



*Established*

*1996*

## SPRINGFIELD WATER AND SEWER COMMISSION

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### Minutes of Meeting

January 15, 2026

The Springfield Water and Sewer Commission held a public meeting on January 15, 2026, in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025.

Chairwoman Otero called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM and announced the Commissioners that are participating. Secretary for the Commission Jaimye Bartak called the attendance roll:

Daniel Rodriguez, Not Present  
Vanessa Otero, Present  
Matthew Donnellan, Present

#### Also Present

Norm Guz, Commission Counsel  
Joshua Schimmel, Executive Director  
Domenic Pellegrino, Director of Finance  
Theo Theocles, Director of Legal Services  
Anthony Basile, Interim Comptroller  
Darleen Buttrick, Director of Engineering  
Steve Frederick, Director of Wastewater Operations  
Jennifer Boulais, Director of Human Resources  
Ryan Wingerter, Director of Field Services  
Darleen Buttrick, Director of Engineering  
Rick Gomez, Director of IT  
Christina Jones, Deputy Director of Water Operations  
Jaimye Bartak, Communications Manager

#### Participating Remotely

Nicole Sanford, Water Resources Manager  
Raemarie Walker, Deputy Director of Finance  
Kristin Monfette, Safety Manager  
Nicole Boland, Billing and Collections Manager  
Frank Zabaneh, Senior Engineer  
Dave Szymczakiewicz, Engineering Manager  
Katie Shea, Educational Outreach Manager

### **Business Matters**

1. Approve the minutes of the meeting held on December 11, 2025, without reading, because copies were furnished to each member of the Commission for their review.

**UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER OTERO**

**VOTED YES –**

**COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN  
COMMISSIONER OTERO:**

to approve the minutes as amended (in item 7) of the meeting held on December 11, 2025.

2. Approve the minutes of the meeting held on December 17, 2025, without reading, because copies were furnished to each member of the Commission for their review.

Tabled.

**New Business**

3. Consideration of Adoption of Proposed Revisions to FY26 Rules and Regulations: Report by Commission Counsel.

**UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER OTERO**

**VOTED YES –**

**COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN  
COMMISSIONER OTERO:**

to approve the proposed revisions to the FY26 Rules and Regulations as presented during a public hearing held on December 11, 2025.

4. Financial Update: Report by Interim Comptroller.

Interim Comptroller Anthony Basile reported on November financials. There was an ending cash balance of \$161.4 million, which represents a \$20.4 million positive cash flow balance.

There was still a projected negative revenue variance of \$3.5 million in FY26. This is due to a 2-3% decrease in water/sewer usage from the original estimate. It is anticipated that 97% of projected revenue will be collected, and shortfalls will be made up with unexpended operating funds.

The operating budget was projected to be 97% expended by year-end. Mr. Basile noted that there is a hiring freeze of 20-22 vacancies, and an anticipated bond sale will be deferred to next year to save \$700,000, to help account for the revenue shortfall. Mr. Schimmel noted that the downward trend in consumption occurred even during a dry summer, which was unusual.

The capital budget has been expended in the amount of \$58 million, with water supply/transmission accounting for \$43 million due to the new treatment plant. It is projected that capital spending will total \$136.5 million by the end of the fiscal year and there is \$427.6 million of capital projects in the books.

There was \$161.4 million in cash at the end of December, of which \$42.3 million (26%) was unrestricted. There was \$109 million in restricted cash.

There was a receivables balance of \$7.2 million, of which \$2.5 million was over 60 days old.

There was \$1.1 billion in assets, and \$792 million in liabilities, which includes outstanding debt, pension, and OPEB liability.

5. Consideration of Budget O&M Amendment #1: Report by Interim Comptroller.

Mr. Basile reported that funding must be transferred from personal services to fringe benefits to cover the unexpected increase in health insurance costs.

Commissioner Donnellan asked about the status of the health insurance search.

