

## COMMUNITY MEETING ON WATER ISSUES

Organized and hosted by Councilors Ken Clifton and Katrina Huff-Larmond

Meeting held Thursday, September 12, 2019

Notes prepared Mr. Jesse Gordon (please send me any edits or corrections; these notes were transcribed live during the event; the entire event should be posted on RCTV for more details).

### ***Panel comprised of:***

- Helen T. Gordon, lead engineer and water consultant for Tri-Town water plant
  - Keith Nastasia, director of DPW
  - Gerry Cody, director of Randolph Public Health Dept.
  - Christine Griffin, Town Attorney
  - Brian Howard, Town Manager
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- ***Facilitators:***
  - District 3 Town Councilor Katrina Huff-Larmond
  - District 1 Town Councilor Ken Clifton

***Town Manager Brian Howard:*** presentation (shared slides on town website)

- Compilation of issues discussed at Town Council meetings ("greatest hits")

***DPW Director Keith Nastasia:*** presentation (same set of PowerPoint slides)

- It's all ground water, from rain and stored in the reservoir
- Water treatment plant pulls water from reservoir, treats it, then pushes it out the water distribution system, and then to individual properties

***Health Director Gerry Cody:***

- Open reservoir allows birds to land on water, and hence can get bacteria from them.
- So water is treated, with chlorine, in case of bacteria.
- Bacteria need water to live (not much food) and can survive in water from 55-100 degrees. Underground pipes are typically about 55 degrees, so bacteria can survive in there.
- E. Coli and other coliform are the ones that can cause illness; they come from the digestive system of mammals. So we test for those, according to state rules.

***Town Manager Brian Howard:***

- We are always working with state agencies on water quality, and for any changes in the system.

***DPW Director Keith Nastasia:***

- What causes brown water?
  - Sedimentation in pipes

- If there's a fire in the area, and hydrants are opened, that disrupts pressure and can stir up sediment

- All pipes get coated with iron and manganese and other materials – that is what the sediment is made of, and it's released by changes in pressure.

**Town Manager Brian Howard:** Next is bubbly water – brown water mostly in North Randolph – south Randolph is mostly cloudy water. Sometimes it fizzes from all the bubbles – but it's not actually carbonation! – just bubbles.

**Health Director Gerry Cody:**

- Pressurized water moves water around town, via pumps; sometimes air gets in.
- People see air as "cloudy water" or "milky water" – it does clear up if you wait a minute.
- The air in the pipe is pressurized so the air is dissolved; when it comes out of your faucet, at lower pressure, the air comes out of being dissolved, and makes bubbles.

**Town Manager Brian Howard:**

- "Cloudy water is 100% safe" it just doesn't look so good.
- How to clear the water line? Via "flushing" by opening hydrants to get air out.
- Did so in Deer Park last week – and people immediately called up to say that the cloudy water was cleared up.

**DPW Director Keith Nastasia:**

- 6-inch pipe makes up the distribution system. Those are the ones that need to be "cleared".
- Unilateral flushing has the goal of removing air and sediment – that's being done in North Randolph because that's nearest the reservoir and hence the worst.
- It's just a start there – it'll take a couple years to do it all systematically, all the way to the south side of town.

**Town Manager Brian Howard:**

- Joint Water Board (JWB) is Holbrook & Randolph – that's where all of the problems are, right now, including the first new pump in 50 years, which occurred in April and started the problems of brown water and bubbly air.
- Tri-Board includes Braintree too – no current problems there.

**Water Consultant Helen J. Gordon (presentation):**

- Consultants tasked with keeping system operational while the new treatment plant is being built.
- Electrical problems at old plant shorted out some pumps, so the consultant company instituted emergency repairs for those.
- Schedule for upgrade to Randolph-Holbrook: pumps are old; electric system is old; first phase is completed and operational (it's a rebuilt pump, not brand-new).

