

**TOWN OF GROTON**

Board of Health

173 Main Street

Groton, MA 01450

**BOARD OF HEALTH**

Jason Weber, Chairman

Robert J. Fleischer, Member

Michelle Collette, Member

Date: Monday, January 4th, 2021

Time: 7:00 PM

Location: Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Members Present: Jason Weber, Chairman; Robert J. Fleischer, Member; Michelle Collette, Member; Ira Grossman, Nashoba Associated Board of Health Agent

Others Present: Groton Select Board Members; Groton Water Commission

**JOINT MEETING WITH SELECT BOARD – Discussion of PFAS**

Chair Alison Manugian called the Select Board meeting to order at 7:37PM.

Select Board member Josh Degen and Superintendent of the Water Department Tom Orcutt have been communicating back and forth concerning the design of the new water treatment facility and well in which the topic of PFAS resurfaced.

Last year the Board of Health placed a moratorium on sludge derived fertilizers.

As a result of these recent conversations, Mr. Degen wanted to discuss with both the Board of Health and the Water Commissioners to see what their thoughts were on continuing the moratorium. He is also requesting input on whether the Town should be putting together a plan for a secondary treatment facility in the event that the treatment of PFAS is required in the future or whether we should at a minimum have an infrastructure built into the new treatment facility specifically designed for this.

Mr. Orcutt said that this has been include as part of the design plan for the treatment center if this is needed in the future.

The Select Board members and the Water Commissioners are aware of PFAS issue.

Mr. Orcutt said regulations were propagated back in October. The Water Department took initial testing of all of our wells a year ago and results are below the threshold of 20 parts per trillion.

However, it is present at right around 3 parts per trillion at Whitney Pond and right under 5 parts per trillion at Baddacook which means that we are below the threshold for treatment or removal of 20 parts per trillion.

We are below the 10 parts per trillion thresholds of more intensive testing, but the Water Department will still be doing more testing.

Mr. Orcutt and the Water Commissioners along with the Select Board are nervous that PFAS is present in the well water supply as it has been detected in 2 out of the 3 wells.

The Water Department will do another round of testing in the fall, possibly sooner once the Water Department receives their schedule from the DEP. This will probably be quarterly testing and then be relieved to go to annual testing after a period of time.

If the amounts pass the threshold and treatment is required then a major concern is that it may cost a large amount of money well over and above the $6 million that the Water Department is planning to spend on the Manganese program.

Treatment modules would have to be installed which can cost an upwards of $1-2 million each. On top of that there will also be an annual maintenance cost to change out the charcoal filters.

This is an expensive proposition and Mr. Orcutt’s discussion with Mr. Degen has been that we need to get out in front of the public and make them aware of where PFAS lives and how normal household items may contain it also. This is in an attempt to eliminate as much of it as we can from the waste stream.

Mr. Orcutt is certain that at some point the Groton Dunstable High School will have to test for it as well as the other public water systems. Therefore, the Town as a community needs to be prepared for any potential ramifications.

A few things to consider is if residents have it in their private wells, will they be installing systems within their house to remove it or are they going to hook up to public water if they are in the district and able to connect.

Mr. Orcutt believes it is a good idea to start to educate the public of where PFAS can be found and see if we can start to eliminate it.

Mr. Degen is asking that the Board of Health consider extending a permanent moratorium for use of sludge based septic derived fertilizer within the Town of Groton and its derivatives. This product has been used on golf courses and yards and can be found in fertilizer.

Mr. Degen also suggested that the public watch the movie “Dark Waters” as it talks about this issue of PFAS on a nationwide basis.

Last, Mr. Degen is turning to the Select Board members and the Water Commissioners and also looking for a recommendation from the Board of Health to look at this alternative for an upgrade to the facility if required. Mr. Degen understands that we do not need the threshold requirements for treatment at this juncture but believes Littleton and Chelmsford already have a facility in place and are currently treating for PFAS.

