



Established

1996

SPRINGFIELD WATER AND SEWER COMMISSION

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Minutes of Meeting

March 20, 2026

The Springfield Water and Sewer Commission held a public meeting on March 20, 2026, in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025.

Chairwoman Otero called the meeting to order at 9:09 AM and announced the Commissioners that are participating. Secretary for the Commission Jaimye Bartak called the attendance roll:

Daniel Rodriguez, Present
Vanessa Otero, Present
Matthew Donnellan, Present

Also Present
Joshua Schimmel, Executive Director
Domenic Pellegrino, Director of Finance
Theo Theocles, Director of Legal Services
Norm Guz, Commission Counsel
Chris Gaugherty, Comptroller
Jennifer Boulais, Director of Human Resources
Jaimye Bartak, Communications Manager/Secretary of the Commission

New Business

1. Report of Initial Screening Committee and Interviews with Candidates for Commission Counsel.

Executive Director Josh Schimmel reported that initial screening interviews were held with Commissioner Donnellan and the screening committee. Mr. Schimmel noted that information contributed by each candidate was shared with the Board and that four interview questions were suggested.

Commission Counsel Norm Guz disclosed that he has worked on several projects with Atty. Finnegan in the past. Commissioner Otero disclosed that Bulkey Richardson is the counsel for her current employment, but not Atty. Finnegan specifically. Director of Legal Affairs Theo Theocles disclosed that he worked with Atty. Chadwell while at the City of Springfield, as well as with Atty. Wilson, who also remains a personal friend.

- a. Attorney Jim Chadwell - 9:15 AM

Atty. Jim Chadwell introduced himself and his background. He noted that he represented the Commission for approximately 20 years on workers' compensation.

Mr. Schimmel asked Atty. Chadwell to describe his perception of the role of general counsel.

Atty. Chadwell replied that the general counsel position is to provide guidance, particularly on open meeting law, and to guide the Board on where to find expertise. Atty. Chadwell acknowledged the role had changed with legal and procurement counsel now in-house at the Commission.

Commissioner Otero asked if Atty. Chadwell is aware of how much the Board relies on general counsel.

Atty. Chadwell replied that he was in control of his own schedule and could be available as much as needed.

Mr. Schimmel asked where Atty. Chadwell's experience translated to the business of a water utility.

Atty. Chadwell responded that his trial attorney experience makes him able to gain expertise on a short timeline. He also cited his experience dealing with health insurance, unemployment insurance, labor, and retirement benefits, and that his strengths will compensate for areas where he has less experience. He also noted he did not see an inherent conflict of interest in continuing workers compensation counsel.

Commissioner Otero asked about Atty. Chadwell's experience managing groups of lawyers, particularly those involved with capital projects.

Atty. Chadwell responded that he has experience in identifying when outside counsel is needed.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked how he viewed his role in terms of identifying conflicts of interest within the Commission.

Atty. Chadwell responded he would always look for what is in the best interests of his client, and that some conflicts are waivable while others are not.

Commission Counsel Norm Guz, Commissioner Otero, Commissioner Rodriguez, and Mr. Schimmel each noted how reliant the Board and executive staff are on the general counsel for guidance, and that the hours vary greatly.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked how Atty. Chadwell saw the general counsel role unfolding with the Board, and how he would guide a Commissioner that is not an expert in Chapter 40N or conflict of interest laws.

Atty. Chadwell responded that it would take time to build trust, that he assumes most people are working to do their best, and that the process for providing guidance would develop over time.

Mr. Schimmel asked if Atty. Chadwell had any questions. Atty. Chadwell asked about the hiring timeline.

AT 9:59 AM, UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

VOTED YES –

**COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSION DONNELLAN:**

to take a 5-minute break.

AT 10:08 AM, UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

VOTED YES –

**COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSION DONNELLAN:**

to return to open session.

b. Attorney Dan Finnegan – 10:15 AM

Atty. Finnegan described his experience and emphasized that he brings stability, continuity, and a deep bench through his firm.

Commissioner Rodriguez disclosed that Atty. Finnegan was in his spouse's high school and college class, though they have never met in person.

Mr. Schimmel asked how Atty. Finnegan visualized the role of general counsel.

Atty. Finnegan responded that the role would advise the Board, and help facilitate the continued working relationship between the Board and the management team.

Mr. Schimmel asked what experience would most closely correlate with a water utility.

Atty. Finnegan responded that he had experience in construction, land use, zoning, and litigation, which exposed him to municipal functions.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked whether Atty. Finnegan intended to be the direct contact with the Board.

Atty. Finnegan responded yes.

Commissioner Otero described that the general counsel helps translate issues for the Board and the position requires much time and interaction. Atty. Finnegan responded that he was comfortable with that.

Commissioner asked Atty. Finnegan how he saw himself handling a Commissioner facing a conflict of interest.

Atty. Finnegan replied that the general counsel's role would be to advise and speak truth to power.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked what major challenges Atty. Finnegan saw for the Commission.

Atty. Finnegan responded that issues with projects could be in the press.

Mr. Schimmel asked if Atty. Finnegan had experience with crisis management.

Atty. Finnegan responded that he had significant experience with crisis management.

Atty. Guz asked if Atty. Finnegan foresaw perceived conflicts between his current client base and the Commission.

Atty. Finnegan responded that he did not see any current conflicts.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked if Atty. Finnegan's firm would compete for his attention.

Atty. Finnegan responded that the Board would have as much attention as they needed.

Director of Human Resources Jennifer Boulais asked how Atty. Finnegan would help get a new Commissioner up to speed.

Atty. Finnegan responded that a new Commissioner must understand their role, open meeting law, and governance issues. Training would depend on the level of experience of the person.