- Upgrade going on now for electrical system. Whole new plant will be on that new system, including the new pumps (one brand new, some not). Full-time pump plus a "redundant pump" for backup in case of breakdown.
- New pump should come online in December, 2019.
- It's not the kind of pump that you can get at Home Depot – takes weeks to put together – 12 to 32 weeks to construct and disinfect for use with potable water.
- Opinion of Construction Cost: \$3 million (\$1.5 million each for Randolph and Holbrook). Currently a little under budget on this item.
- Goal is to keep this operational until Tri-Town is done, sometime in 2023.
- Environmental Partners (envpartners.com) is the water consultant company designing both the Tri-Town and the Joint Water Board.
- The design should take 2 years. Then they can start getting permits. Then they finalize design; construction goes out to bid in Sept. 2021.
- Then construction begins, and might take 1.5 to 2 years. They will provide monthly updates.
- Total cost is \$67 million for design, construction, and permitting. Extra for JWB
- Braintree has a separate plant with a lot of land. JWB has less land available. New Tri-Town plant is in Braintree. Each one has redundancy. All plants must stay operational until whole new system is done.
- Weekly conversations with state agencies.

***Town Manager Brian Howard:***

- We have a surface water system. Residents can help make sure that water stays clean until it gets to Great Pond....

***Health Director Gerry Cody :***

- It's about contaminants in the surface water.
- Rainstorms pick up whatever is on the ground, which can migrate to reservoir.
- So we have catch-basins to prevent that (the rain-drain sewer openings). So never, ever put a dog waste bag in a catch-basin!
- Household hazardous waste day Oct 26 – used oil; paint etc can be dumped there, not down the drain! 600 gallons collected last year. Even dumping it on the ground works its way into water supply – so use this date instead to get rid of it! Also collected 9,000 pounds of solids last year – can also dump those, so they don't get into water supply.
- Conserving water: devices for low-flow on dishwashers etc.

***Town Manager Brian Howard:***

- Different levels of water bans – three years with no water ban now!
- Our consumption numbers have stabilized (leveled off) so we have not had higher phases of water ban.
- Now on to Hyper-Reach....

***Health Director Gerry Cody:***

- Hyper-Reach notified people about boil-water order; also can be used for winter storms, electrical outage emergencies, etc.
- Know/Plan/Prepare bags available, to help First Responders.
- Available on town website: <http://hyper-reach.com/marandolphsignup.html>
- Or call 781-815-4199

***Town Manager Brian Howard:***

- We limit hyper-reach to as few town-wide things as possible – only during wide-scale emergency situations. Not for water main break that affects only one neighborhood.
- I recommend Facebook for less widespread emergencies.
- Also on town website – you can grab these slides there. Can join e-notifications there, too.
- Now on to costs of water
- It costs less than one penny per gallon to produce!
- JWB: is 50%/50%
- Tri-Town is 50% Braintree; 34% Randolph; 16% Holbrook (based on general usage by community)
- On Quarterly Water Billing – Town Council decided proactively to slowly increase water rates, to build up in advance the water stabilization account (now \$6.5 million) for costs planned for construction. Other towns experience "sticker shock" when they open the new plant.
- Billing was made quarterly to make bills more tolerable. Bills are sent out by water district – not all at the same time around town, and not at the same time as other tax bills.
- We have the second lowest water rates, even with the new increased rates.
- Water-boil order in July – for a day-and-a-half: it was precautionary – at no point did water not test appropriately – the issue was water pressure.
- Water pressure differs by where you live in time. Must be over 20 psi everywhere – the July order was because some parts went below that. Most of Holbrook went under the limit (because they're further from reservoir).
- 9-day water-boil issue in a town further south – ruptured line caused some actual contamination – it does happen – our situation was much smaller. We did not have to ship in water via the National Guard, but we were prepared to do so.

***DPW Director Keith Nastasia:***

- Boil-water order was due to pressure, not due to contamination!
- South Randolph pressure is in the 30 psi range; north Randolph is in 70 psi range.
- MA DEP sets cutoff at 20 psi.