Mr. Orcutt confirmed that Littleton is building a facility along with their Manganese treatment facility. Ayer has constructed a temporary facility and is building a 2nd facility. He is not sure where Chelmsford is in the process but knows that they have limits that are above the 20 parts per trillion. This applies to Acton as well. Those are the communities that he is aware of that have tested for PFAS. All of the neighboring towns will be testing during this calendar year.

Mr. Degen mentioned that Chelmsford and Westford recently banned a product called “Fluid Film” that was previously being used by their DPW Departments to stop rust from forming within the undercarriages of their trucks. The main ingredient of this product was PFAS. Mr. Degen suggested checking to see whether this same product is being used by the Town of Groton also.

Dept were previously using – called “Fluid film” – advertised as best thing since sliced bread for the undercarriages of trucks bc it stops rusting

Board of Health member Michelle Collette asked whether anyone had any pointers in terms of sample regulations from other communities that may have already have this ban in effect. Maine is one of the states that has already adopted similar regulations as far as she is aware.

Mr. Orcutt replied that he is not aware of any other communities or towns in MA that have adopted these regulations mainly because this issue is very new.

Ms. Collette suggested reaching out to the MA Department of Public Health to see if they have any knowledge here.

Board of Health agent Ira Grossman said that Groton already has in place a waste regulation that would deal with any new facilities being built as well as any production storage of material. The Town of Groton is the only town in the state that Mr. Grossman is aware of that has the moratorium on the use of sludge derived fertilizer. Mr. Grossman agrees with Mr. Degen that the existing moratorium should be extended at a minimum and if not, then it should be put in as a permanent prohibition and that would include fertilizer or any commercially available parts that are derived from sludge.

From an educational standpoint Mr. Grossman suggested perhaps the Water Commissioners can put something together and include it with their Consumer Confidence Report. This can highlight all materials that are used on a day-to-day basis which contain PFAS such as synthetic sportswear clothing, Teflon cookware and so forth.

Another option is including an informational flyer with any outgoing mail correspondence.

This same information can also be listed on the Board of Health webpage.

Mr. Grossman mentioned that the Town of Harvard is currently working with the state and have tested somewhere around 120 private wells and most of the public water supply for PFAS.

Board of Health member Robert Fleischer is on board with making the moratorium permanent.

Ms. Collette asked where the West Groton Water District stands with their testing. Mr. Orcutt replied that he does not know and will assume their mandatory water testing schedule is most likely scheduled for the fall.

Select Board member Becky Pine said that when the Water Department first started looking at the Manganese issue, they had a map available that showed PFAS was more commonly found in a different aquifer than from where Groton is located.

Mr. Orcutt does recall this and explained that the Town of Groton is located in the Merrimack Basin area. This is where the water shed for the the Baddacook and Whitney wells are located.

Ms. Pine said and at that point the data shows a clearer issue with PFAS in the other aquifers in comparison to the Merrimack Basin. She asked whether this was still the case.

Mr. Orcutt replied as far as he knows, based on the data that has been collected, yes this is still accurate.

Ms. Pine asked whether the town could test for PFAS at any point outside of the schedule set by the state.

Mr. Orcutt replied yes, the Town can test on a different schedule from the state. However, he would like to ensure that any testing done counts towards the total number of testing required by the state. For example, if the state requires quarterly testing come October, any testing that has been done prior to that does count towards those quarters.

Ms. Pine said should we have to treat for PFAS in the future it would be better to start testing for it now.

Brief discussion ensued regarding the cost and process for testing. Similar to last time an external contractor will be used to collect the samples to avoid any false positives and cost estimates are around $2K per cycle for the Town of Groton not including West Groton.

Greg Fishbone from the Water Commission shared some test results he obtained from the state. The Town Forest well in West Groton came back showing no detectable PFAS levels. The well in the Townsend Road area over by Baddacook also showed very low levels of PFAS. The numbers in Westford were a few times greater than Groton’s.