Mr. Schimmel asked if Atty. Finnegan had questions

Atty. Finnegan asked about Commissioner term length. Atty. Guz responded that the appointing authority made appointments staggered.

AT 10:39 AM, UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

VOTED YES –

**COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSION DONNELLAN:**

to take a 5-minute break.

AT 10:58 AM, UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

VOTED YES –

**COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSION DONNELLAN:**

to return to open session.

c. Attorney Anthony Wilson – 11:15 AM

Atty. Wilson introduced himself and described his background and experience, including growing up in Springfield and serving as Springfield and Cambridge city clerk.

Mr. Schimmel asked where his experience overlapped with a water utility.

Atty. Wilson replied that he had worked with boards and several construction projects.

Mr. Schimmel asked what he felt was his biggest knowledge gap.

Atty. Wilson responded that he did not have experience with water distribution, but did have some experience with wastewater issues due to his time in Cambridge.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked what he perceived the Commission's biggest challenges were.

Atty. Wilson responded he perceived the risks associated with big projects, and claims related to infrastructure, as the Commission's largest challenges.

Commissioner Otero asked if there were any potential conflicts of interest with his current clients.

Atty. Wilson responded he checked with the state ethics commission based on his work with builders of large apartment buildings, but that he was usually not involved with water/sewer connections as part of those projects, and would recuse himself whenever needed.

Commissioner Otero conveyed that the expectation for the general counsel is to be well-informed and have an opinion, which means spending time with the Board.

Atty. Wilson acknowledged he understood the importance of understanding the issues and frequent attendance and participation in discussions.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked about his approach if Board members are not in compliance with the law.

Atty. Wilson responded that in his experience, clients are usually not aware that what they are doing is not compliant, and it would be his job as general counsel to raise his hand.

Mr. Schimmel asked what Atty. Wilson expected his communication style would be between the Board and staff.

Atty. Wilson responded that open and clear communication was the best and responsible approach. Atty. Wilson expressed that multiple points of view are valuable to help shape decisions in any high-functioning organization.

Commissioner Donnellan asked about Atty. Wilson's availability given his current distance from Springfield.

Atty. Wilson replied that he is in Springfield a few times each week and has never had an issue with availability.

Commissioner Otero asked about Atty. Wilson's experience with capital budgets and construction projects, and with explaining those topics to elected officials.

Atty. Wilson responded that he did not believe it to be the best strategy for the general counsel to engage directly with elected officials, but to help the Board prepare.

Ms. Boulais asked what Atty. Wilson felt were the most important topics to understand first.

Atty. Wilson responded WIFIA and the regulations around it.

Atty. Wilson was invited to ask questions. Atty. Wilson asked what changes or continuations the Board would like to see in the general counsel position going forward.

Commissioner Otero responded that the general counsel was important in maintaining guardrails and keeping the Board's actions compliant with Chapter 40N. The general counsel is also important in helping the Board make informed decisions, which requires spending time with the Board and building relationships with its members.

Commissioner Rodriguez responded that he was overwhelmingly pleased with Atty. Guz's work and his historical knowledge. The Board's expectation is that the general counsel is very knowledgeable, and keeps the ratepayer in mind first and foremost. Commissioner Rodriguez does not want that current arrangement to change.

Mr. Schimmel added that the general counsel serves as a sounding board for risk and exposure, and cannot make procedural mistakes. Atty. Guz added that as general counsel he is often in contact with directors to understand the full picture of an issue, as well as all other levels of staff.

AT 11:38 AM, UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

VOTED YES –

**COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSION DONNELLAN:**

to take a 5-minute break.

**AT 11:45 AM, UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND
SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ**

VOTED YES –

**COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSION DONNELLAN:**

to return to open session.

Atty. Guz recommended choosing a general counsel in time to experience the budget process and public hearing.

Commissioner Otero asked if the candidate's rates should influence the Board's decision. Mr. Schimmel's opinion was that the best person for the job should be chosen. Atty. Guz noted it was hard to predict the number of hours.

Commissioner Otero commented that she felt like Atty. Wilson would offer an arrangement similar to Atty. Guz, but that Atty. Finnegan had more experience with utilities and a firm behind him. However, Atty. Wilson seemed interested and willing to learn.

Commissioner Donnellan noted that the Board had previously stated it did not wish to hire a firm. He believed Atty. Wilson and Chadwell would both be fit for the role.

Commissioner Rodriguez commented that he liked Atty. Wilson's experience with the City of Springfield, but was concerned that he was located in Cambridge. Commissioner Rodriguez favored Atty. Finnegan or Atty. Chadwell, but was concerned that Atty. Finnegan would pull the Commission's other legal work into his firm. Commissioner Donnellan agreed.

Commissioner Otero noted that Atty. Finnegan's firm had bond counsel, which was valuable. Mr. Schimmel noted that, as another option, the bond counsel used by the Clean Water Trust is allowed to represent both parties.

Commissioner Rodriguez discussed his concerns about Atty. Wilson's availability due to his living in the Boston area. Commissioner Donnellan noted that Atty. Wilson offered Zoom/Teams availability for some meetings. Mr. Schimmel noted that the Commission would no longer benefit from the regular (often unbilled) presence of the general counsel now, and that he preferred in-person presence, but that Atty. Wilson had the most procedural experience.

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

VOTED YES –

**COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSION DONNELLAN:**

to authorize the Executive Director to enter negotiations with Atty. Wilson for the general counsel position.

**AT 12:15 PM, UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND
SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ**

VOTED YES –

**COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSION DONNELLAN:**

to adjourn.

Submitted By:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JBartak", written in a cursive style.

Jaimye Bartak, Secretary