***Health Director Gerry Cody:***

- MA DEP rules are precautionary when pressure is below 20 psi.
- We activated emergency at that time for precaution.

- Board of Health notifies restaurants; we notified them in July, via Medical Reserve Corps, and then it's their responsibility to adopt orders.
- July 11 test was clear; no bacteria in water; so order lifted.

***Town Manager Brian Howard:***

- When water comes back on, run the cold water for a while – 15 minutes – to clear it up.
- The more neighbors that are home and running their water, the faster it clears up.
- If you see non-clear water, call the non-emergency police number, and they will see if there's a pattern.
- Or if there's no water flow at all – which means a water main break.

**QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION**

(Residents are identified when they stated their names publicly on RCTV, or signed in publicly at the meeting and made no indication that they sought anonymity. If you are cited and want to be made anonymous, please write to [jesse@jessegordon.com](mailto:jesse@jessegordon.com) and I'll remove your name; if you are NOT cited and want to be named here, please write to [jesse@jessegordon.com](mailto:jesse@jessegordon.com) and I'll add your name!)

**Q: Resident Judy Gangel:** What do other towns do?

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** Holbrook and Braintree have taken votes; Holbrook is slower because they still have Town Meeting. Tri-Town design selection is next big step.

**A: Water Consultant Helen J. Gordon:** Holbrook Town Meeting funded it last night, for emergency repairs, and then appropriation for Tri-Town funding.

**Q: Resident Judy Gangel:** Grants for costs?

**A: Helen:** On grants, yes, state revolving loan fund – for wastewater and drinking water. It's a 2% loan (discounted). Tri-Town has been put on the list to be funded, pending the three towns funding it and voting for it. Construction and engineering is potentially covered; some parts are not.

**Q: Town Councilor Ken Clifton:** You discussed State funds, what about federal funds?

**A: Water Consultant Helen J. Gordon:** State funds are seeded under federal EPA. (revolving fund got started by federal money, so they can loan more money). Tri-Town will get funded through loan program. There are other grants here and there, but not for a project this size.

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** \$6.5M saved up so far. In addition, the water loan program can be tapped over three years, to maximize savings.

**A: Water Consultant Helen J. Gordon:** A "revolving loan" means you don't have to take all the money up front, so you don't pay interest on money until you need it.

**Q: Resident Sandi Cohen:** Any solar energy system to power the new plant?

**A:** Not at this time.

**Q: West Street Resident Jesse Gordon:** Could you describe for the public the Water Department's regular testing in the distribution system? The "distribution system" means testing around town, in the water pipes, where the source of the discoloration has been occurring – as opposed to regular testing in the water plant – how many distribution testing sites are there?

**A: DPW Director Keith Nastasia:** DEP sets up 10 testing locations per week, or 40 sites per month; all around town, in the distribution system.

**Q: West Street Resident Jesse Gordon:** I previously worked for the Tucson (AZ) Water Department and all of that distribution system testing was made public on their Water Department website on a daily or weekly basis, so residents could see their water quality last week, rather than just last year as in your 2018 summary online now. Could the water quality data from the 10 testing locations per week be posted on the Randolph Water Department website directly? With all of the data, not just an annual summary?

**A: DPW Director Keith Nastasia:** Yes, we can post it!

**Q: West Street Resident Jesse Gordon:** (I followed up after the online discussion and formally requested from the Randolph DPW that they provide all testing data from April 2018 to date, in Excel or other electronic format so residents could analyze it themselves. I formally requested the data for the distribution system, the water plant itself that serves Randolph, and any voluntary at-the-tap testing in Randolph, too).

**Q: Resident 1:** What about water heaters getting calcium deposits?

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** On hard water vs soft water – we meet or exceed every single standard. Don't know if water system plays a role in replacing water heaters – but it's safe and potable.

