



Minutes
June 5, 2026
Remote

Attendees:

WAC Members: **Dan Winograd** (Chair), **Alfredo Vargas** (Vice Chair), **Adriana Cillo** (BWSC), Craig Allen, **Christine Bennett** (Advisory Board), **Felina Silver** (LWV), **Kannan Vembu**, **Dr. Karen Lachmayr** (Harvard), Martin Pillsbury (MAPC), **Taber Keally** (NepRWA), Wayne Chouinard (Belmont), **Zhenyu Tian** (Northeastern). (Members in attendance in **bold**).

MWRA Liaison: David Wu

Guests: Moussa Siri (WSCAC), Chad Whiting, Brian Kubaska, Colleen Rizzi, Daniel Serna, Denise Ellis-Hibbert, David Ruiz (MWRA), Cathy Coniaris (DEP), Lucica Hiller (Cambridge DPW), Stephanie Alimena (Somerville DPW), Chris Mancini, Libby McLaughlin (Save the Harbor/Save the Bay), Julie Simpson (OMSAP, MIT Sea Grant), Emily Norton (CRWA), Erika Casarano (AECOM)

Staff: Andreae Downs

VOTE: June Minutes, Draft CSO LCTP comments (below)

UPDATES:

WSCAC (Moussa) has made comments on the proposed donor-basin pre-screening of 20mgd of water withdrawals from the Quabbin/Wachusett. Quabbin today is fairly low, 77.3% full. Wayland and Weymouth are both applying to join the water system. WSCAC is also active in the Drought Management Task Force—drought continues, although it is better, except on Cape Cod.

WAC (Dan): Looking forward to a good year. Reminds members of the Advisory Board holiday gathering Dec. 10th, in person in Lexington.

(Andreae): WAC will meet next month on the 19th with the Advisory Board to learn about MWRA CIP staffing challenges and then go into a separate meeting to learn about wastewater maintenance planning.

MWRA (David Wu): Biggest news an upcoming vote on two candidates for the Executive Director next week (the Board on the following Wednesday voted for Jonathan Gulliver, undersecretary of state highway administrator at MassDOT).

Just hired: a new associate general counsel for energy and the environment who will start soon.

Also, Kathy Baskin hired from DEP as director of Planning and Sustainability, replacing Steve Estes-Smargiassi, who has been acting as interim director since Fred Laskey's retirement.

DRAFT CSO LCTP--DISCUSSION & VOTE

Andreae: reminded members that in June, they had agreed that WAC would comment on the draft plan, and that WAC should commend the Partners (Cambridge, Somerville and MWRA) on adopting a future-oriented rainfall model that took 2050 climate change into account.

Questioned whether WAC might also want to do some public education on the plan and on CSOs as part of its comment letter.

Key first question is the size of the infrastructure—geared toward which level of control—WAC would support, given the data provided, and that WAC has already asserted that it cares about the overall water quality of the watersheds..

Members of the Partners were available at the meeting for member questions.

Karen noted that the Town of Norwood had already weighed in supporting the \$870m proposal, which was discarded earlier in the drafting process. She noted that under the lower-control proposal almost all CSO discharges are treated, and as a microbiologist she knows that's very different from putting raw sewage into rivers.

She asked that WAC's letter highlights the tradeoffs. Noted WAC's support from when she started with the committee in the 1990s for continued maintenance of the already-large investment in clean water—that's what MWRA was founded to do, and neglecting this infrastructure is not a good use of public funds.

Headline, she said, is that Deer Island is no longer new and will require significant maintenance money to keep it as the amazing plant we saw being designed and built. WAC, she thinks, also supports the redundant water supply tunnel—saw what happened with the 2015 valve break, and WAC knows the serious public health impacts of a water supply shut-off for all of Boston, its

hospitals and residents. WAC needs to emphasize that the region can't risk public health by jeopardizing that funding either.

Alfredo: City of Newton has met with MWRA on the proposals. Know that the upcoming capital costs will be significant. Concerns about impact of the CSO plans on ratepayers. But city hasn't taken a position yet.

Kannan—so does WAC have to choose an option?

Andreae—that's the main question—you can mix & match parts of the plans, but the level of control is the main question. The costs go up precipitously as control levels increase, but the public is unlikely to notice much difference in the water quality, since the data shows little impact on swimmable days. There's also the fact that even without this plan, the Partners are still working to modernize their sewer systems and reduce combined sewage discharges.

Chad—confirmed that MWRA is always working to minimize discharges.

Kannan asked for rate impacts by community.

Christine provided a [link to the Advisory Board dashboard](#) that can be customized to get rough estimates for each community's costs for the proposed plan and the 25-year level of control.

Alfredo noted that Newton's costs ranged from \$98million and for the 25-year level \$295 million, or a difference of \$197m.

Andreae noted Newton's history of cutting sewer and water repair budgets for its own pipes when costs in other parts of the water/sewer/stormwater bill increase, to keep ratepayer bill increases under 4%. That means that the problem of sewer pipes leaking into stormwater would be getting worse.

