Joint Board of Water Commissioners and Finance Committee

Meeting Agenda

Monday, October 19, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

- Call to order
- Comments from the public
- Appoint one Commissioner to sign warrants while conducting meetings virtually
- Approve Minutes from 9/23/26 meeting

OLD BUSINESS:

- Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)
    - Current sample data, if available
    - Discussion of Additional PFAS Upgrades
- Aeration Treatment at South Acton Water Treatment Plant
- Drought Status and Water Use Restrictions
- Free Cash Certification
- MWRA MetroWest Expansion

NEW BUSINESS:

- Personnel Update
- Annual Meeting Location
- Adjourn Open Meeting

Present at Tonight's Meeting:

Commissioners: Erika Lin (Chair), Barry Rosen, John Petersen

Finance Committee: Bill Guthlein, Ron Parenti

District Manager: Matthew Mostoller

Deputy District Manager: Corey Godfrey

Treasurer/Collector: Ashley Pinard

Staff Accountant: Dirk Bellido

Environmental Analyst: Shawn Case

Members of the Public: Kim Kastens; Alissa Nicol; Brewster Conant Jr.; Michael Miller; H2O Customer

START OF MINUTES

Ms. Lin opened the meeting at 7:03 p.m. The meeting was conducted remotely via Zoom under legislation "*An Act Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency (Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025)"* and ensured that everyone could hear and be heard. Mr. Guthlein called the Finance Committee meeting to order and incorporated the same remote meeting notices.

Comments from the public

Kim Kastens, Chair of Green Acton's Water Committee announced that Green Acton had published *"Salt in Nashoba Brook, How It Gets There and Why It Matters,"* by Ms. Kastens, Brewster Conant Jr., and Katarina Spasojevic. The article presented continuous conductivity measurements collected at Nashoba Brook at Wheeler Lane and a model addressing groundwater base flow, overland flow, and interflow. It also discussed implications for public water supplies and referenced District well chloride and sodium data provided by Mr. Case and Mr. Mostoller. Ms. Kastens placed the article information and link in the chat and invited questions and comments. No other opening public comments were offered.

Appoint one Commissioner to sign warrants while conducting meetings virtually

Mr. Rosen motioned to authorize Mr. Petersen to sign warrants while meetings are conducted virtually, through the next regularly scheduled meeting. Ms. Lin seconded, and it was unanimously approved via roll call vote: Mr. Rosen, Ms. Lin, and Mr. Petersen.

Approve Minutes from the meeting of 9/23/2026

Mr. Petersen moved to approve the minutes from the meeting of September 23, 2026, as presented in the packet. Mr. Rosen seconded, and it was unanimously approved via roll call vote: Mr. Rosen, Ms. Lin, and Mr. Petersen.

Ms. Lin announced that new business would be taken before old business because the new business items were brief, and old business included a substantial discussion.

NEW BUSINESS:

Personnel Update

Ms. Pinard introduced Dirk Bellido, the new staff accountant, who had started the previous week. He brought experience from a municipal treasurer/collector's office, banking, and sales supervision, including strong customer service skills. Mr. Bellido said he was enjoying the position and appreciated his colleagues' support. Participants welcomed him, and he left after the introduction and related discussion.

Mr. Mostoller announced that MIS Coordinator Bob Murch would retire January 15, 2027. The retirement date had advanced from earlier expectations of 2028 and then late 2027, accelerating transition planning. Mr. Mostoller, Mr. Godfrey, Mr. Case, and Mr. Murch were documenting responsibilities and cross-training staff so essential work could continue. The District did not intend to replace the position immediately with a single employee because its responsibilities were unusually broad. Staff were examining outside technical support and other arrangements for daily office needs.

