

**GROVELAND WATER & SEWER BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
April 14th, 2025**

A Regular Meeting of the Groveland Water & Sewer Board was held on Monday, April 14th, 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
Terry Grim

Staff Members Present

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

Guest

Joe D'Amore, Town Moderator
David Greenbaum, Board of Health Chairperson

OPENING

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath made a motion to open the meeting at 5:05 p.m. Seconded by Commissioner Grim. All in favor.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Bourque presented the minutes from the March 18th, 2025, Water & Sewer Board meeting. **The minutes could not be approved this meeting due to a lack of quorum of members pertaining to the March 18th, 2025 meeting.**

DISCUSSION WITH TOWN MODERATOR ABOUT UPCOMING WARRANT ARTICLES

Joe D'Amore states that there are forty-eight warrant articles on the Town Warrant this year at Town Meeting, which will take place on April 28th, 2025. He explains that the Water and Sewer Department/Board occupy articles forty-two to forty-eight. Articles forty-two through forty-six require a simple majority vote and articles forty-seven and forty-eight require a two thirds vote. Mr. D'Amore states that he is conducting an educational series to help people prepare for Town Meeting. He explains that there are five big segments of Town Meeting; general bylaws, zoning bylaws, committee preservation, appropriations, and enterprise fund. He asks Superintendent Stokes to explain what an Enterprise Fund is and Stokes explains that it is a separate mechanism for accounting of our funds. We are only funded by our water and sewer bills and do not receive any tax revenue. Stokes states that our whole operation is funded by what we collect from the bills and it is accounted for separately. The town, hypothetically, cannot take water revenue to buy a firetruck or pave a sidewalk, for example.

Article 42: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of ONE MILLION SEVEN HUNDRED FORTY-ONE THOUSAND, NINE HUNDRED THIRTY-FOUR DOLLARS (\$1,741,934.) to fund the Water Department salaries and expenses for FY2026, said sum to be offset by Fiscal Year 2025 Water Department Revenue; or take any action relative thereto.

Superintendent Stokes explains that this is the general operating water budget and it is level funded, outside of the Capital Fee and the loan for the engineering work for the Water Treatment Facility.

Article 43: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of SEVEN HUNDRED THIRTY-EIGHT THOUSAND, NINE HUNDRED THIRTEEN DOLLARS (\$738,913.) to fund the Sewer Department

salaries and expenses for FY2026, said sum to be offset by Fiscal Year 2025 Sewer Department Revenue; or take any action relative thereto.

Superintendent Stokes explains that this is the general sewer budget.

Article 44: To see if the Town will vote to transfer the sum of FORTY-FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS (\$45,000.) from the Sewer Enterprise Department Retained Earnings to fund a Variable Frequency Drive (VFD) replacement at the Main Street Sewer Station and Emergency Funds; or take any action relative thereto.

Superintendent Stokes explains that the VFD is the motor control for the pumps at the sewer stations, which slowly ramps up and adjusts the power to tell the motor how fast to turn, in which the speed dictates how many gallons per minute it pumps.

Article 45: To see if the Town will transfer the sum of SEVENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS (\$70,000.) from Water Retained Earnings to fund Water Tank Cleaning, Emergency Funds, ERP/RRA update or any associated projects; or take any action relative thereto.

Superintendent Stokes explains that every three to five years we have to have our water tanks cleaned and inspected.

Article 46: To see if the Town will vote to transfer the sum of ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEEN THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED FORTY-SIX DOLLARS (\$117,946.) from Water Retained Earnings for the purpose of funding the BAN pay-off and any associated projects for Fiscal Year 2025; or take any action relative thereto.

Superintendent Stokes explains that a BAN is a bond anticipation note, essentially, short-term borrowing. He states that in the recent past, the money was borrowed to do well drilling to try and find a new water source and in going through that process, it was discovered that it was no longer a viable option. This article is to pay off the debt of what was spent looking to drill wells.

