

LANESBOROUGH VILLAGE FIRE AND WATER DISTRICT
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SPECIAL BOARD OF COMMISSIONER'S MEETING
20 Bridge Street, 2:00 P.M.

August 27, 2025

The Lanesborough Village Fire and Water District held a special meeting to discuss water rates at 20 Bridge Street, Lanesborough, Massachusetts on August 27, 2025.

Roll call: Present: William Prendergast, Chair; Mary Reilly, Board Member; Aaron Williams, Board Member; Mark Siegars, District Counsel; Kevin Swail, Superintendent; Katie Lemanski, Treasurer; Cindy Roughley, Clerk.

Also present were Mark Beshar, Christina Botz, Paul Clark, Vera Ferrell, Bridget Griffin, Kelly Parzick, James Rathbun, Michele Roeder, Sandra Shacar, Donald Walen, Cheryl Weider

1. William Prendergast opened the meeting at 2:00 p.m.
2. Discussion of water rates: Although no public comments were on the agenda, Chairman William Prendergast permitted a ten minute time period for comments from James Rathbun, who expressed concerns about Lanesborough being a small town and water district with a large aging population. He stated the water bills are becoming unsustainable for the seniors in the district to pay them.
Mark Beshar asked about other viable options, such as hooking up to Pittsfield and about pay for use. A question was asked about how the rates are determined.
William Prendergast explained about the infrastructure projects that had recently been completed.
Aaron Williams stated that a lot of the mains had been replaced, water transmission lines on Route 7, Prospect Street, Summer Street over to Cheshire, Bull Hill Road and Balance Rock Road. The loan for those projects was paid off, it was a twenty year loan. The Environmental Protection Agency provided funds for most of those projects and also funds to do an asset management plan. Engineering firm Tighe and Bond worked with the Commissioners to identify inventory and all of the assets such as pipelines, type of material used, the age was of the assets and they identified what the capital needs would be for the future. Mass DEP did a rate study taking into account the income of the community. Long View Road had multiple breaks and pipes needed to be replaced. Maple Court pipes were also replaced due to multiple issues. PFAS was found twelve feet from the Bridge Street well and the well had to be shut down. Aaron Williams stated that Mark Siegars has done a lot of work with the engineering firm to identify grants and they take into account the income level of the town and the customers, and that's how the district has qualified for many of the grants received.
William Prendergast stated the district has received million dollar grants for the new well, and they are applying for more. The new well is going to cost somewhere around 6 to 8 million dollars.

Mark Siegars stated that the well on Bridge Street was estimated to cost three million dollars to put a new system in and at least a half a million dollars per year to run it. Commissioners looked into hooking up to Pittsfield and it would cost five million dollars for the connection. Also have to put in a pump and pump house, have to buy land and have to treat the water. So the decision was made to move forward with the well at Bull Hill Road. The district is planning for possible treatment of that water. The district entered into an agreement with the USDA to hire an expert to advise on the rate structure, which is about a six month process. They started last week, met with a woman who specializes in Western Mass and is familiar with all of the water systems in Western Mass. After the six months there will be public meetings to discuss and to address some of the other concerns.

Mark Siegars explained that funding for Berkshire Village was a betterment process and that the District had adopted a policy that any water main extension would be paid for by a betterment. The cost is born by the 42 customers.

Mark Siegars explained the process of EDU's and that the District relies on the Town's assessor's office to determine how many units are in a building or dwelling. He explained that the water district has an exemption program for seniors.

William Prendergast stated that the Town accepts the State program for the reduction of taxes and water bills, and the Water District has adapted that as well.

Mary Reilly stated that the Commissioners are concerned about providing safe water, improving the infrastructure to do so, and choosing projects is sometimes a tough decision. The Commissioners look for cost saving measures and want to do the best that they can for the customers. It's not just the amount of water, that is insignificant compared to the infrastructure costs to get the water to customers. The District has a new SCADA system also. There's the storage space to consider and we need to have a backup water supply.

Aaron Williams stated that the Miner Road well was a major capital investment.

Regarding the senior exemption, James Rathbun stated that the seniors do not want to fill out the paperwork because they have to state their financial information. He suggested that anyone over the age of 75 should get a 25 or 30 per cent break.

James Rathbun asked Kevin Swain who is the company used for water main break repairs. Kevin Swail responded that he handled the last two water main breaks. James Rathbun asked Kevin Swail if he had a hoisting license and when he got the license. Kevin Swail responded twenty to thirty years ago.

James Rathbun asked if the rates could be frozen where they are until they get to the rate study? Mark Siegars responded that district is already into the fiscal year, which ends in June.

James Rathbun asked if there is a petition to petition the district to look at rates or to freeze rates would the district have to? Mark Siegars replied no, that the residents would have to come to the annual meeting to vote on the annual budget.

James Rathbun asked how much was in savings. Mark Siegars replied that the information was in the profit and loss statements that were sent to him.

Aaron Williams stated that the District does try to communicate with its customers the best that they can. When the asset management plan was done a notice was sent out by mail about 40 or 50 people showed up. The website is also updated.

Question was asked why the meetings were in the day. Aaron Williams explained that a lot of the meetings involve meetings with engineers and the construction companies. Then our Treasurer and Clerk can be there. The Commissioners have had meetings with the well driller, for instance, and their subcontractors. Meetings that involve voting on the budget, etc. are held at 6:00 p.m. Mark Siegars suggested that if there's some kind of information and format that the customers would find more helpful then someone needs to let the District know.

A question was asked about using the Town's DPW equipment for projects. Mark Siegars stated that the issue is conflict of resources. He stated that the District and the Town DPW did work on a few projects in the past.

James Rathbun asked how much money was in the stabilization fund. Mark Siegars stated that was in the statements that he sent to him. Katie Lemanski stated that she has moved most of those funds to Bartholomew, over \$ 300,000 is with them. They specialize in investing money. She is using all CD's and maximizing investments.

Discussion about information sharing to Facebook. Mark Siegars explained that someone could request information from the Water District and then they could share it. Mark Siegars suggested that the Superintendent's report be mailed out to all of the customers in addition to putting it in the annual report, or that when the asset management plan is done, if there's an asset management executive summary, it could be sent out.

Mary Reilly stated that they are putting everything on the website, and if customers want to know about the water department, the information is there.

3. Discussion regarding website: Cindy Roughley to work with Mary Reilly to make changes to the website.
4. Meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.