

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 Monday, April 13, 2026. In attendance from staff were D. Kane, G. Pellerin, C. Poulin, J. Wallace, E. Archibald, M. Clements, K. Jacobson, and H. Newman. Tracy Chouinard and Natalie Sierra from Brown and Caldwell attended from the public. S. Firmin attended the meeting remotely.

All trustees were in attendance, except Trustee Shattuck-Heidorn. Trustee Hewes attended remotely.

President Lunt convened the workshop meeting at 6:42 p.m.

## **1. Regional Biosolids Facility**

Charlene Poulin, Director of Operations – Wastewater, and Greg Pellerin, Director of AMAP, partnered with Natalie Sierra and Tracy Chouinard of Brown and Caldwell to provide a detailed presentation and engage in discussion regarding a proposed regional biosolids management facility centered on anaerobic digestion and thermal drying. The consulting team explained that full-scale dryer technologies have demonstrated effectiveness in past municipal operations. These systems are energy-intensive, typically fueled by natural gas or biogas generated on-site through digestion, with many facilities using a blend of both. Key equipment components include digesters (non-proprietary tanks with various mixing systems), dewatering centrifuges (widely available from multiple established vendors), and dryers, which were identified as the most critical and maintenance-intensive part of the system.

The consultants emphasized that the proposed approach relies on well-established, non-prototypical technologies with decades of operational history, particularly for digestion and drying systems. While emerging technologies such as pyrolysis (thermal destruction) are being explored, these would be considered potential future phases rather than part of the initial project. The project could be designed with flexibility to incorporate such advancements later. The discussion highlighted that newer technologies are unlikely to provide substantial cost savings at this scale in the near term, as they would require proven performance at full operational scale before being considered viable alternatives.

Operationally, the facility is expected to run continuously with minimal downtime, supported by routine preventative maintenance. Digesters provide operational buffering capacity, while centrifuges can be maintained proactively. Dryers, however, require more frequent inspection and maintenance, typically being taken offline periodically for short durations. Equipment reliability and redundancy planning will be key considerations, with contractual requirements ensuring contingency plans are in place to avoid service disruptions, including alternative disposal options if needed.

A significant portion of the discussion focused on financial considerations, particularly rising landfill disposal costs. The Board was informed that landfill tipping fees in the Northeast are projected to increase substantially—potentially over 100% in the next decade—posing a major financial risk. Recent regulatory changes have already caused sharp cost increases in a relatively short period. The proposed facility aims to provide long-term cost stability, reduce exposure to volatile disposal markets, and lower transportation costs associated with hauling wet biosolids over long distances. Members noted the additional fuel intensity and environmental impact of current hauling practices compared to localized processing.

Board members expressed concern about the financial burden on the Portland Water District (PWD), particularly related to debt capacity and the potential impact on ratepayers. It was acknowledged that the project, as currently envisioned, would likely be owned by PWD, though governance and cost-sharing structures with regional partners remain to be determined. The importance of ensuring equitable cost distribution and compensation for PWD's early investment was emphasized, especially as the facility is intended to serve a broader regional need. The

concept of incorporating partner contributions through tipping fees or other cost-sharing mechanisms will be further developed during the preliminary design phase.

The proposed facility is initially contemplated at approximately 85 wet tons per day, with the majority of capacity serving PWD. However, the design may allow for modular expansion depending on technology selection and future regional participation. Board members discussed the importance of engaging additional municipalities, including those within the ecoMaine network, to ensure sufficient scale, shared financial responsibility, and long-term viability. Concerns were raised that smaller communities may not immediately recognize their stake in the project, underscoring the need for clear communication about regional benefits and responsibilities.

The project is currently in a planning and communication phase, with a request anticipated to allocate approximately \$1.5 million for preliminary design. This phase will refine cost estimates, evaluate funding opportunities, and address key considerations such as permitting, governance, and financial modeling. The team is actively pursuing external funding sources, including federal and state programs, to offset costs. A progressive design-build-operate approach is proposed, with the goal of advancing to a 30% design level within 8–12 months of project initiation, at which point further decisions regarding project advancement will be made.

Overall, the Board acknowledged the complexity and importance of the project, balancing the need for long-term cost stability and environmental responsibility with concerns about financial risk and regional participation. Staff and consultants will continue refining the proposal, addressing Board concerns, and developing a more detailed and equitable framework for implementation.

## **2. General Manager's Comments**

Scott Firmin, General Manager, provided several updates to the Board. He first reminded Trustees of the upcoming WEFTEC wastewater conference in New Orleans, scheduled for September 26–30, and asked the eligible members to review their availability and coordinate attendance. He noted that additional effort will be made to ensure trustees are aware of scheduling details moving forward.

Mr. Firmin then addressed broader organizational planning concerns, highlighting the District's aging infrastructure, future capital needs, and staffing considerations. He emphasized that upcoming projects, including the proposed biosolids facility, underscore the importance of long-term strategic planning. To support this, he proposed holding a facilitated session, likely at the June meeting, to review 2027 budget guidelines and engage both staff and Board members in identifying key future challenges. Senior Management Team members will each present priority topics of concern, and the Board will be invited to provide input, with the goal of developing ongoing, structured discussions at future workshops throughout the year.

Lastly, Mr. Firmin relayed an update from legal counsel regarding an unauthorized use of a public hydrant in South Portland that resulted in significant water damage. Outside counsel issued a demand letter to the responsible company seeking damages and a response by April 6. While the company did not respond directly, its insurer indicated it is investigating the claim but maintains there is no evidence of fault. Given the lack of substantive response or investigation, Firmin stated that the Board will be asked at its next business meeting to authorize the initiation of litigation. This matter will be discussed further in executive session. He concluded by thanking staff and the Board for their engagement in the biosolids discussion.

## **3. Other Business**

None.

4. **Executive Session**

Trustee McCann made a motion to go into executive session at 7:45 p.m., pursuant to 1 M.R.S. §405(6)(D), to discuss labor negotiations, seconded by Trustee Shaughnessy. All in favor.

Trustee McCann made a motion to come out of executive session, pursuant to 1 M.R.S., seconded by Trustee Shaughnessy. All in favor.

5. **Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Submitted by,

*Kaitlin Tibbets*

Kaitlin Tibbets  
Assistant Clerk