

**North Shore Water Resilience Task Force Meeting**  
**Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School, Danvers MA**  
**February 3, 2026**  
**DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY**

Purpose

- Continue discussion on proposal by the City of Salem to reach consensus on a way forward
- Review existing charter structure and discuss ideas for charter renewal
- Hear updates on Task Force subcommittee progress

Attendees [Please alert us to corrections/omissions, as not everyone present signed in]

*State and Congressional Legislators and staff:* Senator Bruce Tarr (chair); Representative Hannah Bowen; Representative Kristin Kassner; Representative Sally Kerans; Victoria Daigle (Office of Sen. Tarr), Bob McCarthy (Office of Sen. Lovely); Chloe Mitchell (Office of Rep. Kerans); Alice O'Neill (Office of Sen. Crighton); Michael Searles (Office of Rep. Walsh); Laura Byman (Office of Senator Warren); Katie Morfill (Office of US Senator Markey); Alex Uhl (Office of Congressman Seth Moulton)

*Task Force Members, Stakeholders, and Other Attendees (Task Force member official designees for the meeting are noted by showing the community or organization they represented):* Georgia Barlow; Rachel Belisle-Toler; Jill Cahill; Mayor Mike Cahill (Beverly); Anne Carroll; Erin Bonney Casey (IRWA); Zach Calderón; Sharon Clement; Heather Clish; Eileen Coleman (Burlington); Matthew Comeau (Lynn); Joe Domelowicz (Hamilton); Deb Duhamel (Salem); Jim Engel; Rachel Freed; Paul Goodwin (Middleton); Vicki Halmen (Ipswich); Kevin Harutunian (Topsfield); Sandra Howland; Michael Kessman (Reading); Stephen King (Danvers); Karen Lachmayr; Erik Mansfield (Wenham); Karen Martin (Andover); Lydia Olson; William Paulitz (Peabody); Jen Pederson; Brad Perron; Peter Phippen; Ross Povenmire (Boxford); Giovanna Recinos; Alan Taubert (SBWSB); Tom Younger; Andy Youngren (LCWD)

*Facilitators:* Sara Cohen; Jason Duff; Martin Pillsbury

Proposal by the City of Salem

The facilitation team welcomed the group and reviewed the agenda. Due to learning that Mayor Pangallo of Salem was not able to attend the meeting, they recommended that if further questions or discussion on Salem's proposal from the December 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting was of interest to the group, that the discussion be postponed to when Mayor Pangallo could attend. They also acknowledged that parties have had ongoing discussions on the proposal within their constituencies and with each other over the last two months and may all feel ready to support the version of the proposal from December, without further discussion.

The group agreed to take a straw poll to test if all present members felt ready to support the proposal. This was found to be true, and a roll-call vote on the version of the proposal as amended by Beverly in December passed unanimously. Three parties that were not present at the time of the vote were later contacted by the facilitation team and also approved the proposal. This represents an agreement of the full task force, as follows:

**The Task Force agrees, based on a request by the City of Salem as a member, that during any subcommittee negotiations and subsequent deliberations by the full Task Force, members will refrain from further collective analysis of, or deliberation on, regional scenarios that involve Salem or Beverly reducing their reliance on the SBWSB to pursue a connection to the MWRA.**

#### Comments from the Convening Legislators

Senator Tarr expressed appreciation for the support many have offered after the tragedy of the sinking of fishing boat Lily Jean off the coast of Gloucester and the loss of seven lives. He shared that more information about how to help the affected families would be announced at an event he would be participating in later in the day.

He also thanked the Task Force for their ongoing work to address the difficult issues of water resources in the region. He feels the meaningful discussion and hard work that went into working through the proposal by Salem is reflective of the difficult nature of the problems at hand and the passion people have around the issue. He expressed that the challenge before us is to turn the passion into action to save the river and create sustainable water supplies for future generations. He further reminded the group that the work of the Task Force is being watched around the state and country as a model, which is why it's important to handle difficult decisions with the due process, care, and honesty that have characterized the group's efforts in reaching agreement on Salem's proposal.

He introduced the current task of charter re-authorization and noted that the charter also serves as a model for the rest of the Commonwealth. He looks forward to a thorough and inclusive discussion of what we need from the charter moving forward. He's hopeful that future generations will appreciate the willingness of this group to engage in this hard work.