Lucica presented the dashboard for communities, and showed individual communities as asked.

Some of those communities don't contribute to the CSO discharges.

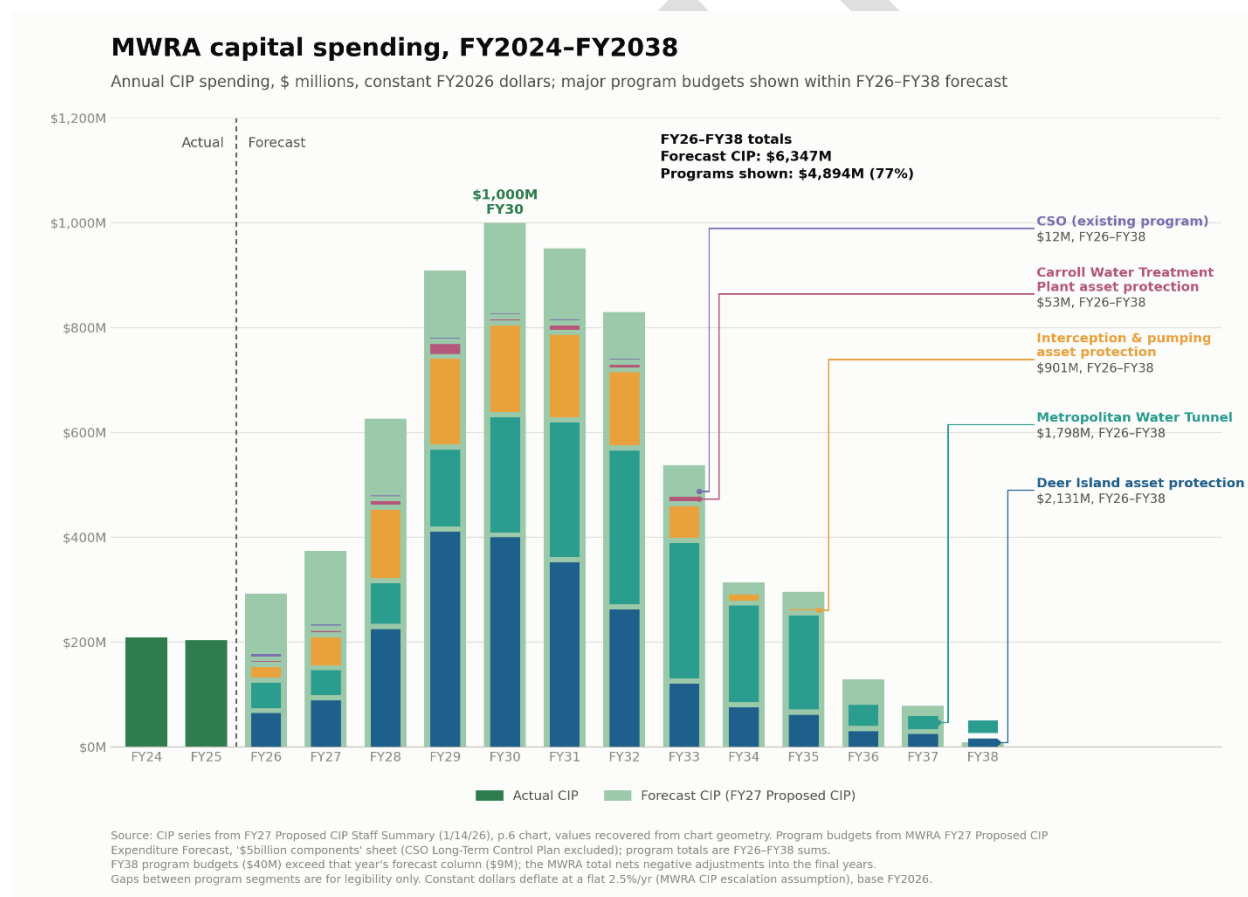
Taber: His concern is diminishing return on investment. While the Alewife clearly needs sewer controls since they get raw sewage in that brook. All of the options control all CSO discharges in the Alewife (in a 2050 TY), its really stormwater that is polluting the rest of the watersheds. The Neponset, where he lives, does not have a CSO system, but they have fecal pollution hotspots from stormwater.

He does feel that even the towns around the Neponset should contribute to cleaner water in the Alewife, Mystic and Charles because clean water is a regional benefit.

The MWRA does have big stormwater storage tanks in Dorchester that keep stormwater from polluting the swimming beaches. He doesn't swim there, but he thinks it's a benefit to the city and the state.

But there are significant expenses facing the MWRA in the near future, and we shouldn't spend everything on any one item. But speaking as a watershed group board member, the stormwater is the more significant contributor of pollution to the harbor and the rivers. CSO discharges are time-limited. But MWRA doesn't really handle stormwater systems. But it is a significant problem and needs to be handled somehow.

Christine shared the chart below showing the MWRA's current and projected capital and debt costs:



Lucica shared the financial impacts for Cambridge ratepayers:

Financial Impacts – City of Cambridge ratepayers

City of Cambridge ratepayers will see a **larger annual sewer bill by 2056** with the recommended alternative than already planned, but not nearly what is projected for alternatives with greater CSO control.

