

Citizens Advisory Board — Weir River Water System

Meeting Minutes

April 21, 2026 | 7:00 PM Hybrid Meeting — In Person and via Zoom

I. Call to Order

Chair David Anderson called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. Chair Anderson read the required meeting announcement, advising participants that the meeting was being held in person and remotely pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 and all other applicable laws, and that the meeting may be recorded by the Town of Hingham in accordance with the Open Meeting Law. No participants indicated they were recording the meeting.

Members present: David Anderson (Chair), Stephen Girardi (Vice Chair), Jim Broderick, John Struzziery. Julie Strehle (Water Commissioner) and Superintendent Russell Tierney also attended

II. Approval of Minutes

October 15, 2025 Minutes

Two amendments were noted:

1. A sentence was added to Section II reflecting that rate increases to date have remained below the projected rate increases modeled at the time of the water system's acquisition — consistent with Anderson's statement at the meeting.
2. A notation was added reflecting Superintendent Tierney's statement that a 3% rate increase is currently expected every other year going forward.

Motion to approve the October 15, 2025, minutes as amended was made, seconded, and carried unanimously.

January 28, 2026 Minutes

No amendments were noted. Motion to approve the January 28, 2026, minutes as written was made, seconded, and carried unanimously.

III. Water Superintendent's Report

Presented by Russell Tierney, Superintendent

Meter Reading & Customer Communication — New Door Tag / Postcard Program

Superintendent Tierney introduced a new customer outreach program to address meter reading issues. The current system, which uses letters generated by Veolia's billing platform, was deemed insufficient. Going forward, WRWS will send postcards to residents experiencing meter issues, 40 at a time, with door tags placed simultaneously at those addresses to provide a double touchpoint. The communication is designed to inform customers that their meter cannot be accurately read and asking them to contact WRWS to resolve the issue, at no cost to the customer.

The Superintendent noted two categories of meter problems:

- **Stuck meters** — approximately 400 meters are currently reading zero, meaning consumption is not being recorded. These are the priority given the revenue and billing implications.
- **Radio Wiring Issues** — approximately 1,000 radios act up on a regular basis, either failing to transmit or missing read cycles. These are more complex to manage given quarterly reading cycles.

It was noted that meters and radios are WRWS property, and there is no cost to ratepayers for meter or radio replacement, except in the case of deduct/exception meters used for irrigation systems. Resident would be required to pay the replacement cost of a water meter and/or radio if it is damaged during construction, subjected to extreme cold and freezes, or if the department deems the meter was damaged due to neglect. A suggestion was made to add language to the door tag noting that any replacement would be at no cost to the resident, which the Superintendent indicated he would consider for future print runs.

The Superintendent estimated that unread meters represent between \$100,000 and \$300,000 in lost annual revenue. A new staff position dedicated to meter replacement was added in May of 2025 to accelerate the program and assist in the transition to HMLP.

FY26 Capital Projects Update

- **Advanced Metering Infrastructure (“AMI”) System** — This is the system of smart meters, communication networks, and data management software that allows WRWS to read every meter in the system automatically, rather than sending staff out weekly to read meters using our current drive by radio system. Six vendors were initially solicited; the field has been narrowed to two finalists. Given how closely ranked the two systems are, the Superintendent has engaged an independent consultant to conduct a peer review before a final award decision is made. Key differentiators include: (a) one vendor uses compatible existing radio infrastructure, potentially saving the cost of replacing all 12,500 radios system-wide; (b) the other vendor's system is considered slightly superior overall and their existing customer portals is a little more user friendly. The Superintendent noted that of the approximately 12,500 service connections, roughly 7,000 radios would be compatible with the one vendor's system, meaning only 5,000–6,000 radios would require replacement. A decision is expected by the end May, with Hull to be addressed first given the concentration of meter issues there. The system is projected to pay for itself within 3–4 years.

The Board discussed the significant customer-facing benefits of AMI, including: daily meter reads at a 98.9% system read rate; an online customer portal allowing residents to monitor their own usage, set consumption alerts, and receive leak notifications; and the potential elimination of the abatement process for high-usage complaints. The

Superintendent also noted that the vendor may be able to incorporate HMLP electric usage data into the same customer portal, however this would be read only and only for the purpose of allowing them to see both utilities in one platform.

- **Security Cameras** — Bids received for cameras at both the water treatment plant and the stockyard came in at approximately \$75,000, within the \$85,000 budget. A total of 10 cameras and 4 door locks will be installed. The water treatment facility and our stock yard will be secured with key fobs and other measures including the camera's
- **Summer Street (Route 3A) Design** — Design and permitting expected to be complete by mid-June, with bidding to follow and construction beginning approximately August–September.
- **Raw Water Main Program** — WRWS has identified obstructions in raw water mains affecting the ability to draw full capacity from the system's largest wells, including the Free Street wells, which are currently operating at approximately 70% capacity. Pressure recorders will be installed at 8 points along the affected mains to pinpoint the problem. A new intake line was installed to Accord Pond over the winter which will increase capacity and flow during high demand for the current summer season.
- **Hull Storage Tank / Booster Station** — Design is at 80%. Permitting submissions to Hull are expected in June, with bidding in July–August and pre-construction work beginning thereafter. Primary construction will ramp up in spring 2027, with startup targeted for fall 2028. Foundation concrete work can proceed through December; glass-fused-to-steel tank installation will follow in the spring.
- **Valve Replacement Program, Pressure Monitoring** — Ongoing.

