



NEWS & NOTES

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HOUSE TO DEBATE BUDGET; DEBT SERVICE ASSISTANCE ELIMINATED

The Massachusetts House of Representatives will begin debate this week on the \$27.4 billion state budget bill that makes deep cuts into state programs and slashes local aid by 25%. Debt Service Assistance (DSA) is completely eliminated from the House version of the budget. There were 978 amendments filed in efforts to influence the House budget, including three that pertain to DSA. The state is facing a \$3.5 million gap between annual revenues and spending.

Representative Katherine Clark (Melrose) filed an amendment to fund DSA at \$10 million; Representative Thomas Stanley (Waltham) filed an amendment to fund DSA at \$20 million. Stanley also filed an amendment to expand the state's existing Bottle Bill to include deposits on bottled water, which would then be returned to a water and sewer infrastructure account. Governor Patrick included a similar approach in House 1, funding DSA up to \$10 million per year through an expanded Bottle Bill. While aware of the difficult economic outlook, the Advisory Board urges legislators to support any approach they feel has a chance of success. Debt Service Assistance is a critical statewide program that provides rate relief for cities and towns.

SAVE THE DATE: LG AT AB MEETING

Lt. Governor Timothy Murray is the featured speaker at the June 18th Advisory Board meeting, held at the Boston Water & Sewer Commission. He will discuss the impacts of the federal stimulus package on cities and towns. This is the second of a two-part series on the federal economic stimulus package; last month MWRA staff spoke about the Authority's efforts to prepare for and utilize federal funds.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

MAY 13: MWRA BOARD OF DIRECTORS / 10 AM - CHARLESTOWN

MAY 15: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE / 8:30 AM - BOSTON

MAY 21: MWRA ADVISORY BOARD & ELECTION TO MWRA BOARD OF DIRECTORS / 11:30AM - LEXINGTON

PLEASE NOTE: The election is NOT a weighted vote; a quorum of 32 voting members is necessary to validate the election.

Each community's attendance is critical.

DEBATE ON TAXING BOTTLED WATER INCREASES

Staff from the Advisory Board recently testified at a legislative hearing in support of H.2828, *The Water Resources Funding Act*, sponsored by MWRA Caucus Chairman Ron Mariano. The bill would place a tax of five cents on bottled water and create a dedicated fund available to all municipalities and all water districts, including the MWRA, to be used for water and sewer infrastructure repairs and projects.

Funding for local water and sewer infrastructure projects continues to suffer from the difficult economic climate. According to a recent report by the American Society of Civil Engineers, Massachusetts' drinking water infrastructure needs an investment of \$8.56 billion over the next 20 years. Additionally, Massachusetts has \$3.16 billion in wastewater infrastructure needs. An innovative approach to funding water and sewer infrastructure, as outlined in H.2828, would provide a necessary means of funding, upwards of \$65 million per year, for these important projects. The bill was featured in a recent Boston Globe Editorial; see below for the full text of the Boston Globe's Editorial.

BOSTON GLOBE EDITORIAL

Short Fuse April 19, 2009

Water: Message in a Bottle Tax

Are plastic water bottles the new cigarettes? For years, lawmakers have found tobacco a convenient vehicle for raising tax revenues because few people will defend the unhealthy product. Now lawmakers are proposing a 5-cent tax on plastic water bottles - also unhealthy, at least for the environment - in order to pay for the state's decaying wastewater pipe system. Governor Patrick and Quincy Representative Ron Mariano have both proposed versions of the fee, which could generate as much as \$65 million a year, according to the State House News Service, and the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority Advisory Board supports the idea. A bottle of Dasani may never be as socially incorrect as a pack of Marlboros, but taxing water bottles to fix water pipes makes good sense.

If you have any questions regarding topics raised in this newsletter or any other MWRA issue, please contact:
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