

**North Shore Water Resilience Task Force Meeting  
December 2, 2025 – Virtual Meeting**

**MEETING SUMMARY**

Purpose

- Review progress to date, including updates from ongoing subcommittees
- Discuss and seek consensus on a proposal by the City of Salem
- Time permitting, discuss process for task force charter renewal

Attendees

*State and Congressional Legislators and staff:* Senator Bruce Tarr (chair); Senator Joan Lovely; Representative Hannah Bowen; Representative Kristin Kassner; Representative Sally Kerans; Victoria Daigle (Office of Sen. Tarr), Christina Eckert (Office of Rep. Kassner); Ian Hatfield (Office of Rep. Robertson); Chloe Mitchell (Office of Rep. Kerans); Alice O’Neill (Office of Sen. Crighton); Michael Searles (Office of Rep. Walsh); Rochelle Sport (Office of Sen. Lovely); Laura Byman (Office of Senator Warren); Katie Morfill (Office of US Senator Markey)

*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) :* Ayman Alafifi; James Arsenault (LWSC); Georgia Barlow; Rachel Belisle-Toler; Amelia Boivin; Jill Cahill (Danvers); Mayor Mike Cahill (Beverly); Anne Carroll; Erin Bonney Casey (IRWA); Zach Calderón; Sharon Clement; Eileen Coleman (Burlington); Matthew Comeau; Chuck Dam; Joe Domelowicz (Hamilton); Deb Duhamel; Jen D’Urso; Jim Engel; Rachel Freed; Paul Goodwin (Middleton); Vicki Halmen (Ipswich); Kevin Harutunian (Topsfield); Danial Heiter; Sandra Howland; Mike Kessman (Reading); Stephen King; Karen Lachmayr; Duane LeVangie; Joe Lobao (Wilmington); Erik Mansfield (Wenham); Ken McNulty; Hillary Monahan; Lydia Olson; Mayor Dominick Pangallo (Salem); William Paulitz (Peabody); Jen Pederson; Brad Perron; Peter Phippen; Ross Povenmire (Boxford); Giovanna Recinos; Colleen Rizzi; Alan Taubert (SBWSB); Tom Younger; Andy Youngren (LCWD)

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

Introduction

Senator Tarr welcomed participants and noted that the work of the Task Force remains of critical importance to the region, as another drought continues to strain the river and water supplies. Representative Hannah Bowen, elected in May 2025 for the 6<sup>th</sup> Essex District, which includes Beverly and parts of Wenham, introduced herself to the task force. Representative Kassner thanked participants for the ongoing dialogue on the pressing issues at hand. Representative Kerans thanked the group and Senator Tarr for continued progress and sticking with the hard work.

Updates from the Subcommittees

In addition to the updates below, subcommittee membership and descriptions can be viewed [here](#).

*Lower Basin Subcommittee (LBS) – provided by Rachel Freed, Consensus Building Institute (CBI)*

- The CBI team has been meeting regularly with members of the LBS in full groups, small sub-groups, and individually through the summer and fall.

- They have entered a stage of mediation among some parties to try to come up with options that could form the core of a framework for a conceptual agreement or series of agreements. This means they are seeking clarity and definition on options the parties would be willing to consider, without committing or agreeing at this stage.

*PFAS Subcommittee – provided by Jason Duff, Task Force and subcommittee facilitator*

- The subcommittee is due for a meeting, as it has been a few months since they convened.
- Since the September task force meeting, there has been no new information from EPA on the federal PFAS regulations, but indications are still that the proposed revisions should be released soon with final regulations following in the spring. The subcommittee will alert the Task Force as information becomes known.
- The subcommittee is tracking federal and state funding related to PFAS. Importantly, \$900,000 was just secured for another round of MassDEP grants for PFAS-related projects specifically for Ipswich River Watershed communities with the RFR expected in the next month or so. *Now would be a good time to start planning for projects to take advantage of that funding source.*
- The subcommittee developed a spreadsheet of funding opportunities for PFAS projects and is expanding that to include potential funding sources for water infrastructure projects more broadly. People should reach out to Jason for that information.
- Jason and some PFAS subcommittee members who are also on the LBS are following the progress of the LBS closely, ready to provide PFAS-related analysis or information as needed to support the exploration of potential supply scenarios.
- If anyone has ideas for how the PFAS subcommittee can further assist the group on technical, regulatory, or funding matters, they should reach out to Jason.

*Conservation and Demand Management (C&DM) – provided by Rachel Belisle-Toler, Town of Ipswich and Subcommittee Facilitator*

- The subcommittee has nearly completed interviews of the lower basin communities and has begun interviews of upper basin communities. The analysis team is ready to go once the interviews are complete. The interviews are eliciting from communities their conservation priorities, challenges, and successes, with the goal of providing useful data and targeted support on conservation and demand management to the Task Force.
- Rachael and Sharon Clement from Danvers presented to the MA Water Resources Commission on the interview process and forthcoming analysis goals, including some of the hopeful observations from the interviews thus far.
- The subcommittee toured the SBWSB treatment plant in the early fall and learned a lot about that facility.