**Q: Resident 1:** What about sprinklers? We used to get fined if sprinklers were on; won't new strip mall and hotels will use up water quantity?

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** We cannot use the issue of water to deny a building permit. That's based on zoning. As new streets are built, and developed, yes, they use more land and more water, due to housing market. There's no legal method to deny permit on water usage.

**A: DPW Director Keith Nastasia:** We have "withdrawal permits" too.

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** On MWRA: Getting three towns to agree is difficult enough!

**Q: Resident Sharon Artis-Jackson:** What impacts can we expect at installation in December?

**A: DPW Director Keith Nastasia:** We do it in the middle of the night and it's like flipping a switch – no one SHOULD notice.

**Q: Resident Mike Harris:** On hydrant flushing: What programs are there for maintenance of water distribution?

**A: DPW Director Keith Nastasia:** Yes, exercising valves is an important part of maintenance. I've only been here since October, but I've been doing this for 20 years. The flushing program was designed by an engineer. We did no flushing before my time. You can't do the entire town at once – it has to be done in phases, where the valves and service lines are. Must avoid flushing when a blizzard is predicted, too!

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** "Free cash" and "water retained earnings" – I will implement a more aggressive townwide flushing system when funds are available (next year).

**Q: Resident of Addison Drive in North Randolph:** Brownness is not accidental, temporary, or periodic or recent – it is permanent and chronic! I have to change filters every month or every week! Water brownness is a major issue – Town Council should take it seriously! Prioritize water-main replacement.

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** We have done everything from lining of the pipes to others –

**Q: Resident of Addison Drive:** Unacceptable – (showing filter browned by iron, etc) -- people don't know if their water tank is contaminated –

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** I drink the same water; I live here in town! I don't filter my water – I drink it. Yes, filters will turn brown – and yes, more frequently since April.

**Q: Resident Dave Mulligan:** Does Holbrook pay Randolph to flush pipes that go thru Randolph? So budget limits flushing? We missed several years of flushing -- why?

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** Yes, Holbrook pays for their share.

**Q: Resident Cheryl Jones:** 5 years ago I moved to Randolph and I noticed bad smell and bad taste. I had it tested – too much chlorine! The water is awful! I have to boil water constantly – it's brown even after I boil it. I have water-saving devices but I have to flush my toilets multiple times! I buy bottled water even though Keith wrote me a letter saying it's fine. And now I'm not drinking fluoridated water so I'm getting more cavities! I feel blown off by DPW!

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** Bring any DPW customer service issues to me! We hear from folks who have spent money on testing --

**Q: Resident Cheryl Jones:** DPW wouldn't do it so I wrote to Mr Cody and they had a Quincy lab do the water testing. If you think it's all drinkable, go to Shaw's and see how many people buy water! They all say it doesn't taste good and it smells!

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** I strongly disagree – I drink the water – I understand that in apartments it's different. Sometimes people in one apartment complex there are differences – like just in your unit – we don't control the water after it gets to the apartment building.

**Q: Resident Cheryl Jones:** No one in my building likes the taste and smell. It's not just me. I wish the water department were as responsive as the Town Manager!

**A: Town Councilor Katrina Huff-Larmond:** The Town Hall is the resident's home – we will respond too.

**Q: Resident 2:** I hear from the panel that the water is "clean" – but I have a filter system too, and I see the water is brown. Are you saying it is usable and safe? People who use filters can see it – others can't – is the brown water, that we're seeing in our taps, on the record, is this water usable?

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** Yes. We test the water through all state standards. Yes on discoloration – it's usable. If you see brown water, we should do a flushing near you. We don't have folks who regularly have brown water....

**Q: Resident 2:** This is ten years, Brian!

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** If you have a filter, it's going to pick up stuff! That's its purpose! But the water in Randolph is 100% safe to drink. I don't want to minimize the issues in North Randolph – "dead end mains" have a much harder time getting the water cleaner-looking. We have an aggressive program – let us know and we will send somebody out to test your water.