Director of Human Resources Jennifer Boulais responded that a management firm is currently operating the Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust (HCGIT). HCGIT is keeping its members updated on its analysis of insurance options. The vote on the cost of insurance will likely be delayed until February. The Commission has also been in communication with MIAA, which is the top provider of Blue Cross Blue Shield insurance in Massachusetts. A proposal from MIAA is expected soon.

Commissioner Otero asked if those were the only two options. Ms. Boulais responded that the Commission is also engaged with a broker that is analyzing the best path forward between HCGIC, GIC, MIAA, and an independent plan. The analysis is free; the broker would be paid if the option that requires a broker fee is chosen.

Atty. Norm Guz asked about the viability of a GIC plan. Mr. Schimmel responded that GIC does not offer Blue Cross Blue Shield, but if other options are not viable, it may be considered.

Atty. Guz noted that property and liability insurance were also being reviewed and that proposals would be opened tomorrow.

**UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER OTERO**

**VOTED YES –**

**COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN  
COMMISSIONER OTERO:**

to approve Budget O&M Amendment #1.

6. Financial Policy Certification for FY25: Report by Interim Comptroller.

Mr. Basile reported that the Commission's external auditor and its Director of Finance certify that its financial policies were followed in FY25.

7. Consideration of Utility Billing Credit Summary and Summary of Accounts Receivable December 2025: Report by Director of Finance.

Mr. Pellegrino reported net billings of \$8.9 million, payments of \$10.7 million, for an accounts receivable balance of \$6.2 million.

There were 8,027 accounts with balances over 60 days old totaling \$2.5 million.

There were 111 credits issued for a total of \$21,402.48.

Commissioner Otero asked if the CAP program was being utilized. Mr. Pellegrino reported that VOC sends CAP applications when fuel assistance is approved, and fuel assistance programs were delayed by the government shutdown.

Mr. Pellegrino presented predicted consumption trends for the next 3-5 years. Actual to budget volume has been lower each year. The trends generally correlate with weather, except for last summer where consumption did not increase.

Commissioner Otero asked how reductions in consumption impact the operating budget. Mr. Schimmel responded that if operating costs go up, and revenue comes down while rates stay the same, the operating budget will have to be tighter. Atty. Guz added that operating costs will go up due to a \$1 million increase in pension costs next year as well as new debt service payments, which impacts the Infrastructure Renewal Fee.

Commissioner Otero asked if consumption projections should be more conservative. Mr. Schimmel responded that overly conservative consumption assumptions immediately place upward pressure on rates. Atty. Guz noted that some smaller capital projects may have to be reduced to compensate for the fall in consumption.

**UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER OTERO**

**VOTED YES –**

**COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN  
COMMISSIONER OTERO:**

to approve credits in the amount of \$21,402.48 as presented.

8. Consideration of Amendment No. 1 to AECOM Task Order No. 23: Report by Director of Engineering.

Director of Engineering Darleen Buttrick reported on an amendment for additional engineering services through May 2026 associated with on-site resident engineering and project management.

**UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER OTERO**

**VOTED YES –**

**COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN  
COMMISSIONER OTERO:**

to authorize the Executive Director to execute Amendment No. 1 to AECOM Task Order No. 23.

9. Water and Sewer Updates: Report by the Executive Director.

Mr. Schimmel reported on contracts under \$250,000 and the current capacity of the reservoir.

Mr. Schimmel reported that the Commission recently received \$16.9 million in debt forgiveness for the water treatment plant, which represents 26% of the borrowed amount.

Mr. Schimmel reported that staff are in conversation with the WIFIA program for a potential additional loan.

Mr. Schimmel reported that advisory notices for customers with balances over \$200 over 60 days old are being issued to give as much advance notice as possible ahead of shutoff season.

Mr. Schimmel reported that a new comptroller will start on January 26. Mr. Basile will remain available to help with the transition and budgeting process.

Mr. Schimmel reported that staff met with DEP about the Commission's drought management plan and the Commission's exemption from the state drought restrictions. The meeting was successful.

Atty. Guz noted that litigation of the new Water Management Act regulations issued by DEP resulted in the Mass. Court of Appeals decision that the DEP regulations, as revised, are valid.

