



News & Notes

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Group's Efforts Send Project Costs Soaring

In a recent notice to ratepayers, the Advisory Board detailed ongoing efforts by a local conservation group to derail a critical public safety project taking place at the Blue Hills Reservoir in Quincy.

The Blue Hills Covered Storage Project includes the construction of a drinking water storage facility at the Blue Hills Reservoir, which is currently maintained by the MWRA as an emergency, non-potable water source. The facility would serve a population of over 100,000, protecting drinking water from contamination, stabilizing water pressures in the distribution system and creating an ability to feed off a storage facility if needed.

Ongoing efforts by the Friends of the Blue Hills (FOBH), based in Milton, to halt the Blue Hills project have resulted in a delay of eighteen months, increasing project costs by an estimated \$3 million. Most recently, the FOBH requested that the Department of Environmental Protection remove the Blue Hills project from a list of projects eligible for State Revolving Fund (SRF) monies. If successful, this action would result in a loss of \$5 million in federal assistance, a cost that would need to be absorbed by the ratepayers.

In the notice, Advisory Board Chair Katherine Haynes Dunphy said ratepayers deserve to know about the rising cost associated with this project and the reasons behind it. She added the project is an important step toward protecting the MWRA's waterworks system post September 11th. To view the entire notice, please visit the Advisory Board's web site.

Upcoming Meetings/Events

- February 9--** MWRA Board of Directors Meeting
10:00 am in Charlestown
- February 14--** ♥ Valentine's Day ♥
- February 16--** Operation's Committee Meeting
10:00 am at the Americal Civic Center in Wakefield
- February 18--** Executive Committee Meeting
8:30 am at Advisory Board Office
- February 24--** Advisory Board Meeting
11:30 am in Lexington
- March 9--** MWRA Board of Directors Meeting
10:00 am in Charlestown

Ratepayers 0 for Three in Governor's Budget

For the third year in a row, Governor Romney zero-funded the Debt Service Assistance (DSA) program in his budget recommendations (referred to as House 1), leaving ratepayers to shoulder the more than \$5.4 billion in MWRA outstanding debt. Currently, nearly 60 percent of MWRA's operating budget goes directly to paying this debt.

Last fiscal year, the MWRA Legislative Caucus led a successful effort to restore DSA, securing \$10 million for the program in the Legislature's budget and overriding the Governor's subsequent veto. This action reduced MWRA's effective overall rate increases from 3.9 percent to 1.9 percent. Ratepayers must again look to their elected Senators and Representatives for funding for this program in FY06. To read more about the cuts to DSA and obtain information about contacting your elected officials to express your support for this program, please visit the Advisory Board's web site.

Water Use Continues Downward Trend

MWRA water demand for 2004 was 220 million gallons per day (mgd), according to year-end water use numbers. This figure represents the lowest demand in 50 years. Impressively, Boston's demand of 77 mgd marked the City's lowest water use since sometime before 1910; a near 100-year low. The low figures can be attributed to increased emphasis on water conservation, system rehabilitation, aggressive leak detection/repair and the rising cost of water.

5.7% Rate Increase Proposed for Fiscal Year 2006

The MWRA has released its preliminary recommendations for water and sewer assessments to communities for Fiscal Year 2006. A combined water and sewer rate revenue increase of 5.7 percent was proposed. This includes an 18.2 percent increase for water assessments and a 0.5 percent increase for sewer assessments. Advisory Board staff will have 60 days to review and comment on the proposed increases and will submit recommendations to the full Advisory Board in May. Individual community assessments can be accessed on the MWRA's web site at www.mwra.state.ma.us.

Additionally, Advisory Board staff is continuing its review of the FY 2006 Capital Improvement Plan and will submit recommendations to the full Advisory Board at its March 24th meeting.

Reading Application Before WRC for Second Time

The Water Resources Commission (WRC) voted at its January meeting to put the issue of reconsideration of the Reading Interbasin Transfer Act application on its agenda for its February meeting. The move comes at the request of the Ipswich River Watershed Association and the Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee (WSCAC) who believe recent changes to Reading's application warrant further consideration by the WRC. More information about their request can be accessed in the January summary of the MWRA Board of Directors' Meeting, available on our website.

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

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