

1991 to 1995

In Full Swing

The MWRA and Advisory Board Optimize Water and Sewer Systems and Policies

The Advisory Board focuses on fairness for all of its communities. This philosophy led to a lawsuit against the Town of Clinton for nonpayment of user charges, as all communities must pay their fair share of the system. The initial court ruling favored the MWRA in the amount of \$6.1 million, but was appealed to the Supreme Judicial Court (see 1996-2000 period for result). A cry for fairness from member communities also led the Advisory Board to restructure the sewer rate methodology, creating a new “flow-based” method in June 1995. This sewer rate methodology has been in place ever since and the Advisory Board, through its dedicated members, was instrumental in getting all communities to agree on a fairer system.

In addition to fairness among communities, the Advisory Board pushed for fairness from regulators, pointing out that state and federal mandates were costing ratepayers millions of dollars and increasing the cost of water and sewer services rapidly. To address this, the Advisory Board put forth an initiative to have the Legislature enact the Commonwealth Sewer Rate Relief Fund (Debt Service Assistance), which allowed the MWRA to recoup some of its debt service expenses on court-mandated projects. Additionally, the Advisory Board pushed to have some court-mandated projects rolled back in size and scope for the purpose of saving eventual debt service costs that would be picked up by ratepayers. As an example, in October 1995, the proposed secondary treatment “Battery D” was eliminated from the Deer Island construction plan saving an estimated \$125 million in design and construction costs. Finally, in 1991, the Advisory Board spearheaded legal action against Governor Weld’s proposed “water tax” and won the landmark decision.

With the introduction of Debt Service Assistance and the continued financial oversight performed by the Advisory Board, the FY1995 rate assessment increase was kept to 0% for the first time since the MWRA was created 10 years earlier. Unfortunately, this would not become the norm, as increasingly stringent state and federal regulations continued to hammer the Authority and subsequently, the ratepayers.