Article 47: To see if the Town will vote to re-appropriate and transfer the remaining FOUR HUNDRED SIXTY-SIX THOUSAND SEVEN HUNDRED FIFTY-FOUR DOLLARS and 80/100 CENTS (\$466,754.80) balance of the borrowing authorized by Article 41 of the Town Meeting held on April 24, 2023, which funds were initially borrowed to pay costs of a new water supply source, which project is hereby abandoned and for which no liability remains, to pay costs of water main replacement, including the payment of costs incidental or related thereto; or to take any action relative thereto.

Superintendent Stokes explains that this is the other part of Article 47, the remaining balance of the funds that were already appropriated and to repurpose the money to put towards water main replacement.

Article 48: To see if the Town will vote to appropriate FORTY-FOUR MILLION SIX HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS (\$44,600,000.), more or less, to pay costs of engineering, design, permitting and constructing and equipping a Water Treatment Facility and related appurtenances (such as, but not limited to, piping), including the payment of costs incidental or related thereto; to determine whether this amount shall be raised by borrowing (including by borrowing from the Massachusetts Clean Water Trust) or otherwise; or to take any action relative thereto.

Superintendent Stokes explains that this article is to build our own Water Treatment Facility, something Groveland has never had before, but we are being forced to build it by the State and Feds, based upon new PFAS regulations. He states that we are just over the new threshold and have to be compliant by 2029. We also looked at purchasing water from Haverhill, completed a study with our engineers and Haverhill's engineers, and our board voted to build our own facility, as it will be roughly half the cost.

RESIDENT QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Superintendent Stokes states that there are two resident billing concerns. He states that a local, vacant building in town (in which is awaiting to be torn down), failed to call us to shut the water off at the street for the winter. We ended up finding that a pipe had broken, the owner was in Florida for the winter, and three quarters of a million gallons of water went through their water meter and was dumping inside the property. Stokes explains that you could hear the water from the driveway, so he shut it off at the street, reached out to the homeowner, and when he returned from Florida, he reached back out to the office. The resident was curious to see if the board would be interested in doing anything to help him. Commissioner Grim asks if he is also on sewer and Stokes states that he

is only on water. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath asks if it is a vacant building just for the winter and Stokes explains that he bought the property and is tearing it down to build contractor bays, but it used to be a single-family home. She questions this happening because of the pipes freezing and Stokes explains that he should have called the office to have the water shut off at the street, but he had one of his guys shut the valve in the basement, which still leaves some exposed pipe. It was 99,800 cu. ft. and Commissioner Grim states that it is water we will never get back. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath questions what the resident is looking for, is he looking to set up some sort of payment plan or is he looking for us to waive part of his bill. Superintendent Stokes explains that the resident will be appreciative of any help that is decided on by the board. Commissioner Grim states that a partial compromise would be to just charge him the lowest rate, as we can never get that water back, but at the same time, we feel his pain. Stokes states that is exactly what previous boards have done, while it is still a lot of money, it is also still saving him a lot of money, and at the end of the day, he made a mistake.

Commissioner Grim makes a motion to charge this resident at the minimum rate for the total amount of water used instead of the graduated rate at 5:32 p.m. Seconded by Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath. No further discussion. All were in favor.

Superintendent Stokes states that there was one other resident who called and complained about some past bills that have not been paid yet. She was looking to pay them, but she wanted to dispute a bill from last year. She was not disputing the dollar figure; she was disputing the volume used. Stokes explains that essentially that far back, there is nothing we can do now to see what was wrong then. He states that there is a thirty-day period that a resident would have to appeal a bill, and this is well outside of that period. Commissioner Grim questions her usage and what made her question it and Stokes explains that her typical bill was 1,500-1,700 cu. ft. and it jumped up to about 5,000 cu. ft. and then back down to her “normal usage.” He states, in his opinion, something happened during that billing, whether or not she knew it or not, and either got it fixed or it fixed itself. She did not reach out at the time and Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that she did not reach out at the time and has been sitting on this unpaid bill for months. Stokes explained that she was supposed to write a letter or come to this meeting and she did not do either one of those. Sheehan-McGrath states that she is not willing to do anything unless she comes to a meeting, due to waiting this long, but would be happy to have her at a meeting.

