

**GROVELAND WATER & SEWER BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
February 18th, 2025**

A Regular Meeting of the Groveland Water & Sewer Board was held on Tuesday, February 18th, 2025 at 5:00 p.m. The meeting was held at The Town Hall, 183 Main Street, Groveland.

Board Members Present

Sarah Sheehan-McGrath, Chairperson
Bill Dunn
Terry Grim

Staff Members Present

Colin Stokes, W/S Superintendent
Kimberly Bourque, W/S Office Manager

OPENING

Commissioner Dunn made a motion to open the meeting at 5:00 p.m. Seconded by Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath. All in favor.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Bourque presented the minutes from the January 21st, 2025, Water & Sewer Board meeting. **Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath made a motion to approve the minutes from January 21st, 2025, as submitted. Commissioner Dunn seconded. No further discussion. All in favor.**

PFAS LITIGATION UPDATE

Superintendent Stokes states that he had a meeting with the lawyer and our point of contact within the organization and they have not released the dollar figures yet. They gave everyone a score/ranking and now they are going through the process of assigning dollar figures to the scoring metric that they have established. They are saying that municipalities can anticipate checks between March and May, for the first round. Commissioner Dunn inquires about the total amount of money that these companies will be paying out and how many towns are involved. Stokes explains that it is a lot of money and that this is nationwide. The first round covers two of the major chemical companies that already agreed to pay out. This money can only be used for PFAS related projects.

SERVICE LINE IDENTIFICATION UPDATE

Superintendent Stokes explains that all water departments in the country have to go around and identify what material everyone's service lines that feed their houses are made out of. It is called The Lead Service Line Program and Stokes has yet to see a lead pipe in Groveland, but the problem is, that we do not have record that we do not have lead service lines. He explains that we went through all the records that we did have, but we only have approximately half of the data we need for the town. Letters have been sent out to residents with a QR code to identify their service line or they can call to make an appointment for our guys to go out and identify it. Only about fifty people have used the QR code. Stokes explains that lead was banned in 1986, so if your house was built after that, it would not contain lead. Even still, if we do not know what material your pipe is, the Government considers it "unknown" and we need to identify it. The prior Superintendent has told Stokes that in the 1980's, all lead pipes were replaced, but, again, there are no records of it. The only pipe we are concerned with, for this project, is the pipe in the road and residents' yards. The QR code will be on our website, any mailing that goes out, and hopefully on residents' bills, so that we can collect this data easily. We have approximately nine hundred houses to identify.

ENGINEERING UPDATE

Superintendent Stokes explains that we have to decide to either build a treatment facility or interconnect with and buy water from Haverhill, before Town Meeting. We are being forced to do this because of PFAS regulations, we do not have a choice, and have to do one or the other. Either solution has to be implemented by 2029. Stokes explains that, right now, we are waiting for our engineer and Haverhill's engineer to get their report to us by the end of this month, so that we can then reconvene and choose the best option for the town. Unfortunately, we are dealing with a lot of hypotheticals. Stokes states that we cannot negotiate with Haverhill until we know it is physically possible to interconnect. When we are doing our cost analysis, we have to make a lot of educated assumptions. We do know that we have to replace water mains in Haverhill to get the water to Groveland, we need to build a chemical building at the line to change the chemical composition to be more friendly to Groveland, and we need to replace infrastructure in town to be able to accept the water coming in. Stokes explains that our best guess at the cost of those things is approximately 8.5 million dollars, just to get the water to Groveland. Best case scenario, we would take Haverhill's rate and add twenty percent onto it, and that is what Groveland would pay per gallon. We also know that we will have to pay approximately 6.5% of Haverhill's loan they have for redoing their treatment facility, in which they just completed. These numbers are coming from their water department, but at the end of the day, it has to go to the mayor for the final decision on numbers.

A resident asks what the numbers would be if we built our own treatment facility. Superintendent Stokes states that right now, it is estimated at about 44 million dollars, over a thirty-year loan, but, again, these are not solid numbers yet. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath and Stokes state that if we go with the treatment facility, we have been accepted into a program through the state (The State Revolving Fund), which is a 0%-2% loan program and currently have been awarded approximately 15 million dollars from them. Historically, with this program, once you are in it, they end up funding the entire project, and right now we are in the draft phase of FY26. They have insinuated that it is no longer a guarantee that once you are "in," you stay "in." Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath and Stokes explain that, to the best of their knowledge, Groveland has never applied for this, but if we do not build a treatment facility (and go the route of interconnecting with Haverhill), we would not receive the funds from this loan program. This would mean, anything we do with Haverhill, we would have to pay 100%. Another resident asks about the project lifetime and what the ROI would be. Stokes explains that we do not have that information until we get the Engineering Study back, which we should have by the end of February. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath explains that no matter what, we are not going to have a solid number 100% from Haverhill before we have to go to Town Meeting. She states that if we decide to go with buying water from Haverhill, we still would have to negotiate with the Mayor and City Council, which could be anything. Commissioner Dunn expresses his concern with wasting our time even having this conversation with them. Sheehan-McGrath states that, in fairness, this board had a conversation that we wanted to vet both options 100%, as best we could, because it was in the best interest of the rate payers in Groveland. She explains that, as a board, we have consistently said that we are not ready to vote on this until we have all the information that we can obtain. The bottom line is, the board makes the decision, but at Town Meeting, all tax payers (not just water rate payers) vote on whether we can spend that money.