Mr. Petersen praised Mr. Murch's work and emphasized the importance of adaptable, capable employees in a small organization. Mr. Mostoller explained that Mr. Murch had developed the software supporting daily administrative operations. The District began moving toward third-party financial software at the end of the prior fiscal year and was evaluating customer service and accounts receivable options, including integration with WaterSmart and our three metering systems. Existing providers might be able to expand their services. The transition would cover immediate needs, move appropriate functions to outside systems, and reassess staffing and service arrangements approximately one year later.

Annual Meeting Location

Mr. Mostoller reported that the Annual Meeting would be held on the third Wednesday in March (weather-depending). Following unfavorable feedback about the prior public safety facility venue, staff did not seek that location again. The R. J. Grey auditorium was unavailable, but Acton-Boxborough Community Education arranged space at the administration building, 15 Charter Road, where the School Committee had been meeting. The location was on the calendar.

OLD BUSINESS:

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)

Current sample data, if available

Mr. Mostoller reported that September PFAS sampling results were below detection limits at all three treatment locations. Center Acton was sampled September 21, and South Acton and North Acton were sampled September 22. October sampling was expected during the week of October 19.

Discussion of Additional PFAS Upgrades

Mr. Mostoller reported progress on South Acton's transfer pump issues. The pump undergoing work was expected to return in mid-November, after which staff hoped to troubleshoot the pump currently operating. Staff were also working to finalize resolution of the contract dispute with Aqueous Vets, which appeared prepared to release funds associated with liquidated damages for multiple missed delivery deadlines. At Center Acton, staff expected to submit the final payment requisition and close out the project financially.

Aeration Treatment at South Acton Water Treatment Plant

Delta Cooling Towers had provided an equipment evaluation, and the District's local engineer was completing a peer review. Staff was waiting for the engineer to develop a repair scope of work to return the larger aeration tower to service and restore the desired raw-water processing capacity. Staff would then evaluate repair or replacement of the smaller, redundant tower. Mr. Mostoller recognized Mr. Godfrey's coordination of the work and follow-up with outside parties.

Mr. Godfrey reported continued communication with state and federal regulators while the District relied on granular activated carbon (GAC) for volatile organic compound (VOC) removal. W. R. Grace was expediting data sharing to help staff identify changes in raw-water quality. One South Acton well had been offline for approximately two weeks because of level-control problems, avoiding potential pump damage. That well had the highest VOC concentration, and Mr. Godfrey said its absence was presumably helping GAC removal efficiency.

Drought Status and Water Use Restrictions

Mr. Mostoller shared a photograph of a new water restriction sign installed with Mr. Case the previous Friday (10/16). Additional signs would be deployed with the operations team. The interchangeable panels covered all five District restriction levels and matched the colors used on the website.

Massachusetts continued to classify the area as experiencing a Level 2 significant drought, while the October 15 U.S. Drought Monitor update showed improvement from moderate drought to abnormally dry conditions. Despite recent rainfall and improved surface appearances, groundwater levels continued to decline without the seasonal recovery staff hoped to see approaching late October.

The District would remain at Level III restrictions, limiting nonessential uses to one day per week. Demand had not shown a clear seasonal decline and had increased somewhat over the preceding weekend. Staff continued daytime flushing but did not consider tank levels adequate for evening work. Meter reading was underway and expected to finish the following day, providing information about consumption since restrictions were eased.

Mr. Petersen complimented the new signs and asked about their adaptability, possible use for flushing notices, and total flushing water use. Staff confirmed the restriction panels could be changed. Existing flushing signs remained practical given their wear and tear. Complete flushing water-use records would be available in the database after the program concluded.

Free Cash Certification

Ms. Pinard reported a productive October 1 meeting at the District office with the Department of Revenue (DOR) representative and a colleague, with free cash consultants participating remotely. The meeting helped resolve difficulties translating audited financial statements into the trial balance and combined balance sheet submitted for certification. Follow-up exchanges continued, and the representative believed the information supplied should answer her outstanding questions.

