Safe Water Advisory Group Meeting

Conference Room A at City Hall, 1 Junkins Avenue
Wednesday, March 11, 2026 at 6:30 pm

For the Zoom recording of this meeting, go to: **https://youtu.be/mbxRX06k5Ek**

Draft Minutes

1. Introductions and new members - Andrea Amico, SWAG Co-chair

Co-Chair Andrea Amico, , Councilor Rich Blalock, Councilor Michelle Flynn, Rich DiPentima, Dan Finan, Chief Bill McQuillen, Katrie Hillman, Kim McNamara (Zoom), Laurel Schaider (Zoom).

Staff: Co-Chair Al Pratt, Mason Caceres.

Absent: Rep. David Meuse, State Sen. Rebecca Perkins Kwoka, and a School Board Representative.

2. Mission update - Al Pratt, Water Resource Director & SWAG co-chair

To review and communicate the latest science on the health and environmental effects of PFAS, to monitor federal and state level legislative changes, and to anticipate policy changes that could impact the City of Portsmouth.

To discuss topics relevant to the City's drinking water quantity, water quality, preservation and conservation efforts, and water infrastructure projects. Outreach to get to SWAG and Council.

To discuss public health aspects of water quality, support and provide public education about drinking water topics, and take proactive stances to protect and conserve water quality and quantity. Outreach to the community with SWAG advocates to inform and educate the community.

Considering new topics to discuss – things we haven't covered but follow mission and not veer off drinking water focused mission. Categories of topics covered over past 6 years presented:

- PFAS – history
- Regulations
- Water Status Updates: more on compliance parameters
- Water System tours – Madbury, Reservoir, another Pease PFAS treatment
- Special topics: schools, Dover landfill
- Spark your thoughts on what we might like to cover in the future

Comments:

- Fluoride supply – Potential impact of war; Israel is #2 producer. Portsmouth receives from China. Also note potential cost increases for fuel and chemical supplies. Any disruption to the use of fluoride requires public notice (covering healthcare providers).
- Concerns about impacts in southern part of state relative to health concerns from sites such as brownfields and PFAS, etc. Public education is needed for people to understand chemicals that surround us in our environment. Other emerging contaminants could be discussed. Northern part of the state looking at initiatives that caused the PFAS issues. Other sources for presenters such as education and research centers (e.g. Silent Spring).

3. Quarterly Water Supply Update - Al Pratt – Details

https://files.portsmouthnh.gov/minutes/2026/SWAG/WaterSupplyUpdate SWAG 031126.pdf

A. Water Supply

Seacoast is still in severe drought. This has been the longest period of record low precipitation in at least 29 years. While the ground is frozen, precipitation runs off as surface water instead of infiltrating and recharging the aquifers. Precipitation in March through May is important for recharging the aquifer to meet summer water demands. Water use restrictions may be needed if groundwater levels remain low. Restrictions would be enacted first with voluntary outreach, then depending on resource conditions may proceed to odd-even restrictions and finally no-irrigation restrictions. The Seacoast communities are looking at the forecast to determine how to act collaboratively. SWAG suggested proactive outreach before people start

planting gardens, education on rain barrels (environmentally sustainable materials), irrigation, etc.

Stream flows are low; but the reservoir is full. Portsmouth wells are in better shape now than in the 2016 drought. Water resources are managed by reducing withdrawals from the supply wells while water is available from the surface water. A greater proportion of surface water from Bellamy Reservoir has been used over the winter.

PFAS data update – not much change in supply well monitoring results. Portsmouth, Collins and Greenland wells remain under the State limit but slightly over the EPA MCLs which will go into effect in 2029.

