



Established

1996

SPRINGFIELD WATER AND SEWER COMMISSION

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Minutes of Meeting

January 16, 2025

The Springfield Water and Sewer Commission held a public meeting on January 16, 2025, in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023.

Chairman Rodriguez called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM and announced the Commissioners that are participating. Acting Secretary for the Commission Katie Shea called the attendance roll:

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

Also Present

Joshua Schimmel, Executive Director
Anthony Basile, Comptroller
Domenic Pellegrino, Director of Finance
Theo Theocles, Director of Legal Services and Procurement
Norm Guz, Commission Counsel
Ryan Wingerter, Director of Field Service
Darleen Buttrick, Director of Engineering
James Laurila, Director of Water Operations
Nicole Sanford, Water Resources Manager
Steve Frederick, Director of Wastewater Operations
Jennifer Boulais, Director of Human Resources
Rick Gomez, Director of IT
Patrick Burns, Comptroller
Attorney Bruce Leiter
Katie Shea, Educational Outreach Manager/Acting Secretary for the Commission

Participating Remotely

Raemarie Walker, Deputy Director of Finance
Frank Zabaneh, Engineering Manager
Kristin Monfette, Safety Manager
Nicole Boland, Billing and Collections Manager

Business Matters

(non-agenda item)

Commissioners agreed to appoint Katie Shea as Acting Secretary of the Commission for the meeting held on January 16, 2025.

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

VOTED YES –

**COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN:**

to approve Katie Shea as acting secretary of the Commission for the meeting held on January 16, 2025.

1. Approve the minutes of the meeting held on December 13, 2024, 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 RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN:**

to approve minutes of the meeting held on December 13, 2024.

Executive Session

Item 9 taken out of order.

AT 1:04 PM UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER OTERO

**VOTED YES –
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN:**

to enter executive session to discuss negotiations related workers compensation claims for two employees Mr. Johnson and Mr. Vega. It was determined that public session would have a detrimental effect on the Commission's position regarding the claims. It was announced that public session would resume following executive session.

Public Session resumed at 1:34 PM.

New Business

2. Financial Update: Report by Comptroller.

Comptroller Patrick Burns reported on the December 2024 financial report. There was an ending cash balance of \$143.1 million, which represents an approximate \$6.7 million positive cash flow.

There is a projected negative revenue variance of \$1.1 million, reflecting a decrease in water and sewer usage from what was estimated. Revenue from investment income and power generation has been higher than projected. The Commission also received \$600,000 as a one-time grant from Eversource for the Connecticut River Crossing Project.

The budget is projected to be spent at 97% with a balance of approximately \$2.7 million in unexpended operational funds. This will be managed throughout the fiscal year.

Mr. Burns reported that payments to Veolia will be less than projected this fiscal year, resulting in some savings. Director of Wastewater Operations Steven Fredrick added that due to lower than projected precipitation and groundwater flowing through the system there is a reduction in biosolids produced at the wastewater plant. The decrease in biosolids has contributed to a decrease in payments for the hauling and disposal of the biosolids.

Mr. Burns reported that the Commission is in the process of filling several vacant positions, which were included in the FY25 budget. The annual OPEB payment will be made this spring.

Mr. Burns reported that approximately \$30.4 million has been spent from the capital budget so far in FY25, with a projected total expenditure of \$119.5 million. Expenditures will increase as construction at West Parish accelerates.

Mr. Burns reported that there was \$143.1 million in total cash, \$39.5 million of which was unrestricted representing approximately 28% of overall cash, with \$72 million in restricted cash.

There was \$6.7 million in receivables of which \$2.3 million was over 60 days old.

There was over \$1 billion in assets and \$730 million in liabilities, including outstanding debt, pension, and OPEB liabilities.

3. Consideration of Utility Billing Credit Summary and Summary of Accounts Receivable
December 2024: Report by Director of Finance.

Director of Finance Domenic Pellegrino reported net billings of \$8.6 million, collections of \$10.6 million, with a resulting accounts receivable balance of \$5.6 million.

There were 7232 accounts receivable over 60 days old totaling \$2.2 million.

There were 225 credits issued totaling \$40,999.95.

Mr. Pellegrino reported that CAP credits continue to be issued, and the number of applications is consistent for this time of year during fuel assistance season.

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

VOTED YES –

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

COMMISSIONER OTERO

COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN:

to approve credits in the amount of \$40,999.95
as presented.

4. Consideration of CIP Amendment No. 2025-09: Report by Director of Finance.

Mr. Pellegrino reported on CIP Amendment No. 2025-09 to transfer funds from the CIP Reserve account to the Connecticut River Crossing and York Street Pump Station account. Some outstanding items at the York Street Pump Station are not SRF eligible and will be payable out of the project CIP account.

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

VOTED YES –

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

COMMISSIONER OTERO

COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN:

to approve CIP Amendment No. 2025-09.

5. Consideration of Amendment #1 to Kleinfelder Task Order 50 under Contract R-21-01: Report by Director of Engineering.

Director of Engineering Darleen Buttrick reported on a water main repair project on Riverside Road. The amendment to the task order includes additional efforts for Kleinfelder to obtain permits, complete the geo-tech review, and conduct workplan and construction oversight. The cost is \$283,724.95.