The District was awaiting FY2025 free cash certification. Once that amount was received, staff expected to move relatively quickly to submit FY2026 information and determine the amount available for appropriation. Ms. Pinard was optimistic about progress but did not provide a completion date. Mr. Petersen emphasized the commissioners' urgency and asked staff to continue conveying it to DOR.

Mr. Mostoller said a special district meeting would be pursued promptly after certification to address appropriations deferred in the spring and emerging needs. Potential proposals included aeration tower expenses currently funded largely from operations and emergency water main repairs. Staff were considering combining anticipated FY2027 water main repair funding with the FY2026 appropriation rather than waiting until the March 2027 Annual Meeting. Proposed allocations would be reviewed with the Finance Committee and commissioners once the available amount was known.

Mr. Petersen recommended the administration building as a possible special meeting venue because of its capacity and audiovisual equipment. Mr. Mostoller said it was on the shortlist, although availability could be challenging. A garage meeting was also mentioned as an option since we control its availability.

MWRA MetroWest Expansion

Mr. Mostoller presented the recently completed regional cost allocation study and requested feedback on next steps. Commissioners and Finance Committee members participated in a September presentation made by Mr. Mostoller, Maynard's public works director, and consultants from Stantec and Kleinfelder. The purpose of tonight's discussion was to consider the findings and their implications for Acton, rather than repeat the full study process.

The District evaluated MWRA service in 2013 while planning the South Acton treatment plant, but an independent connection was not economically feasible at that time. MWRA waived its entrance fee in 2022 to stimulate expansion interest. The waiver was scheduled to expire in 2027; any extension would require an MWRA Board decision. Acton and Concord began joint discussions in 2022, leading to broader regional cooperation. In 2023, MWRA funded a feasibility study requested by 13 MetroWest communities. It found service technically feasible, with infrastructure for the relevant area estimated at approximately $1 billion.

The District's 2024 annual meeting authorized $75,000 for a water supply alternatives study. Nine communities entered an intergovernmental agreement to share the cost allocation work, with Maynard contracting with Stantec and Kleinfelder. Seven scenarios were evaluated. Acton's share generally ranged from 11 to 13 percent, and losing participating communities had a greater financial effect than the differences among scenarios.

The refined approach distinguished common trunk-line and storage infrastructure from connecting infrastructure needed by particular communities. Allocating the latter costs to the communities benefiting from them improved Acton's outlook and made costs more acceptable to some partners, particularly Westford. The two scenarios presented placed Acton's infrastructure share at approximately $78 million to $110 million, with annual debt service ranging from slightly more than $6 million to approximately $9.5 million, comparable in magnitude to the current operating budget. These were preliminary planning estimates.

Acton was assigned to Phase 2, but its connection point remained undetermined. Mr. Mostoller said Phase 1 participation might be possible and could offer earlier benefits and

financial advantages. An MWRA connection could potentially allow the District to avoid future reinvestment in aging treatment facilities. North Acton, operating since 2009, had an estimated useful life of 30 to 50 years.

Mr. Mostoller proposed examining costs, water quality, operations, staffing, supply reliability, climate resilience, land use, groundwater demands, and partial versus full MWRA service. PFAS had made the local system less reliable, and recruitment of treatment operators was increasingly difficult. Staff also needed to understand requirements for maintaining local resources; existing treatment technologies were not well suited to long periods of inactivity.

Proposed work included public engagement before year-end if feasible, a dedicated project website containing reports and supporting documents, discussions with the Select Board and Town Manager, a cost-benefit analysis following completion of the master plan update, reassessment of demand projections, advocacy for state and federal assistance, and a 2027 rate study. The analyses would compare continued local investment, regional investment, and other alternatives. Shared consultant work could reduce costs. Financial assistance and streamlined regulatory processes could help the regional project advance.

