

As voted by the Board of Trustees and in accordance with the notice of the meeting, the monthly Workshop Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Portland Water District was held in the Nixon Training Center at the general offices of the District, 225 Douglass Street, Portland, Maine on Tuesday, June 20, 2023. In attendance from staff were S. Garrison, C. Crovo, D. Kane, S. Firmin, J. Wallace, M. Clements, D. Katsiaficas, and M. Demers.

All Trustees were present except Trustees Siviski and Levinsky.

President Lunt convened the workshop at 6:35 p.m.

1. State of the Water Industry – AWWA vs. PWD

Staff provided an overview and discussed the state of water utilities in the U.S. as captured in the recent State of the Water Industry Report published annually by the American Water Works Association (AWWA). Staff provided information on how the District compares with utilities nationally on key issues. Some of the areas discussed included aging infrastructure, long-term water supply, the public value of water resources, and the workforce.

The General Manager noted this is the 20th year that the AWWA did a report detailing the status of the water industry. Key issues in the industry were identified in the report—aging infrastructure is a top issue. Long-term supply is also a big issue for other utilities but not PWD. Optimism in the water industry was high in 2022.

The report addressed rate increases—78% of utilities expect to do an annual rate increase. PFAS is a growing concern in the industry.

Chris Crovo talked about PWD’s aging water infrastructure. PWD has 1,000 miles of water main. Replacement should be at 10 miles per year, given an anticipated average lifespan of 100 years. PWD averaged about 3 miles a year prior to 2013. In 2013, PWD doubled its investment in main replacement. PWD uses 100 years as an average measure of the useful life of a water main, but the service life varies by pipe type and installation conditions. The cost of pipe has increased significantly, affecting the amount of main PWD can replace.

PWD experiences about 100 leaks per 1,000 miles of pipe annually. This has improved from an average of 200 leaks per 1,000 miles of pipe annually over the years, showing that PWD is making investments in the right places. PWD adds about 10 miles of pipe per year the system.

Seth Garrison noted PWD’s vertical assets are also aging, and are reaching or have reached the end of their useful life. When the wastewater facilities were originally built, they were built with large amounts of grant money. Rebuilding those assets will have a significant impact to our communities, as they struggle to pay for these assets and other improvements to their sewer systems and CSOs even with the initial capital having been substantially grant funded. Paying the full cost of the capital will be challenging. The capital budget trend has been on an upward trajectory for many years, as infrastructure ages and prices increase.

Wastewater violations have decreased over the years, despite aging and failing assets. This is largely due to operational changes and greater operator attentiveness. Scott Firmin noted that PWD's goal is zero violations. When a violation occurs, the circumstances surrounding it are examined. To get to zero violations, it will take continued investment and additional operations changes.

A history of water rate increases at PWD was shown. Water rate increases have averaged in the 3% range since the mid-2000s, less than inflationary benchmarks. Water supply issues are not an issue for PWD. PWD's goal to continue to conserve land is consistent with efforts undertaken by other New England water utilities.

Michelle Clements addressed customers' understanding of the value of water resources and PWD services. She highlighted the efforts PWD undertakes to connect with its customers. She noted that in May, a new Customer Satisfaction Survey was launched. The public feels generally positive about PWD (92% of customers in the last survey). PWD received high ratings on many topics—including keeping the public informed.

Mary Demers addressed the present state of the labor market and how PWD is responding. PWD continues to see a tight labor market but is having some success in filling its positions. Vacancies at PWD are being filled quickly. On average, a position is taking 6 weeks to fill; some vacancies – like engineers – are harder to fill and take longer. PWD provides training opportunities including the use of MMA University by employees. PWD reviews salaries and compensation levels and is staying on top of the market as far as paying the market rate for our positions. Approximately 19% of the workforce is over 60 and 35% are over the age of 50. A lot of young people are being brought into the District. The water field and water service departments are presently fully staffed. The overall message is that PWD is staying on top of filling its vacancies. PWD has been successful in retaining employees by promoting from within and other means. In general, the workforce is very stable, considering the labor market is very tight.

2. Other Business

The General Manager discussed the positive bacteria sample at the Cumberland Town Hall. All the resamples came back negative. PWD has not been able to figure out the source of the positive test.

LD 211 - An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Water Supply Protection Funds has been signed by the Governor.

3. Executive Session

Pursuant to 1 M.R.S. §405(6)(A) personnel, the Board went into Executive Session to conduct the General Manager's six-month performance review.

A motion was made by Trustee Cote and seconded by Trustee Shattuck-Heidorn to go into an executive session to conduct the General Manager's six-month performance review. Voted all in favor.

The Executive Session began at 7:20 p.m. and ended at 8:09 p.m. Motion to come out of Executive Session and adjourn made by Trustee Cote, seconded by Trustee McCann. Voted all in favor.

4. **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 8:11 p.m.

Submitted by,

Carrie E. Cote,
Assistant Clerk