Mr. Schimmel reported that the search committee is continuing to search for new general counsel candidates. Commissioner Donnellan volunteered to be a part of the screening committee.

**UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER OTERO AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN**

**VOTED YES –**

**COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN  
COMMISSIONER OTERO:**

to nominate Commissioner Donnellan to represent the Board on the general counsel screening committee.

Atty. Guz suggested that the role of the general counsel should be different going forward, since the Commission now has in-house counsel and it is unlikely that candidates will also have bond counsel experience. If the new general counsel is not in the "red book," they would need to co-counsel with someone who is to advise on bonds. There are currently only three attorneys in the area in the red book. Mr. Schimmel added that the Director of Legal Affairs has assumed more everyday legal transactions.

Commissioner Otero responded that she did not think the general counsel role should be reduced at first, and that general counsel's advice on the budget is still needed.

Mr. Schimmel reported that Director of Water Operations Jim Laurila will be retiring at the end of the month, and that he has been instrumental in changing the culture at West Parish Filters.

Educational Outreach Manager Katie Shea reported that Pipeline Program applications are opening next week, and outreach will continue over the next few months. Atty. Guz reported that he had been approached by a former Pipeline intern and received positive feedback on their experience.

Commissioner Otero advised of an internship program through UMass that pays students and provides transportation for internships at water utilities, as well as the Youth Works program through New North Citizens Council. Mr. Schimmel responded that the Commission has hosted students through the UMass program in the past.

Mr. Schimmel reported that staff were meeting with representatives of watershed communities to discuss internship and water operations opportunities.

Mr. Pellegrino reported that advisory letters are being sent and preparations for the budget are starting.

Mr. Basile reported that a new payroll administrator was hired.

Ms. Boulais reported that the project to improve use of Checkwriters is ongoing. Work related to the implementation of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act is ongoing, which requires coordination through HR, Payroll, and the Business Intelligence teams.

Director of Wastewater Operations Steve Frederick reported that a pilot project with DEP for PFAS destruction and a study on the use of odor control chemicals for disinfection will take place at the wastewater treatment plant.

Mr. Theocles reported that an on-call engineering contract separated by specialty will be released soon. There were 20 parties to the last contract.

Ms. Buttrick reported that isolation of the 60" raw water transmission main was underway. The EDV/42" project is moving forward to completion in March. The second phase of the Birnie Avenue project is ongoing. Sewer rehabilitation work at St. Michael's Cemetery is complete. FY25 sewer improvements are complete. The installation of the water quality monitoring station and flow meters at Provin Mountain is ongoing. The CMHS project is ongoing, with designs currently at 60%.

Deputy Director of Water Operations Christina Jones reported that the transition in advance of Jim's retirement is ongoing. Staff have been promoted to run the plant and watershed more efficiently. Water quality and treatment parameters have remained steady. Cobble Mountain Reservoir is slightly below average capacity but is expected to refill in the spring.

10. Consideration and/or action on any other matters that may come before the Commission at this meeting.

Director of Legal Affairs Theo Theocles reported on a CIP amendment to pay the final bill and close the PO for the legal firm that oversaw the litigation related to the 42" pipeline.

**UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER OTERO**

**VOTED YES –**

**COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN  
COMMISSIONER OTERO:**

to approve CIP Amendment 2026-10.

The next Board meeting will be held on Thursday, February 19 at 9 AM.

**Executive Session**

11. Discussion of Litigation Concerning Retired Employee Anthony Johnson: Report by Executive Director.

Tabled.

12. West Parish Water Treatment Plant Construction: Report by Commission Counsel.

**AT 10:18 AM, UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER OTERO**

**VOTED YES –**

**COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN  
COMMISSIONER OTERO:**

to enter into executive session to discuss construction at West Parish Filters. It was determined that discussion of such matters would have a detrimental effect on the litigation position of the Commission and that the Commission would not be coming back into regular session..

Submitted By:



Jaimye Bartak, Secretary