



News & Notes

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Asking Questions

Demanding Answers

Editorial by Joe Favaloro



Unfortunately, it seems that we are taking a step backwards with regards to watershed management. To help explain why, I thought I would ask a few questions and provide a few facts.

The Division of Water Supply Protection's Office of Watershed Management was created by Chapter 149 of the [Acts of 2004](#), and its purpose was to provide a more efficient mechanism for MWRA's funding of the watershed. The [Water Supply Protection Trust](#) allowed the Office of Watershed Management to fill a wide range of critical positions that were previously frozen due to state budget constraints, as well as to fund necessary infrastructure improvements. **The Trust was created to ensure the protection of our watersheds,**

insulating the Division from politics, bureaucracy, and the uncertainties of state finances.

Did you know that the Watershed Management budget is 100% funded out of the [MWRA's budget](#), meaning it is totally outside of the State Budget?

Can someone, other than the Advisory Board, remind DCR Commissioner Roy of this? It seems that the Division is allowing the Commonwealth's restrictions and rules to potentially undermine what we all fought hard to achieve. We will not allow that to happen.

Did you know that it took over a year to fill the top position in the Quabbin/Ware region?

Did you know that the Division is just filling the Wachusett Region's top position, which has been vacant for eight months?

Did you know that currently nearly [20 positions](#) remain unfilled, some for as long as 10 months?

Why is this happening? Is it politics?

(Shouldn't be! That's why Senator Brewer et al. created the Trust. You may remember that my first choice was to move the entire Division into the MWRA. Shall we start that discussion again?)

Or maybe they don't need the positions?

(Seems unlikely, since they pushed for them in the approval of their \$17+ million FY19 operating budget.)

Maybe they believe that if they don't spend the dollars, they will come back in June and reallocate the funds on an item that they never previously requested? (Don't count on that.)

Are they unable to do their jobs?

(I truly don't believe that to be the case.)

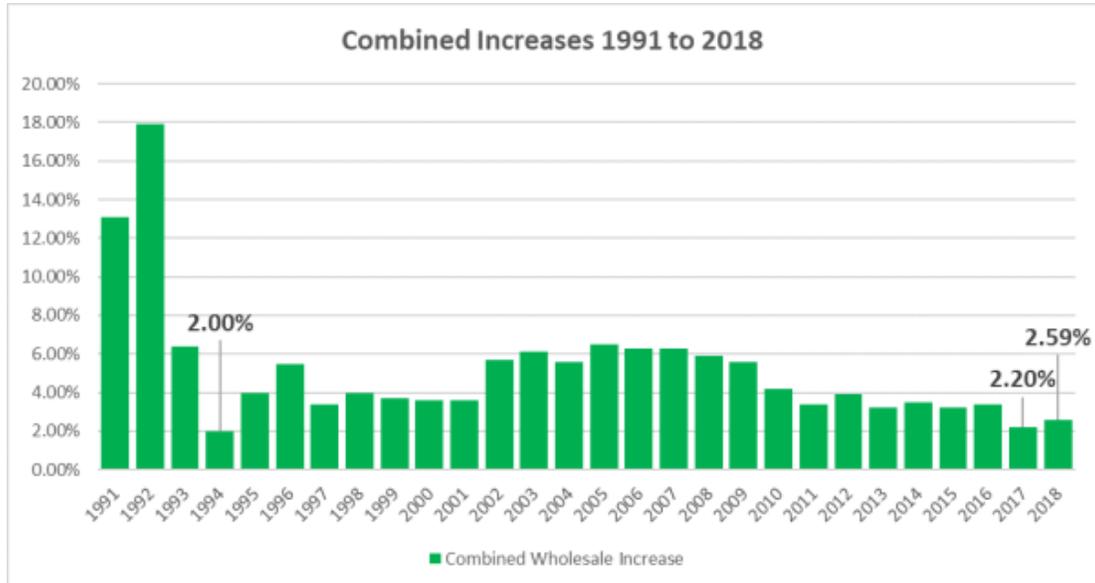
Our frustration is growing, and ratepayers need answers. The 2.7 million water customers who rely on the Quabbin and Wachusett deserve assurance that their water is protected.

The Advisory Board strongly requests that DCR Commissioner Roy appear before the Trust on December 6 to fully explain why positions are unfilled, or better yet, to provide a timeline to fill them. The Trust, MWRA, and MWRA Advisory Board are entitled to this accountability. See you on the 6th.

2.59% Retail Rate Increase for MWRA Communities in 2018

Examining the Data

For the past three decades, the Advisory Board has been tracking the retail rates for the 60 MWRA communities and many out-of-system communities as well. At the November Advisory Board meeting, staff presented the preliminary findings of the 2018 Water and Sewer Retail Rate survey. Every year, the survey gives the communities and the ratepayers a chance to compare their own rates to those of their neighbors. They can also see the long-term trends of their rate history. The input from all of the communities makes the survey rich in information and continually the most requested Advisory Board publication.



For the 2018 calendar year, using the AWWA standard of 120 HCF per household usage annually, the average combined water and sewer bill for MWRA communities was \$1599. This is an increase of 2.59% from last year's combined bill of \$1558. This was the second lowest retail rate increase since 1994. In comparison, the average wholesale rate change for wholesale communities in June of 2018 was 3.07%.

When factoring in local, state, and federal data, the average household usage in the MWRA service area is estimated to be 70.5 HCF a year with an average combined bill of \$878.

For more information on the 2018 survey, check out the [presentation](#) from the November Advisory Board Meeting or the handouts on 2018 [rates](#) or [local usage](#). Be on the lookout for the December 2018 Green Sheet which will feature an overview of this year's rate survey. Also visit our [document library](#) to catch up on previous editions of the rate survey.

Wishing Kathy Soni Well

Thank You for Your Distinguished Service



For the past 20 years, Kathy Soni has been a critical player in developing and managing MWRA's capital and operating budgets. Kathy has decided to move on to the next chapter of her life with her retirement. We thank Kathy for her many valuable contributions to ratepayers and wish her all the best. She will be missed.

Friday's Spaghetti Session

Seeing What Sticks

Last year, we dedicated our

December Executive Committee meeting to an idea-generating discussion affectionately called a Spaghetti Session (or, throwing spaghetti against the wall and seeing what sticks). Simply put, we took a handful of topics, such as rates management, system expansion, and regulatory impacts, and fully explored them.



The Executive Committee felt that this was a fruitful engagement. Our plan is to once again engage our Executive Committee in the same forum, with topics to include:

- What role should the MWRA and the Advisory Board play in stormwater issues?
- How can we make 2.4% by '24 a reality?
- How can communities address unaccounted for water?
- How can the Advisory Board better serve our communities?

This meeting is open to all Advisory Board members. We would love to have your input and participation. Please let us know if you would like to attend by Tuesday, December 4. The meeting is scheduled for 8:30 AM on December 7 at the Advisory Board offices. Hope to see you there.

Upcoming Events

For the Month of [December](#)

December 6 | 10:00 AM, [Water Supply Protection Trust meeting](#) at John J. Carroll Water Treatment Plant

December 7 | 8:30 AM, [Spaghetti Session](#) at Advisory Board offices

December 11 | 9:00 AM, [WIFIA Info Session](#) in Boston

December 19 | 10:00 AM, [MWRA Board of Directors meeting](#) at MWRA Board

Room

December 25 | Happy Holidays! (office closed)

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