Commissioner Otero asked about the project timeline and completion date.

Mr. Schimmel responded that the project is starting at the end of January, and it is expected that a portion of Riverside Road will be closed for approximately 3 months, until May 2025, while the project is completed. The Commission and the contractors are working diligently to get the road reopened as quickly as possible while completing this critical project. Outreach was conducted by the Commission to the neighborhood, including residents on the impacted streets, schools, police, fire, and local officials.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked if there were any factors impacting estimated versus final costs. Mr. Schimmel reported that some of the costs were related to permits and other requirements of the Army Corps of Engineers due to the flood wall located near the water main.

Commissioner Otero asked if the condition of the flood wall could contribute to future issues with the water main that is being repaired. Mr. Schimmel responded that as part of construction additional structures are being added around the water main to help maintain the soil and prevent the pipe from being further compromised.

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

VOTED YES –

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

COMMISSIONER OTERO

COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN:

to authorize the Executive Director to execute Amendment #1 to Kleinfelder Task Order 50 under Contract R-21-01.

6. Consideration of Acceptance to Hold Conservation Restriction on Property Owned by DG Northeast 21, LLC: Report by Water Resources Manager.

Mr. Schimmel reported that the Commission has an opportunity to manage a conservation restriction (CR) on a property in the watershed. The CR is available as a result of MassDEP taking enforcement action on the property. There would be no cost to the Commission to obtain the CR. The Commission would manage 49 acres as part of the CR, 30 acres of which are Zone A. Because of the location and proximity to Cobble Mountain Reservoir it would be in the interest of the Commission to manage this CR rather than another entity.

Mr. Schimmel stated that the Commission has obtained a draft CR from the state, but would like to make amendments before finalizing.

Atty. Guz stated that the current draft is not as detailed, and the CR should definitively state what is not allowed on the parcel. Accessibility for Commission staff to the property should also be provided in the CR.

Mr. Schimmel requested authorization to enter into negotiations with MassDEP for the CR on this property.

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

VOTED YES –

**COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN:**

To authorize Executive Director to enter into negotiations with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection on terms of the Conservation Restriction for the parcel owned DG Northeast 21, LLC, on Old Stage Road in Blandford, MA.

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

Mr. Schimmel reported that Cobble Mountain Reservoir levels are normal for this time of year.

Mr. Schimmel reported that last week there was an issue with the Surge Tank, resulting in a shutdown of the hydrostation while an assessment was conducted. During this time Water Operations switched to the Diversion Gates to convey water to the treatment plant. The Commission has met with HG&E and have developed a plan to move forward. More instrumentation will also be added in the area. The hydrostation has since returned to operation.

Mr. Schimmel stated that the Commission and twenty-three other water suppliers are moving forward with the Water Management Act appeal.

Mr. Schimmel reported that the Commission is currently working on updates to the Rules and Regulations as it does every year at this time. Additionally, the Commission is making updates to the bill payment and e-billing system to further enhance customer service.

Mr. Schimmel reported that the Commission will be participating in Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce events including sitting on a panel to discuss utility response to emergency incidents, and a legislative event which will provide an opportunity to engage with members of the state delegation.

Mr. Schimmel reported that the Commission exceeded the MCL for HAA5 as part of December sampling and issued Public Notification in January. Customers received the notice in January 2025 bills.

Mr. Schimmel reported that there have been recent reports of imposters posing as Commission employees in Springfield neighborhoods. The Commission sent out a press release, posted on social media, and have been in contact with Springfield Police.

Mr. Schimmel reported that the Commission has organized a table-top emergency response exercise with multiple agencies including wholesale water communities, MassDEP, and MEMA. The exercise will take place next week.

Mr. Schimmel reported that the sewer pipe that failed in December in St. Michael's Cemetery/Wilbraham Road area has been temporarily repaired. Commission crews have been working on a clean-up of the area and will conduct final cleanup once the area and Watershop's Pond thaws. The Commission is working on a permanent repair including bidding the project and worksite coordination with the cemetery.

Director of Wastewater Operations Steven Fredrick reported that the grit project at the wastewater plant has gained momentum and concrete work is underway. At York Street Pump Station final punch list items are being completed. DOC and a subcontractor are in arbitration which will need to be completed for final closeout of the York Street project.

Mr. Pellegrino reported that the Commission's RFP for an e-bill vendor received nine proposals. Based on submittals and review process, Paymentus, which is the Commission's current vendor, was determined to be most advantageous. The Commission plans to present the contact for approval at the next Board meeting.

Commissioner Otero asked what criteria were included and if there will be any efficiency improvements for customers. Atty. Theocles responded that Paymentus was determined to be the most advantageous based on product comparison, pricing, and reference checks. Mr. Schimmel added that Paymentus has strategies to help improve efficiency and engage more customers in e-billing and online bill pay.

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

VOTED YES –

**COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN:**

To authorize the Executive Director to negotiate a 3-year contract with a 2-year option with Paymentus for electronic billing services.