Select Board member John Giger asked Mr. Orcutt whether there will be another multi-week wait to receive the water test results back similar to last time.

Mr. Orcutt replied he believes so due to all of the mandatory testing that will be taking place. The labs as a result will be inundated with samples.

Mr. Giger feels there is an obligation for the Board of Health, the Select Board and the Water Commissioners in helping the residents of Groton in understanding how they can get their water supply tested, where they can go for testing, estimate of costs and so forth.

Mr. Weber said that Mr. Giger makes a great point and an informational insert should be included with mailers as part of these awareness efforts.

Select Board Chair Alison Manugian asked Mr. Orcutt if he was aware of any other entities in Town that had wells.

Mr. Orcutt replied that there were a few areas in town that had small water systems which usually serve more than 20 people. These sites will have to test at some point.

As follow up to Mr. Grossman’s suggestion, the Water Department will look into including an informational insert on PFAS as part of the annual report mailing to residents.

Mr. Weber proposed the idea of broadcasting an informational segment on the local community television.

With regard to any permanent bans being placed, Mr. Degen suggested placing a ban not only on the use of sludge derived fertilizers or similar product brands in the Town of Groton but also the sale of it. He suggested doing a Press Release to the general public as well as sharing this with the other local Board of Health offices in the community. The watershed does not stop at the Groton Town line and other neighboring towns such as Pepperell and Townsend are also large farming communities that could benefit from this information.

Mr. Orcutt suggested notifying landscapers of this as well since they may be using sludge derived fertilizers.

Select Board member John Reilly suggested checking to see whether the DPW or small businesses in town are using any of these products also. From there each town can decide if they would like to consider enforcing any new regulations.

Ms. Manugian and Mr. Orcutt suggested also checking with the Groton Dunstable School District, Country Club, Lawrence Academy and the Groton School regarding their use of these products.

Mr. Weber agrees with doing a Press Release and sending the communication out to the surrounding communities.

The Groton Board of Health will add an agenda item for their next Board of Health meeting to discuss all the other points made earlier. Select Board members and Water Commissioner members are encouraged to send any suggestions to the Board of Health.

**Jason Weber moved to extend the moratorium previously enacted on the use of fertilizer derived from sludge for five years; that notice of said extension shall be put out in a Press Release; and to send the Press Release to local newspaper and the surrounding communities’ Boards of Health and local newspapers in those communities.**

Ms. Collette suggested extending the moratorium for a shorter period of time in order to allow the Board of Health enough time to draft a prohibition. The moratorium is only intended to serve as a temporary measure while they look at a more permanent solution.

**Michelle Collette made a motion to amend the existing motion to specify that the moratorium be extended for a period of one year to January 1, 2022.**

**Robert Fleischer seconded and the amended motion carried.**

Mr. Giger suggested putting in language that will allow this to be extended one or more times to prevent the Board members from having to go through a large arduous process.

Mr. Degen suggested that the Press Release be sent to the DEP also.

Mr. Fleischer said that he was content with the original motion to extend the moratorium for five years. He said extending it by one year is fine also but that may also mean that action would be required sooner. Ms. Collette explained that a moratorium is supposed to be temporary in order to give the governing body more time to work on a more permanent solution. In January 2022 either a permanent set of regulations be adopted or the existing moratorium be extended again.

Mr. Giger said another reason he is suggesting that they allow themselves room to extend the moratorium is due to a lot of the science and information for PFAS is still evolving therefore we may not know any more about it a year from today.

Ms. Collette agrees but feels that decision needs to made on an annual basis.

**Jason Weber moved to amend the motion such that the DEP is added to the recipient list, and that this moratorium is reviewed and auto extended as necessary.**

**Michelle Collette seconded and the amended motion carried.**

The Board of Health will work to raise community wide awareness of this topic.

The Select Board adjourned at 8:21PM.

Minutes by Sammie Kul.