the meeting, no votes could be taken, but the final version of the FY26 operating budget will be brought back for approval in May.

Proposed FY26 Comments & Recommendations Preview

Mr. Romero previewed the FY26 Comments & Recommendations, beginning with a recap of last year's successful visual refresh and the renewed emphasis on numerical analysis. Updated summary sheets are nearly complete and will be uploaded to the Executive Committee Dropbox.

The proposed CEB totals \$922.2 million, a 2.4% increase. Capital financing accounts for 56% of the budget, and personnel-related costs account for 19%. Rate increases remain relatively stable, but water assessments continue to outpace sewer. The Advisory Board is likely to recommend a 2.5–2.9% combined rate increase.

Mr. Romero presented data showing that MWRA is averaging 106 fewer filled positions than





Advocacy & Accountability

Representing over 3 million people in Massachusetts since 1985

budgeted, representing a \$12.2 million wage surplus. He proposed that such surplus wages and fringe benefit funds be committed to the pension and OPEB funds, similar to the prior MWRA's capital financing rate surplus policy.

He also recommended reconvening the Long-Term Rates Management Committee to assess rate sustainability amid major upcoming capital expenses, including the Metropolitan Tunnel and possible CSO obligations.

On the capital side, wastewater dominates FY26 spending, including \$21 million from a new climate grant. Mr. Romero called attention to the high cost-per-gallon estimates in the updated CSO Long-Term Control Plan and urged MWRA to revisit its projections and assess the rate impact of each CSO tier.

On the policy front, the Advisory Board continues to oppose Quabbin legislation, monitor DCR's enforcement efforts, and respond to forestry moratorium proposals. Mr. Romero also proposed a new model to reduce system expansion barriers by allowing MWRA to front connection costs and recover them over time, similar to a betterment or the existing communities' interest free loans.

Due to the loss of quorum, Mr. Romero encouraged members to share comments offline.

New Business

Mr. Romero introduced the final agenda item by noting two quick updates under new business. While Chair Raiche suggested tabling both topics for the next Executive Committee meeting, Mr. Romero offered a brief overview. First, he shared a preview of financial analysis regarding Reading's entrance fee request. He noted that he had spoken with the MWRA Treasurer just before the meeting and that a full packet of information has been assembled and is currently under review by Executive Director Fred Lasky. Once finalized, the materials will be forwarded to Advisory Board staff and shared with the committee. Mr. Romero emphasized that preliminary findings indicate a refund would be financially infeasible and highly detrimental to MWRA ratepayers. He expects the topic will return for discussion at the next meeting and cautioned that its inclusion on the agenda may again attract public attention.

Mr. Romero then addressed a second item concerning Lancaster's wastewater assessment. Although Lancaster is served by the MWRA, it is not a member of the Advisory Board and thus often overlooked in Advisory Board discussions. MWRA staff contacted the Advisory Board after Lancaster questioned a significant fluctuation in their assessment. Upon investigation, MWRA staff confirmed that the meters were functioning correctly, but discovered that Lancaster's charges were not being calculated using the three-year averaging method applied to all other Metropolitan Wastewater Communities since the 1990s. Mr. Romero characterized this as a long-standing oversight and stated that, in his professional opinion, no Advisory Board recommendation was needed beyond an acknowledgment of support. The MWRA Board of Directors is expected to vote to correct the methodology. Mr.



2 Griffin Way, Suite A, Chelsea, MA 02150



(617) 788-2050



mwra.ab@mwraadvisoryboard.com

mwraadvisoryboard.com

Matthew A. Romero
Executive Director



Advocacy & Accountability

Representing over 3 million people in Massachusetts since 1985

Romero indicated that unless members strongly objected, he would convey that the Advisory Board views the change as a routine administrative correction to align Lancaster's assessment process with that used for all other communities.

With no quorum remaining, Mr. Romero and Chair Raiche noted that no formal adjournment was required, but a motion and second were offered out of courtesy to close the informational session.

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.