B. Water System Projects Update:

- Bellamy dam repairs – 70% completed in fall 2025; will finish this April.
- Greenland well PFAS treatment – design to be finalized in Aug and bid in Sep. Cost now estimated as $8.5 million (was $2.5 million 6 years ago) due to a number of drivers. State Revolving Fund loan will cover $6.5 million with 10% loan forgiveness and include grant funds from the Emergent Contaminant Loan program. Treatment will have two granular activated carbon vessels. Old well will be reactivated in case of future emergency needs. City is in the process of purchasing one acre of land for the facility from Greenland in exchange for paving.
- Portsmouth and Collins wells PFAS treatment – Air Force has not agreed to pay for treatment, so the City is preparing a second formal request. May need SWAG to assist with Congressional input as City is up against the timeline. $600,000 for design is included in FY27 CIP and $13 million scheduled for FY29.
- Water storage tank rehabilitation - Spinney Road tank now scheduled for fall 2026 (early Sep-Nov); Newington in spring 2027, Lafayette in fall 2027. Spinney will require outreach to inform the neighborhood about the tank draining that will be required and visible on the road to the catch basins.
- Little Bay Transmission Main – SRF funds were offered for the installation of the third line across the bay, but City does not have the budget for this project yet, and the SRF loan was not offered with any forgiveness. This project is still a priority, so grant funds and future SRF funds will be sought.
- Revenue Study – The City has contracted with Stantec to conduct a Rate Study which includes an assessment of enterprise fund finances, cost of services and rate structure rates, including tier structures and changes in service fees. Two Work Sessions have been conducted with City Council. Annual water and sewer service fees may go up for the first time in 24 years, but by adding a low tier increases for the typical water customer will be minimal. Assets such as water

distribution system piping are evaluated based on their expected life. Water pipes can be considered 70- to 100-year assets, so their replacement needs to be planned accordingly. So, for a 100-year asset, 1% should be replaced each year to keep up with their lifecycle. This equates to approximately 2 miles of water main replacement each year, which corresponds to an estimated cost of $4 million per year.

4. Lead update - Mason Caceres, Assistant Water Resource Manager

https://files.portsmouthnh.gov/minutes/2026/SWAG/ServiceLineLeadTestingReportSWAG 031126.pdf

The service line inventory must be completed by 2037.

In November 2025, 2,327 letters were mailed to customers with unknown service line materials and customers with known galvanized lines. Received 80+ replies; did 12 service line inspections, delivered 43 free lead testing kits and 23 participated. None of the samples tested had detectible levels of lead.

At this time the material on 8,204 of the 8,661 service lines has been identified on the privately owned portion of the services; 457 remain unknown.

There are 2,049 services where the material on the City-owned portion are unknown. Inspections by statistical potholing (curb-stop valve excavation) will continue this spring starting with a total of 48 sites in Maple Haven. At this time, 15 have been completed and the remaining 33 to be done in the next few weeks.

Lead monitoring compliance summary for 2025: Of 31 samples in the Portsmouth water system, all from galvanized services, two samples had measurable levels of lead, both in single digits, under the 15 ppb limit. Pease system: Of 21 tests, one sample had a detectible level of lead. All customers received their sample results within 48 hours of lab reporting. Flushing with cold water for 30 seconds or so typically lowers the concentration below detection. The source of lead is often from old plumbing fixtures within the house.

5. PFAS timelines: City - Al Pratt; Community – Andrea Amico

https://files.portsmouthnh.gov/minutes/2026/SWAG/PFAS%20Impact%2012%20Year%20Community%2010%20Year%20SAWG%20031126.pdf

6. Disinfection byproducts and monitoring - Mason Caceres

A. A new topic regarding 9 of the 94 regulated contaminants.

https://files.portsmouthnh.gov/minutes/2026/SWAG/Disinfection Byproducts SWAG 031126.pdf

DBPs result from organic matter in surface water reacting to chlorine. Higher levels in the summer, due to increased organic loading during drought conditions, and in water that stagnates. Control with source management, minimizing nutrient loading and optimizing the added chlorine balance. Flushing programs and aeration can address the problem of stagnant water.

Present DBP concentrations, measured as locational running annual averages, remain below the regulated maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) for both haloacetic acids (HAAs) and total trihalomethanes (TTHMs). The compounds are tasteless and odorless but can respond to reverse osmosis and carbon filtration.

7. Community Resources - Andrea Amico

https://files.portsmouthnh.gov/minutes/2026/SWAG/SWAG Community Resources 031126.pdf

Online resources to learn more about community and State initiatives, PFAS (eg Environmental Working Group ewg.org and pfas-exchange.org/resources)

8. Public Comment

A. Shan Zuidema, UNH hydrologist – Q. Does Portsmouth collaborate with other Seacoast towns on drought and water supply issues? A. Yes. Portsmouth is in communication with Rye Water District and Aquarion (Hampton) regarding a concerted effort, perhaps reviving the 2016 Drought Drinking Water Task Force if needed.

9. Next meeting: June 2026, TBD

10. Adjourned at 8:36 pm.

MEETING PURPOSE

Founded by City Council action on October 5, 2020, the group's stated mission is:

To review and communicate the latest science on the health and environmental effects of PFAS, to monitor federal and state level legislative changes, and to anticipate policy changes that could impact the City of Portsmouth.

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