The current planning demand was 2.6 million gallons per day on a maximum-day basis. Firm capacity commitments would eventually be necessary to design the final project. Future capacity transfers might be possible if another community wished to buy or sell capacity. Staff were also discussing possible future service needs in central and eastern Boxborough, which had worked with Littleton to extend service in its western area and expressed interest in relying on established utilities if public water were desired.

Mr. Mostoller emphasized that Acton had not committed to an MWRA connection. Community evaluation and financial forecasting would precede commitments, detailed design, permitting, and construction, with implementation potentially extending over a decade or more.

Mr. Rosen emphasized establishing a shared understanding of benefits with town leadership before proceeding to a full cost-benefit assessment. Mr. Petersen asked about Chelmsford participation. Mr. Mostoller said that changes in leadership there was likely a driver and noted the challenge of advancing long-term projects while managing daily operations. Local support was essential. A shared cost-benefit study could take nine months, compared with approximately six months independently; Mr. Petersen favored regional cooperation despite the additional coordination time.

Mr. Petersen requested clear financing assumptions and context for annual debt costs. He compared the proposed investment with the roughly $100 million Boardwalk Campus

project, which accounted for slightly more than $3 million in annual excluded debt within total town and school excluded debt exceeding $4 million. He suggested examining potential state and federal support, and presenting a range that included no assistance. He supported continued evaluation and saw benefits in a hybrid supply providing capacity and redundancy, including water for possible future economic development.

Mr. Parenti emphasized that residents would need a clear explanation of potential bill increases, existing system risks, and increasing treatment requirements. Mr. Mostoller recalled opposition in 2013 based on cost, development concerns, and chloramination. He said remaining independent would also carry future costs and constraints. One model deferred debt payments until 2035, raising questions of generational equity. Each participating community would need to approve the project; Acton could not make it viable alone. Staff were also exploring more local resource-sharing alternatives if MWRA participation did not proceed.

Members discussed preliminary storage concepts and potential locations in Acton or Concord. Mr. Rosen described emergency reserve benefits and underground facilities. Mr. Mostoller clarified that the proposal involved twin tanks with water turnover and relatively stable levels, and that detailed hydraulics would be addressed later. Final locations and engineering remained unresolved.

Mr. Guthlein requested comparison of independent operation, the full consortium, and smaller partnerships, including benefits, risks, and coordination costs. He questioned whether communities seeking only backup or infrequent supply would move forward to finance their shares. He highlighted cost variation across the original scenarios: approximately 20 percent for Acton, 76 percent for Maynard, and 63 percent for Lincoln. He also asked about value engineering, potential land sales, and protections against late participants or departing members shifting risk to others.

Mr. Mostoller said the cost-benefit analysis, rates study, and allocation model would help test participation scenarios. Fewer communities could increase proportional shares while avoiding some infrastructure. Withdrawal required another participant willing to acquire the share and assume liabilities. Some partners were hesitant, while others, including Sudbury, might join later. Protected-land requirements could limit proceeds from property sales. Current feasibility estimates would be refined, but actual costs could exceed the planning figures despite use of the higher routing estimate.

In response to Ms. Lin, Mr. Mostoller said allocations would continue to be refined. Acton benefited from proximity to the trunk line and allocation of specific connections to their

users. Scenarios 5R and 7R reflected a collective balance of individual and regional interests but could require reconsideration if communities did not support them.

Ms. Nicol questioned whether MWRA could serve all four potential expansion regions and whether Acton could be denied capacity after extensive planning. Mr. Mostoller confirmed MWRA could not serve all four study areas in their entirety. Some communities had declined, and the process would identify serious applicants. Capacity limitations should become apparent relatively early; beyond a certain application stage, MWRA would commit to meeting the approved need. In response to her question about leasing storage sites, he said certain leasing could be permitted under Article 97 for water supply purposes, subject to deed restrictions and other constraints. Some District properties could be suitable, while 549 Main Street could not accommodate such a facility.