Billing Transition — Veolia to HMLP

The Superintendent reported that the billing transition from Veolia to HMLP is on track for a July 1, 2026, launch. The billing vendor will be on-site the first week of May for five days of intensive review to ensure all calculations are correct. The system will move to monthly billing for all customers across Hull, Hingham, and North Cohasset. Only Hingham customers will receive a combined water and electric bill, with sewer coming in 2027. A transition letter will be sent to all customers in advance.

The Superintendent indicated a possible one-month delay in implementing the rate increase, preferring to allow the first monthly bills to go out before layering in a rate change. The Board discussed the bill design and agreed to review a draft template once available, with the goal of providing feedback before launch. The Superintendent will also share the list of top billing FAQs developed at the time of system acquisition for the Board's review and potential updating.

The Board discussed several bill design priorities including: a year-over-year usage comparison; clear presentation of what the customer owes and how to pay; and consolidation of surcharge line items, which the Superintendent noted has already been done (multiple surcharges have been merged into one line).

Unidirectional Flushing Program

Veolia is currently conducting a unidirectional flushing program in the High Service area of Hingham, covering areas from the Accord Pond tank down Whiting Street, Gardner Street, and surrounding area, with Derby Street and the industrial park to follow.

Northern Hingham, Hull and North Cohasset areas will be flushed in the fall. The program flushes 800–1,200 gallons per minute for 30-minute intervals, using 4–5 million gallons of water over the course of the full program — approximately one day's system usage. The program improves water quality and reduces sediment, which in turn reduces the likelihood of discolored water complaints following main breaks.

Raw Water Intake

A new 400-foot raw water intake has been installed improving source water quality, reducing chemical usage, and reducing PFAS levels in the raw water. Samples analyzed during the design of the new intake showed significant reduction in PFAS levels. The installation was completed by divers sawing through ice and diving in winter conditions. Some additional footings and anchors remain to be completed, and the project scheduled for final sign off in May of 2026. However the line is in service and providing raw water to the plant.

Town Meeting

WRWS will be appearing at Town Meeting the following week with two articles. Some questions on PFAS are anticipated. The Superintendent and Commissioner Strehle indicated they are prepared to address any questions, including on the lead service line program.

Lead Service Line Program Update

The Superintendent provided a status update on the lead service line identification program. Key points:

- Our finish water and sampling locations throughout the system show lead levels to be well under the acceptable levels set by MassDEP and EPA. Water is treated to prevent lead from leaching from any pipes in the system, primarily through pH management (maintaining pH between 7.4 and 7.8), which reduces corrosion.
- Of the approximately 3,000–4,000 unknown service lines, the Superintendent expects the vast majority will prove to be galvanized rather than lead, based on historical survey data.
- Only 7 lead service lines have been confirmed to date, and those homeowners have not yet responded to outreach.
- The Superintendent has concluded that it is more efficient for WRWS staff to visit properties directly rather than relying on resident self-identification, given the verification burden the self-assessment process creates. Residents with unknown classifications are now asked to fill out a form on the website, after which WRWS will schedule an appointment within two weeks to inspect the service line in person.
- The Superintendent noted a desire to work with MassDEP to allow a shorter follow-up letter in future years to improve customer readability and response rates. The recent revised supplemental letter was referenced positively in this context.
- Approximately 30 lead gooseneck fittings remain in the system and are being removed over time.

- For the 7 confirmed lead service lines, WRWS will replace the line and allow the homeowner to pay over two years at no interest if they cannot afford replacement.

Drought Level Plan

The Superintendent noted that the proposed Drought Level Plan is still being refined and will be reviewed with the Water Commissioners after Town Meeting. The Superintendent also indicated a desire to increase drought violation fines, as the current \$50 fee is insufficient as a deterrent.

IV. Water Commissioners Report

Julie Strehle, Water Commissioner

Commissioner Strehle had no items beyond those already addressed in the Superintendent's report. She indicated she is prepared to speak to any questions at Town Meeting, including on the lead service line program and the budget article.

V. Capital Improvement Plan

No additional items beyond those covered in the Superintendent's report.

VI. CAB Goals and Ways to Add Value

Chair Anderson invited discussion on how the CAB can be most helpful to the Superintendent and the system going forward. Key discussion points:

- The Superintendent expressed appreciation for the CAB's engagement over the past year, specifically citing the lead service line supplemental letter as a meaningful contribution.
- The CAB email inbox has received no complaints for an extended period, which the Superintendent attributed to improved system management and customer communication.
- The Board agreed that the upcoming billing transition represents a near-term opportunity to provide useful feedback, including reviewing the bill template before launch and helping to update the billing FAQ.
- The Board discussed the idea of a public-facing system status map — similar to HMLP's outage map — that would allow customers to check whether WRWS is aware of an issue in their area before calling. The Superintendent indicated this may be achievable through the existing GIS system and committed to discussing it with HMLP. The Board noted that such a tool could meaningfully reduce inbound call volume during main breaks and other service disruptions.
- Member Broderick raised the importance of follow-up communication with individual customers after service issues are resolved, noting a specific instance where a main

break affecting a residence went without adequate follow-up for an extended period. The Superintendent acknowledged this as an area for improvement and committed to working with the contract operator on follow-up protocols.

- The Board discussed the Open Meeting Law implications of having a subcommittee review the bill template, with Chair Anderson indicating he would confirm with Town Counsel whether a subgroup of less than quorum could meet informally with the Superintendent for this purpose.

VII. Public Comment

No members of the public were present. No public comment was received.

VIII. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

*Minutes prepared by: Dave Anderson, Chair Date prepared: April 22, 2026. Approved 6/25/26.
Next meeting: TBD*