FLUORIDE DISCUSSION – BOARD OF HEALTH INVITED

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that there have been questions by some people in Groveland about the fluoride that is added to our water supply and if it can be taken out. She explains that it would be something that would need to be taken to Town Meeting in order to do so. She would like to try and genuinely educate the public on the process if they wanted it removed, when it got added, etc. and to collaborate with the Board of Health on this topic.

Mr. Greenbaum states that fluoride is one of the great public health successes of the twentieth century. He explains that fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral found in water, soil, and certain foods. It is not a synthetic chemical, it is not toxic, it is part of the environment, and it is an element on the periodic table, in which strengthens tooth enamel, making teeth more resistant to decay through remineralization. It is an essential mineral for tooth enamel, which can be lost overtime due to acid exposure. Fluoride supports the replacement of these lost minerals, reversing the stages of tooth decay, so that is why it is in toothpaste, drinking water, and applied by a dentist. Mr. Greenbaum states that it is safe, as there are levels set that you can be at, and public water supply is regulated at 0.7 parts per million. This level was chosen to prevent cavities, avoid any risk of toxicity, and a person would need to drink over two hundred and eighty liters in a single day to reach toxic levels of fluoride; at that point the water would kill you before the fluoride would. He states that we know that anything in great excess is toxic and believes that the idea that fluoride in drinking water is toxic is a little “out there.”

Commissioner Grim states that he has a mouthful of silver and gold because he grew up with a well, before fluoride was routinely available, and states that he is a big fan of fluoride. He explains that when it became available, he used to get it in drops that could be added to water. He questions about what percentage of the water that gets pumped out ends up in our bodies, as opposed to our lawns, showers, dishwashers, etc. Grim asks if there are other ways to get fluoride to people where it can be more effective. He states that the drops were only used for drinking water, then it could be a choice for those who may be concerned about it, and questions if there have been any

studies about the relative costs to possibly doing it that way. Mr. Greenbaum states that he is not aware of any studies, but that he would look into it.

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that, from her perspective, people are very concerned about it and she wants to give them information that is factual. She wants it known that it was not something the board decided to do behind closed doors, and if they want it taken out, it is something that has to be taken to Town Meeting. Mr. Greenbaum states that he would urge people not to take it out, as it has more value in the water than out of the water. He cites two examples of places that did remove it; Calgary, Canada and Juneau, Alaska both removed fluoride from their water and cavities and dental infections increased dramatically to the point they had to bring the fluoride back. He states that, Public Health wise, it is the rational thing to do.

RAIN BARREL PROGRAM DISCUSSION

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that Haverhill is running a program, in which, a resident purchases a rain barrel from a certain company, they will get \$25.00 off their water bill. We did a similar program in the past where a majority of people picked up their barrels and a majority of people did not, which in turn, Stokes spent the summer delivering them. She does not want Stokes or his crew to have to do that again, but would like to support the idea in some way. Stokes explains that there were two rounds, working with Annie and Rebecca. The first round, between the three, were paid for, so they were free. The second round, they paid half and the resident paid half. Superintendent Stokes reached out to The Great American Rain Barrel company, but the woman he needed to talk to was on vacation and is supposed to send information to him, upon returning. The person he spoke with indicated that the cost has not really changed and that the program still exists. He states, separately from that, there is a family in town who makes and sells their own rain barrels. They are less money for the same product. Stokes reached out to them to see if they could handle a mass influx if we put it out there to the people to get their rain barrel from them. They indicated that they were interested. Stokes states, in his opinion, that he would rather give the business to a local family and Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath agrees. Commissioner Grim states that we would not have to subsidize it and they are still getting it for less. Sheehan-McGrath states, after Town Meeting, we can have our PR firm put this information out there for the residents.

SIGN DEPARTMENTAL PAPERWORK

Superintendent Stokes presents paperwork for a lien release to be signed by the board for 27 Rollins Street.