Another resident expresses his concern that Groveland separated from Haverhill back in 1850 and over the course of time, they filed a lawsuit against Groveland for 5.5 million dollars and the lawyers played around with it for twenty to twenty-five years. This resident went to a meeting with the Mayor and Bob Ward and within two weeks they were able to settle. He also states that Haverhill tried to raise the rates on sewer and wanted to put that extra money into the general fund, so he believes that "getting in bed" with Haverhill, again, should not even be on the table. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath explains that we really had no other choice. We vetted the route of digging new wells and we are just trying to vet all possible options.

WATER SUPPLY MAILING DISCUSSION

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath explains that the water department will be sending out a mailer to ALL TAX PAYERS in town, since they are all allowed to vote at Town Meeting on this matter, whether they are a water customer or not. She feels this is important to be able inform the residents so that they fully understand what the money is being spent on. Superintendent Stokes explains that we are trying to make a decision, and although we do not have all the answers, we are trying to make the best choice with the information we have been given.

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that she understands that either way will be a big impact on residents. The mailer may include a dollar figure for each option and the reason for the chosen option to inform the residents about voting on the monies at Town Meeting. A resident talks about the possibility of Groveland being able to sell water to West Newbury, but Stokes states that that idea is more of a “Phase 2” of this project, as we have to take care of Groveland first. Another resident states that informing people of this possibility could be a huge selling point to offset costs. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that we cannot “promise” this “selling point” because we do not know if it can or will ever take place. Superintendent Stokes states that there has been discussion with West Newbury and that they are 100% interested, but he does not feel comfortable promising anything until there is good water going to the Groveland residents. A resident asks if the treatment plant route is chosen, how long does it take to build and what is the contingency to get to the point where it gives back to the residents. Superintendent Stokes explains that we have to be online, one way or another, by April 2029. Sheehan-McGrath explains that we will be working on a plan to do some work on the pipes during the interim, which is the reason we are collecting a “Capital Fee.” Commissioner Grim states that before then (April 2029), we will be spending money to get to where we need to go. Yes, there is going to be more costs and probably higher rates, but it HAS to be done because these are Federal Rules.

OLD OR UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that the Water & Sewer Board does not do anything different from any other board in Groveland. We post our meetings and we follow every same regulation that every other board does. This board used to meet at 4:00pm every Monday for twenty-two years and now we meet at 5:00pm. She states that she understands that 5:00pm is not ideal for everyone, but it works for this board. After our meeting, at 6:30pm, is when the Board of Selectmen meets, so we have to be done by 6:30pm, which means we cannot move our meetings any later. We post our meetings forty-eight hours in advance, so that we can set our agenda, as things are always evolving and changing constantly. If something is not on the agenda, we cannot vote on it and it would have to wait until the next meeting, which is less than ideal. Sheehan-McGrath states that we are not having the meeting at 5:00pm to make it inconvenient and we are not doing it to hide anything, as the entire board and Superintendent all reside in Groveland. She explains that our meeting dates are posted on OUR website and will not be posted on the Town website until the agenda is posted forty-eight hours before the meeting date. We meet once a month and will meet twice a month if we need to.

ITEMS NOT REASONABLY ANTICIPATED AT THE TIME OF POSTING

A resident explains that they got a letter that their road is going to get paved, as early as April 1st, 2025, on Merritt Street. Stokes explains that the likelihood of there being lead is almost zero and that the gas company is supposedly replacing the gas lines. The residents’ concern is that they are still on septic and a neighbor tapped into town sewer, via another street nearby, and is wondering if a sewer line will be going in. Stokes explains that there will not be a sewer line placed there at this time and the resident states that they are asking from a planning perspective. Stokes states that to put sewer on that street, the cost of the project would be divided by the number of houses to connect, and a betterment would be put on each house for the cost. Unfortunately, our department was just told about this project, but we do have a new employee that is putting together a five-to-ten-year paving plan so that we can coordinate projects in the future.

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday March 18th, 2025, at 5:00 p.m., Town Hall, 183 Main Street, Groveland.

CLOSING

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath made a motion to close the meeting at 6:20 p.m. Seconded by Commissioner Grim. No further discussion. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly Bourque
Water & Sewer Office Manager