Ms. Kastens raised opposition in the Quabbin region to additional interbasin transfers and asked how the District could present MWRA as necessary while retaining local supply as a fallback. Mr. Mostoller said independent operation would not mean unchanged conditions: costs could rise and reliability and permissible uses could become more constrained. His illustration of sharply restricted future uses was hypothetical. The District intended to support MWRA's Interbasin Transfer Act application. He described the 20-million-gallon-per-day request as authorization for new members, distinguishing it from existing members' declining use and current withdrawals. Acton would also need its own approval, demonstrating need and conservation; he believed its efficiency record supported a strong case.

Ms. Kastens also asked about purchased water costs beyond construction debt. Mr. Mostoller said the study began examining debt service, water purchases, and operating fees. Ownership remained unresolved, although he believed MWRA should own the shared infrastructure and include maintenance in its overall operating costs. A study chart showed a substantial cost reduction after infrastructure debt was retired. Further analysis would examine the implications for rates.

Mr. Conant asked about continuing local maintenance expenses, the treatment facilities' future role, long-term demand, additional bedrock supplies, reasons other communities declined participation, and regional supply security. Mr. Mostoller said these issues would inform the proposed work. Existing wells faced yield challenges and complex treatment systems were difficult to maintain at peak operation. Bedrock wells produced useful volumes but raised potential radionuclide and treatment-media concerns. Local systems also faced supply-loss and contamination risks. Staff would present the operational reasons for examining alternatives to the broader community.

Mr. Conant requested documented capacity and demand assumptions in an accessible form. Mr. Mostoller believed the 2.6-million-gallon maximum-day figure originated in either the 2018 master plan update or 2015 water needs forecast. The District normally considered average-day demand and based forecasts on population and use characteristics rather than housing-unit counts or “build out”. Brewster said any appropriate measure would be useful with its assumptions explained.

Mr. Petersen supported a community event because the preliminary costs warranted closer consideration rather than an immediate decision. Such an event could also provide an example for regional partners. Ms. Lin and Mr. Rosen supported continued exploration and presentations to town leadership and residents, without committing to join MWRA. Mr. Parenti supported the next steps, and Mr. Guthlein supported obtaining more reliable data while reserving a final position. The Finance Committee would discuss the matter further at its Friday meeting at 9:00 a.m. The discussion reflected consensus to continue evaluation; no formal vote to join MWRA was taken.

Mr. Mostoller reported that the completed allocation study cost Acton approximately $10,000 of the $75,000 authorization. He estimated another shared study phase at approximately $10,000 to $15,000, potentially $20,000 depending on participation, and a rate study at approximately $30,000 to $45,000 depending on scope. Staff believed the work could be accommodated within existing authorized spending. Mr. Guthlein requested clear costs and deliverables and considered those preliminary amounts reasonable.

Mr. Conant asked that the initial forum’s purpose be clear because the studies would not yet be complete. Mr. Mostoller confirmed it would solicit questions and feedback to guide further work. Later forums would share findings and seek additional input, potentially the following fall, as part of an iterative decision process. Ms. Nicol recommended presentations at existing meetings of the Economic Development Committee, Housing Corporation, Board of Health, and town Finance Committee, beginning with the Select Board. Sustainability staff, the Green Advisory Board, and Energize Acton were also discussed as potential audiences. Ms. Lin thanked both boards and said further timing would be coordinated with Mr. Mostoller.

Adjourn Open Meeting

Mr. Parenti moved to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Guthlein, and passed unanimously by roll call vote: Mr. Guthlein and Mr. Parenti voted aye. The Finance Committee adjourned before the commissioners.

Mr. Rosen moved to adjourn the Board of Water Commissioners meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Petersen and passed unanimously by roll call vote: Mr. Petersen, Mr. Rosen, and Ms. Lin voted aye.

The open meeting closed at 9:08 p.m.

The next Board of Water Commissioners meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 9, 2026, at 7:00 p.m.