Mr. Pellegrino reported that the Commission will be closing on \$50 million in SRF funding which will help cover costs for the York Street Pump Station project, Locust Street project and the first round of SRF funding for the new water treatment plant. There have also been 4 draw downs to date on the WIFIA financing and more are expected soon due to the water treatment plant construction.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked how quickly WIFIA funds are deposited to the Commission. Mr. Pellegrino responded that typically the funds are received in two weeks. The finance team is managing cash flow and funding by timing requests for SRF and WIFIA.

Commissioner Otero asked about emergency or contingency funds for unexpected projects like large main breaks or sewer failures. Mr. Schimmel responded that the Commission has been able to manage emergency projects through the O&M budget as well as the CIP account through CIP amendments that are voted on and approved.

Director of IT Rick Gomez reported that the IT team is advancing the SCADA upgrade project. IT has also been working to enhance connection speeds, software licenses, and support technology needs across the Commission.

Water Resource Manager Nicole Sanford reported that the Source Water Projection Plan is being updated. Later this month Ms. Sanford and Water Resources staff will be presenting to the New England Watershed Managers Collaborative on their work in the watershed.

Ms. Buttrick reported that Walsh Construction has mobilized at West Parish Filters and is repairing bridges at the site for heavy vehicles and other traffic, and prepping for excavation and tie-ins. Demolition has been completed on the 42-inch project and contractors will pour concrete soon. Fiberoptic upgrades at West Parish are being completed. The Backwash Pump station is complete, and the team is working on some warranty issues to finalize the project. The lagoon project is going out to bid and is expected to begin later this spring. At Locust Street, substantial work is complete, but the contractor is waiting on a few parts to finalize the project later this year. The Birnie Avenue project is scheduled to begin this spring. The St. Michaels Sewer Project will also go out to bid this spring once agreements are in place. Planning for the hydrostation upgrades is underway.

Comptroller Anthony Basile reported that Patrick Burns has taken over daily responsibilities of comptroller. Mr. Basile continues to work with Mr. Burns on financial operations and preparing for budget season.

Atty. Theocles reported that he is working on the contract with Paymentus for the new e-billing contract. A residuals bid is out now, and a chemical bid will be released in the coming weeks. Mr. Theocles is also supporting WIFIA reporting and the Engineering Department with several bids that will be released soon.

Director of Field Services Ryan Wingerter reported that there have been 15 water main breaks since January 1st and crews have been working diligently to repair breaks and restore service to customers as quickly as possible.

Director of Water Operations James Laurila reported that Water Operations staff are finishing several maintenance projects at the treatment plant to help ensure it runs well throughout construction of the new plant. Projects include installation of new chlorinators, new valves on slow sand filters, and rapid sand filter nozzle replacement. Water Operations staff are preparing for the tie-ins and will help facilitate the project. There is a tank cleaning project at Provin Mountain. Water Operations is also working on hiring new staff.

Commissioner Otero asked how the new hires heard about opportunities at the Commission.

Mr. Schimmel responded that the Commission's scholarship program for the Basic Treatment Training Course has been successful in getting people into water operations careers. The current spring semester course offered at STCC in partnership with MWWA has the highest enrollment ever for a MWWA Basic Treatment Course with 50 students.

Educational Outreach Manager Katie Shea reported that the Commission awarded nine scholarships to Hampden County residents for the Basic Treatment course this semester.

Ms. Shea reported that the Commission is preparing for the Pipeline Program for summer 2025. Applications opened last week and will be accepted until March 26th.

8. Consideration of FY25 Executive Director Organizational Goals: Report by Commission Counsel

Atty. Guz reported that as outlined in the employment contract for the Executive Director the Board must review and approve the Executive Director's goals for FY25.

Mr. Schimmel presented the goals for the Board's review and stated that the goals provide a framework for the direction of the Commission and are a working tool.

Commissioner Rodriguez stated that goals with actionable items and target dates, similar to SMART goal models are beneficial.

Commissioner Donnellan asked what the process for reporting progress on the goals would be. Mr. Schimmel responded that a reporting schedule will be developed. Mr. Schimmel stated that in May 2025 he will report on FY25 progress and propose FY26 goals.

Commissioner Otero stated that the goals presented for FY25 are good and that Mr. Schimmel could continue to enhance the executive level goals for 2026.

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

VOTED YES –

**COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN:**

To approve the Executive Director's FY25 goals as part of the Executive Director's employment contract as presented.

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

Item taken out of order following item 1. Discussed in Executive Session

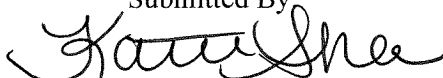
AT 3:03 PM, UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER OTERO

VOTED YES –

**COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN:**

to adjourn.

Submitted By:


Katie Shea, Acting Secretary

Exhibits:

December 2024 Financial Report

2024 December Finance Director Report

Cobble Mountain Reservoir Capacity Levels

Contracts Signed by Josh Schimmel

CIP Amendment No. 2025-09

R-21-01_KLEINFELDER-50_Amendment#1

Kleinfelder Task Order 50 Amendment #1(Contract R-21-01)

Draft Blandford Conservation Restriction