Representative Kassner expressed appreciation for all the ongoing work on behalf of sustainable water supplies and the river.

Representative Bowen noted that communities in the region have needs that differ and overlap in multiple ways, and she appreciates the opportunity the Task Force provides for municipalities to share resources and collaborate on decisions. She also appreciates the tension between the slowness of a consensus process and the urgency of the matters at hand. The Task Force's approach of moving quickly on some matters, and more slowly where needed, is a helpful balance.

#### Charter Renewal Discussion

The facilitation team reminded Task Force members that when the charter was developed, many members were uncertain about the likelihood of success or the wisdom of working collaboratively. Reflecting this uncertainty, the charter included an agreement that its terms would last for 3 years, unless extended by consensus. September 2025 marked the three-year point. Members could choose to extend the charter with only housekeeping updates or make substantive changes as part of the renewal. To set up the discussion, participants reflected on the following questions, first on paper then in table conversations:

- *Do you feel the group is accomplishing what it set out to do?*
- *Do you feel confident in the goodwill and actions of the other members, stakeholders, and convenors?*
- *Do you have thoughts about what structures, formats, or agreements could be added, subtracted, or changed to improve the way the Task Force functions?*

Several thoughts that were generated by this exercise were shared with the group, suggesting an appetite for substantive changes/updates to the charter:

- It would be helpful to establish ways to move more quickly, perhaps by doing more extensive small-group work that flows to larger-group consensus.
- Voting procedures and voting designees should be made more clear at a minimum, and potentially more formal.
- More focus on funding for the needed solutions may be warranted.
- The milestones section of the charter should be updated to reflect what we've accomplished and what's next.

Based on the conclusion that substantive updates were desired, the facilitation team led the group through all the sections of the charter, collecting the following points of input:

#### MISSION:

- ➔ Either expand the mission to include elements of the Joint Narrative or append the Joint Narrative to the Charter and possibly reference it in the Mission.
- ➔ Consider refining the phrase "most promising solutions" to reflect that the range of solutions under consideration may change or be limited by consensus, as happened with the agreement on the proposal by Salem. Or alternatively, consider incorporating/memorializing the spirit of that agreement in a different part of the document.

#### MEMBERS:

- ➔ The group asked for a reminder about how it was decided not to extend voting membership to communities who rely on Ipswich sources for emergency backup. Facilitators and members recalled that the two additional communities considered for inclusion as voting members originally, Essex and Manchester by the Sea, expressed that their stake in the outcome felt lower than those with substantial land area or primary water supplies in the Ipswich and agreed to be categorized as Additional Stakeholders.
- ➔ Based on this history, the group expressed comfort leaving the members list as is.

#### ADDITIONAL STAKEHOLDERS:

- ➔ Suggestion to welcome any group that wants to be added as a stakeholder.
- ➔ Ensure that all Additional Stakeholders have at least one email point of contact to stay informed of Task Force events and progress.
- ➔ Consider adding EPA as a stakeholder.

#### CONVENERS and FACILITATORS:

- ➔ The Conveners list will be updated based on the full current legislative delegation for the community members.
- ➔ The Facilitators list will be updated to include Jason Duff.

#### INITIAL TOPICS OF FOCUS FOR CONSENSUS BUILDING:

- ➔ The facilitators explained that this section of the charter was not intended to commit or limit the group to specific topics of discussion but rather to orient it to the topics that mattered most to members to work on collectively, at the time the Task Force was formed.
- ➔ Update the statute references to reflect current potential sources of funding.
- ➔ Add PFAS/Emerging Contaminants to list.
- ➔ Consider reshaping the section as a summary of accomplishments and remaining scope. This would incorporate a reference to the Earmark reports, which could be where to memorialize the spirit of Salem's proposal as a footnote or caveat with respect to the Dewberry report.

#### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- ➔ Members
  - Add responsibility to keep group informed and regularly updated on local actions that would affect the group, especially critical infrastructure planning and decisions.
- ➔ Additional Stakeholders
  - State and federal agency designees should proactively update the Task Force on regulatory or policy changes that are imminent or, to the extent feasible, further out on the horizon that bear on the Task Force objectives.
- ➔ Facilitators
  - Send out agendas, materials for review, meeting summaries, and other relevant updates in a timely manner ahead of each meeting (however, a 7-day turnaround for summaries has proven unrealistic and should be lengthened to match reality).
  - Communicate process updates more often with full group (Quarterly Newsletter could help serve this purpose), including sharing key outcomes from individual and smaller group meetings to the full group, while respecting confidentiality.
  - Provide outreach and summary material to help members communicate with their constituents on Task Force matters.
- ➔ General
  - Consider better defining the process for taking advantage of grant opportunities collectively or as a Task Force, including surveilling for opportunities, matching those with Task Force needs, and coordinating applications (consider a subcommittee for this responsibility).

#### MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- ➔ A request was made to add specificity to this section of the charter, with clear and realistic expectations of when costs would be known, when funding opportunities would be identified, and when infrastructure and permitting would be completed.

- ➔ A suggestion was made to address the importance of meeting short-term needs while also working toward meeting longer-term needs, especially for regulatory compliance for PFAS.
- ➔ Related to benchmarks around funding, a question was asked about the federal earmarks recently announced for this region. Some Task Force communities confirmed they had received federal funds for individual infrastructure work. Alex Uhl from Congressman Moulton's office confirmed that their office is available to consider requests for Community Project Fund (CPFs) (federal earmarks) once a project or set of projects is well defined.

## MEMBER AGREEMENTS

The group did not have time to discuss this section and will revisit it at a future meeting.

***\*\*Participants were encouraged to email thoughts on this section to the facilitation team.\*\****

## Subcommittee and Other Updates

- The **Lower Basin Subcommittee (LBS)** has met 9-10 times as a whole or in smaller subgroups over the past 9 months. Recent focus has been on exploring water sharing between Hamilton, Wenham, Topsfield and possibly the SBWSB, with considerations for drought and non-drought conditions, in the shorter term and over the long term. This week additional LBS members will join and expand the conversation, working toward a framework for possible agreement. The progress has been slower than anticipated by a couple months, but things are moving in a hopeful direction. If the LBS can reach an agreement conceptually, that would be brought before the full Task Force for approval.
- The **Decision Support Tool** is initially being constructed to represent the ideas in the forefront of the conversation of the LBS. It should be functional within a few weeks to help evaluate some of the trade-offs among different options. After the Task Force agrees on the most promising scenarios, a version of the tool will be developed for the general public.
- The **Conservation and Demand Management Subcommittee** has been interviewing all water suppliers in the Ipswich Basin, exploring their priorities and challenges in conservation and demand management. Only two communities are left to be interviewed. After completing these, the subcommittee will conduct qualitative analysis on the results and present findings to the full Task Force.
- The **PFAS Subcommittee** has not met recently, in large part because most of the members are also on the Lower Basin Subcommittee (LBS) and have been working together in that capacity. These cross-over members and the facilitation team have been closely tracking the LBS conversations, ready to bring in assistance and resources as needed on technical questions related to PFAS. Additionally, the facilitators are tracking the regulatory and funding landscape and passing along opportunities and updates as soon as they're known. The MassDEP grants for PFAS-related projects are due on Feb. 20<sup>th</sup>. If any members want assistance coordinating with others on a joint application, they should contact the facilitation team.

- The **Earmark Subcommittee** has not met in a while but will be reconvened soon to address contract extensions needed for both contracts drawing on existing earmarks.
- The **New England Environmental Finance Center** is using federal funds to contract with Quantified Ventures (QV) to help the Task Force explore funding and financing options for whatever package of infrastructure solutions is identified by the Task Force as preferred for the region. QV is engaging in initial research to be ready to address specific cost needs as they are identified.

#### Next steps

- ➔ Lower Basin Subcommittee will convene on 2/5.
- ➔ The Conservation and Demand Management Subcommittee will complete the final two interviews of water suppliers in the basin and compile results for a report to the Task Force.
- ➔ Task Force members will continue the process of revising the charter by sending ideas to the facilitation team and responding to iterative drafts at upcoming meetings.
- ➔ Facilitators will produce a meeting summary of this meeting and the next edition of the Quarterly Newsletter in the coming three weeks and create draft language to capture the ideas expressed on updating the charter.