Discussion of Proposal by the City of Salem

The facilitation team explained that the City of Salem is requesting that the task force formally agree to a proposed statement that was circulated ahead of the meeting as part of a letter of background and explanation from Salem. Mayor Pangallo of Salem addressed the attendees, acknowledging Mayor Cahill of Beverly and thanking Senator Tarr for convening the Task Force.

Mayor Pangallo confirmed his interest in Salem being part of a regional solution for water supply needs. He explained that Salem is seeking a consensus in writing from the task force that there will not be further studies or analysis or reports that suggest a scenario in which Salem would be removed from the SBWSB and moved onto the MWRA. He explained that this proposal was prompted by scenarios analyzed in the Task Force's "Earmark #1 Study" by Dewberry and elsewhere, suggesting that theoretically Salem could be connected to the MWRA to allow other communities to be connected to the SBWSB system. Mayor Pangallo emphasized that he is not opposed to exploring other communities participating in the SBWSB system, only that Salem could be displaced as a result of that. He explained that their concerns with moving to the MWRA include water chemistry concerns, governance concerns, and equity concerns. As a gateway city and an environmental justice community, he would not want to tell his community that they are going to give up this resource that they have invested in for over a century so other towns could benefit from that resource. A positive vote would enable Salem to move forward with full confidence in exploring and studying a range of possible regional scenarios that do not include Salem being displaced from the SBWSB in the future.

The facilitation team read the language proposed by Salem for consensus approval:

**"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 reducing its reliance on the SBWSB to pursue a connection to the MWRA."**

The facilitators explained that this language was developed in a conversation between Salem and the facilitation team. At the suggestion of Salem, the facilitators had reached out to the City of Beverly for their approval of the language and to determine if they would like to be included in the proposed statement and had understood them to be comfortable with the language and not to request that Beverly be added to the statement.

Mayor Cahill of Beverly stated that while he is not aware of any studies that have looked at Beverly being removed from the SBWSB, he certainly would not approve of any studies doing so, and would like the language to reflect that explicitly, noting that "bad ideas" can at times land on a shelf in a study and be resurrected years later. The facilitation team and Mayor Cahill mutually apologized for the misunderstanding, and the proposed language was amended, with Salem and Beverly's approval, 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."**

The facilitators reminded the group that consensus is defined in the charter as unanimity, meaning a vote only passes if approved by all voting members.

A discussion on the proposal followed, including the following points:

- Senator Tarr commented that there are many options under exploration for the region that would continue to move forward if this proposal passes, and the Task Force should be able to carry on its work without needing to regroup or reorient.
- Jim Engel acknowledged the legitimacy of the concerns raised by Salem and Beverly but expressed the following concerns:
  - The proposed vote feels premature in light of the task force’s spirit of exploring all ideas. Given the constraints on the region, the task force should be looking at all options, even those initially unfavorable to certain communities. Every community in the future will retain the ability to say “no” to a given option, but if everyone’s initial resistance to certain ideas drove those ideas off the table at the beginning, that would severely limit the creative process.
  - Many or all of the other communities in the task force have the same kinds of issues and concerns as those articulated for Salem, including potentially giving up some independence in favor of more regional cooperation, or abandoning some infrastructure investments to free up resources for larger regional investment. This vote suggests Salem’s situation and risks are materially different.
- Mayor Cahill referenced a move last year in the legislature to allocate significant money to expand the MWRA to the North Shore. He said he couldn’t abide documentation that would suggest a member of the SBWSB could be subsumed against their will into another water district. His protection of his residents, businesses, and ratepayers is foremost even as they work cooperatively toward regional sustainability.
  - Senator Tarr offered clarification that there was funding included in a bond bill for the MWRA to expand either to the north or the south, but that money would only flow if there was an agreement by all parties and all the necessary legislative and regulatory steps ensued.
  - Senator Tarr also reminded everyone that within the Task Force process the communities have the ultimate veto power over options involving their own system. The Task Force is not a regulatory authority and has no ability to bind anyone. Rather the process is to seek unanimous consensus to serve as the basis of action.
  - Representative Kerans shared that her understanding of the bond bill referenced by Mayor Cahill made it clear that connecting to the MWRA would be a community-by-community choice to opt it. She hoped that this was reassuring to the mayors. Mayor Cahill explained that the bond bill was just an example, and that his hope was that this vote could serve as a counter to any document suggesting it was okay for Salem to move to the MWRA.
- Mayor Pangallo explained that much of the work of the Task Force, including the development of the scope for the Earmark #1 study by Dewberry happened when Salem was in a leadership transition. He would not have accepted the inclusion in that study of a scenario in which Salem moves to the MWRA. He stated that once ideas end up in studies, they become the basis for future legislation and capital plans, and the legacy of state infrastructure decisions has not proven favorable to gateway and larger cities like Salem and Beverly. He sees this requested vote as an opportunity to avoid further studies, grant

applications, bond bills, legislation, or other resources being spent on options that would prove to be dead ends, allowing those resources instead to be focused on options that have the potential to reach consensus.