Alternative	Current FY 2026 Annual Bill *	Projected FY 2056 Annual Bill*	Percent Change
Baseline	\$1,233	\$3,173	+157%
2050 TY (recommended)	\$1,233	\$3,341	+171%
2050 5-YR	\$1,233	\$5,308	+330%
2050 25-YR	\$1,233	\$7,686	+523%
Full Sewer Separation	\$1,233	\$5,381	+372%

* average single family residential household bill

Lucica also shared a chart showing how many Cambridge residents would facing unaffordable sewer bills:

Financial Impacts – City of Cambridge ratepayers

More Cambridge households will have high sewer bills.

Alternative	Percent of households with unaffordable* sewer bills by 2045
Baseline	23.3%
2050 TY (recommended)	24.8%
2050 5-YR	34.2%
2050 25-YR	46.2%
Full Sewer Separation	38.5%

* sewer bill more than 2% of the median household income. Today 17.9% of households in Cambridge fall into this category.

Zhenyu—as an environmental chemist, he is testing some of the watersheds under discussion. He is seeing stormwater and dry day flows are the bigger problem if you are thinking about fecal

pollution or swimmable days. He'd like to see more green infrastructure, but understands that is under the control mostly of the communities. But he thinks that's a better stormwater solution. And as far as dry day flows—more IDDE (the detection and elimination of illicit sewer connections to the stormwater system) is needed. Is there any commitment that if a lower-cost plan is chosen, could the savings go to IDDE?

Andreae: it would be great to be able to promise that, but that's not the way the current plan/permit system works. We can say that if sewer rates spike, most communities will cut sewer repairs, but not the opposite.

Zhenyu: on dry days in the Alewife, he's finding more fecal pollution than on wet days. It should be a separate flow (on dry days), but it's not.

He finds e.coli without wastewater markers on beaches on wet days—may be just from people's skin.

Kannan: so what does WAC do next?

Karen: in terms of a letter, she'd like to make a minor point that the difference between the plans, for instance the \$870 million proposal vs. the \$1.3 billion draft plan that the difference is bigger tanks; more tanks—she hopes that in the future there may be better technologies to handle. But the bigger the tanks are, the more they cost to maintain. And there's more intrusion onto park lands both short-term and long-term.

Andreae: Once WAC has decided on the level of control you want to recommend, she will draft a letter and run it by membership before submitting a final before the Oct. 30 deadline.

Taber: appreciates all the work on this draft, and doesn't think there's a "right" answer, just the best answer we can afford. There's a declining amount of value per investment in CSO control, but if we hadn't done anything earlier, we'd still be swimming in sewage. While it's hard to know exactly how the climate will hit us in 2050, the MWRA has done a tremendous amount of work here, and I would support the recommended draft plan.

Question in the chat—why do any further CSO control at all?

David Wu: The Partners are required to do this plan. But as you note, they are already continuing CSO control repairs.

Karen: Seems to me that many WAC members are uncomfortable supporting options that are more expensive than the \$1.3 billion plan currently on the table, is that right?

And some members have to abstain because of their positions, right?

Kannan: I think people will be shocked when they see how much this will affect their rates.

Karen: should we note in our letter—usually MWRA is pretty immune to outside politics, but I think in this case they were not as much. And WAC is supposed to be independent, and I think we should keep that in the back of our minds.

Motion (KL): WAC would feel uncomfortable with a plan that spent more than \$1.3 billion.

That doesn't mean individual members of WAC might not lean toward a less-expensive plan, and there may be members who lean toward a more-expensive plan.

VOTE: -6-0-3 abstain, 2 absent

Other comments WAC should include?

Karen: That these are regional issues, it's a regional problem.

Discussion about water quality impacts of CSO vs. stormwater? Solutions beyond the CSO plan? Fiscal impacts on maintenance, Deer Island, MWRA borrowing, and municipal trade-offs?

Maybe a shorter, more public-facing letter?

Impacts on parkland?

Christine: I do spend a lot of time looking at the capital needs of MWRA, and I can share a graph on those needs. This is the most significant period in MWRA capital spending, but most of what is already planned is not mandated but necessary asset protection. Unfortunately, the mandates (this plan) have to be addressed first.

Include some of the historic work on river water quality? Also, how MWRA has traditionally done larger projects than absolutely necessary because they have used climate change models in such things as the elevation of Deer Island?

Also note that CSO control efforts don't stop once this plan is done? And that the plan is expandable—each tank can be added to? And reference some of the history of cleaning up the Mystic and Charles before this plan?

Members agreed.

Andreae reminded members of the next meeting and the Dec. 10 lunch. And thanked WAC members for the immense amount of work on understanding and deciding on how to comment on this draft.

Next meeting is Thursday, Nov. 19, 10 am-12:30
jointly with the Advisory Board with WAC meeting separately after the Advisory Board
presentation on staffing (Virtual)

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