**Q: Resident 3:** I use bottled water to wash my dishes! I lived here since 2001, and since April, it's not even good enough for a cup of tea – I can taste the water!

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** I want to make this abundantly clear – the water is not making you sick!

**Q: Resident 3:** You can smell it; it stinks! I can't even drink it! I buy water. Bridle Path apartments, building 8 – the water in the whole building is awful.

**A: DPW Director Keith Nastasia:** Those pipes were built in 1970 – they're old.

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** But it's only happening since your pump failure!

**A: DPW Director Keith Nastasia:** Yes, we're working off of temporary pumps and rebuilt pumps – these issues are going to go away, after we get the new pumps in place and do the flushing program. The issue within apartment buildings is the building owner's responsibility. The management team needs to deal with the issue within the building. We test at the point of entry – there's something inside the piping inside the building – the management team has to work with the tenants.

**A: Town Councilor Katrina Huff-Larmond:** If you call Town Hall, they will test your water!

**Q: Resident Yahaira Lopez:** Water Testing kits available at Home Depot! I ran this test at home, and you can too, but you can expect marketing calls from Home Depot if you use this method.

**Q: West Street Resident Jesse Gordon:** (I distributed a dozen to residents who wanted them; I ran the test on my tap myself, and Yahaira and I will report the results when Home Depot's lab responds. I also offered to all residents that I'd post online their home testing kit results alongside the town's data, when provided, so that residents can look for any patterns).

**Q: Resident Yahaira Lopez:** Should our kids be drinking water from the water bubblers at school? How we will know if there's a problem?

**A: DPW Director Keith Nastasia:** We have to report instantly if there's a high lead level or other problems. Then we notify everybody within 24 hours. We will test your water at your tap, upon request.

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** DEP ordered boil-water solely as a precautionary measure. Bacteria did not enter the system. The test took 24 hours, in tow sets, to remove boil-water order. If there were actually something exceeding levels, the school department would have taken water bubblers offline immediately.

**Q: Resident Gary Ratliffe:** Will the new treatment center fix the fluoride issue? My sons currently take fluoride pills from our physician.

**A: Water Consultant Helen J. Gordon:** Currently we do not add fluoridation. That was a decision by the communities, and new treatment plant has no current plans. If communities decide to do so, we can do so.

**Q: Resident Gary Ratliffe:** The 2018 water report says it failed to sample for pesticides during the spring sampling time. Has 2019 been tested?

**A: DPW Director Keith Nastasia:** We can get that information. We can post all lab results. It's all public documents.

**Q: Resident Janil Stevens, 22 Boylston St:** On water smell: I've seen it brown sometimes, but it sounds to me like you're saying water is ok at the entrance point to buildings, but what are regulations inside the apartment complexes?

**A: Health Director Gerry Cody:** There is no state sanitary code on that.

**A: Town Councilor Ken Clifton:** Significant percentage of residents do live in apartments – so we're concerned about what's in the apartment buildings. Perhaps town can have discussions with building managers to seek assistance.

**A: Town Councilor Katrina Huff-Larmond:** When Rosemont (apartment complex) was having issues, we worked with management – we can use those methods in other places as well.

**A: Town Manager Brian Howard:** In no instance has the testing come back indicating that the water is unsafe to drink. We tested at the tap for many residents; there was never chloroform bacteria. I don't want to minimize anyone's personal preferences – my daughter won't drink our water because she doesn't like the taste – but I don't have an issue with it.

**Q: Resident 4:** Is there a standard pressure that we can read from our water main?

**A: DPW Director Keith Nastasia:** Water meter doesn't show pressure – just cubic feet. (volume). DEP requirement is 20 psi. Plumbers do have a pressure reader – DPW can screw in a meter on your spigot to test pressure too. But it's not on the meter. We can "jellybean" your line to blow out any sedimentation in your line – it blows out your line into the main line – if pressure is low, that fixes it.