- Senator Lovely expressed her own opposition to Salem being removed from the SBWSB and placed on the MWRA system, which is a more expensive proposition for Salem, stating she would have objected to that notion back in the earliest days of conceiving of the Task Force with Senator Tarr had she felt that was going to be explored.
- Kevin Harutunian shared that Topsfield is a potential beneficiary of either SBWSB or the MWRA in future regionalization, and he feels it is appropriate for Salem and Beverly to establish as a baseline condition for them being at the table that what the Task Force is doing is not going to have a net negative impact on them. He would like to see the Task Force support this vote and move on to explore and spend its time in other ways, in acknowledgement that time is of the essence.
- The facilitation team shared their view from a process perspective.
  - In a complex negotiation, creativity is important for generating out-of-the-box solutions, so it is not ideal to block certain explorations as off limits. With that in mind, the team explored with Salem whether there were any other ways to provide them the reassurance they were looking for. Salem expressed strongly that this was the only option that would allow them to continue engaging with the Task Force in a way that felt protective of their interests.
  - The team also explored with Salem whether there were any circumstances that might make it worth their while to consider shifting reliance onto the MWRA. Salem expressed strongly that nothing could make that option attractive to them.
  - Given the above, the facilitation team feels this vote could save everyone some time. They see it as an acknowledgement from task force members that they have heard where Salem and Beverly stand on this issue and are ready to focus attention on other scenarios that may bear more fruit.
  - The facilitation team was asked if these statements amounted to a recommendation of a favorable vote. They clarified that they do not take a position on how people should vote. Rather, they see one of their roles as safeguarding against process decisions that would undermine the Task Force's ability to make progress toward its stated goals, and in this case concluded that Salem proposing this vote should not pose a danger to further progress. That is different than encouraging people to vote a particular way, and they encouraged people to vote as they felt they needed to.
- A task force member asked if the vote did not pass unanimously whether Salem would consider withdrawing from the Task Force. Mayor Pangallo responded that it would be challenging for them to continue, knowing that the task force continues to be willing to entertain a possibility that Salem feels would be harmful to their interests, although he could not definitively state whether they would cease participating.
- Joe Domelowicz shared that everyone in the Task Force is working on finding a solution they can be a part of and have a voice in. There may come a point where the worsening water availability means the state or federal government steps in to dictate a solution, since all

solutions are so expensive they will need state and federal funding. He expressed willingness to support the proposed vote but cautioned that if the group fails to keep functioning holistically, they may all face losing control of their fates. He feels none of the communities are going to be able to “go it alone.”

- Mayor Cahill reiterated his reasons for supporting this proposal and stated that Beverly remains a participant on the Task Force in good faith and really does want to get this right.

#### Vote on Proposal by Salem

A roll-call vote was solicited on the proposal by Salem, as amended by the City of Beverly. The vote failed to reach unanimous approval, with two member representatives voicing concerns and a third voting to approve but expressing ambivalence, as follows:

- Ross Povenmire representing Boxford explained that he had checked with the Boxford administration and their position is not to support the motion.
- Vicki Halmen representing Ipswich expressed feeling conflicted, sharing the views expressed by Jim Engel, her Ipswich colleague, but also sympathizing with the reasoning offered by Mayor Pangallo. She expressed that, in balance, to support the task force, she would support the proposal.
- Eileen Coleman representing Burlington shared that she did not feel that this was the right stage in the process to narrow the options and did not support the proposal for that reason.

The facilitators reminded participants that in the absence of unanimous consensus, the charter makes clear that no action is taken by the Task Force, but that the matter can continue to be discussed and negotiated in an attempt to reach consensus in the future. They expected to continue the discussion on this proposal at the next meeting and seek consensus on a way forward in some capacity. They would be reaching out to the members who did not support the proposal and anticipated asking them to share more of their thinking with the group at the next meeting.

Senator Tarr commented that the discussion was a step in an evolutionary process that included taking a sense of the membership, which will inform further discussion and work toward consensus. He sees the time between this meeting and the next as an opportunity to speak with members and try to sort out the various concerns.

Representative Kassner also expressed deep appreciation for the quality of the discussion on this matter, noting that many of the legislators and their constituent communities have feelings about the proposal, and talking the issues through is extremely helpful.

The facilitation team thanked all participants for the discussion and told people to expect to continue the discussion at the next meeting.

#### Next steps

- ➔ Lower Basin Subcommittee will convene on 12/8.
- ➔ The Conservation and Demand Management Subcommittee will complete interviews of Lower and Upper Basin communities (**if you have not already done so, please respond to**

**Rachael's scheduling emails**). The subcommittee will begin compiling results for a report to the Task Force.

- ➔ Task Force members will continue the discussion begun today at the next meeting, which will be in-person (Note this was announced at the meeting to be scheduled for Dec. 16<sup>th</sup> but was subsequently postponed to Feb. 3<sup>rd</sup>).
- ➔ Facilitators will work with parties to better understand the range of concerns expressed at this meeting.