OLD OR UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath asks about when Ryan Allgrove's report will be finalized. Superintendent Stokes explains that Ryan was still waiting to hear back John D'Aoust from Haverhill. He sent it to Mr. D'Aoust in an effort to see if they had anything they wanted to add to it, and as of last Friday, he had not heard back yet. Stokes explained that if we did not hear back from him, that Ryan would finalize it. Sheehan-McGrath states that she would like the report to be "out there" for Town Meeting for anyone that wanted to read it, to understand why we made this decision. She states the report is a wealth of knowledge and it was very well done. Commissioner Grim states he would like the report to also be on our website.

Superintendent Stokes provides the Commissioners with a copy of the new PR that will be released, in case they want to add anything to it. Stokes explains that this is kind of the "kick-off" of this information outreach. He explains that there will also be a page on our website dedicated just to this project and as construction happens, everything will be updated there.

Commissioner Grim asks if we are leaving all the technology for the treatment plant to the engineers and Stokes explains that, to an extent, it has to be. Grim states that the technology on this can be changing monthly and he would be happy to attend any meetings about new technology. Superintendent Stokes explains that we just got our permit for the Pilot Study, which took significantly longer than it should have. DEP basically has to approve us step by step, down to what container we use to put the water samples in, and they have already approved what media we can test in the Pilot trailer, which took six months. Stokes does not believe that we have the time line to explore

emerging technologies and it is a whole other process to get approved for emerging technology with DEP. Stokes explains he is not against it, but we can not do what we have been waiting six months to do, as we did that looking into the Haverhill option and are now a year behind.

The PR company has asked if the board would like to host a Q & A session with the public in the middle of May, as another step to get the information out to the public. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states yes and that we will need to have a Public Rate Hearing before the middle of June, as well. She believes the best way to go about it would be to combine the Public Rate Hearing and the Q & A session to get the most attendance possible.

Superintendent Stokes states that figuring out the rates for what we need to collect in order to pay for this initial engineering aspect of the treatment plant, is pretty basic. As part of the engineering itself, Ryan is going to have a separate third-party company do the rate study for us as part of the engineering line. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that we would not be able to start the rate process until everything is appropriated at Town Meeting and July 1st. She does not want people to think that we would start next week or next month, that it *HAS* to wait until July.

Stokes states that we were formally accepted into the SRF Program for \$15,000,000.00 for this year. He explains that he is going to try and push DEP for some guidance on the flexibility of spending the SRF funds and the potential to start bringing the water main from the other side of town down “here.” Even though we are not ready to construct a building with those funds, part of that project is bringing the raw water pipe “here.” Stokes states that once we have clarity if we can take that first step, we might be starting a water main project from well one to at least down town. He explains that we need to bring a raw water pipe from well one all the way “here.” Part of the plan was to replace the one-hundred-year-old water main on the one way on Main Street at the same time. Stokes explains that the thought process, right now, is to go from well one to the bridge and once we cross to the other side of Main Street, it becomes a DOT highway, which makes it more involved. It is six-inch, unlined, old cast iron pipe, which is very undersized.

ITEMS NOT REASONABLY ANTICIPATED AT THE TIME OF POSTING

Superintendent Stoke explains that the State is grinding and repaving School Street, from Parker Road to our office. With that, they will fix any of our gate box covers, sewer manholes, however, they will not provide the physical metal pieces. They also will not dig down to the water main to reset a gate box that may have shifted. The crew went down the whole street and they found a couple of gate boxes that we need to excavate and reset because DOT will not. Stokes states that he is asking the board to authorize spending out of the Emergency Fund for this, as there is only about a two-week window to get this completed.

Commissioner Grim makes a motion to approve spending out of the Emergency Fund to excavate and reset gate boxes, replace sewer manholes, and replace gate box covers at 5:51 p.m. Seconded Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath. No further discussion. All were in favor.

NEXT MEETING

Monday May 12th, 2025, at 5:00 p.m., Town Hall, 183 Main Street, Groveland.

CLOSING

Commissioner Grim made a motion to close the meeting at 6:02 p.m. Seconded by Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath. No further discussion. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly Bourque
Water & Sewer Office Manager