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**MINUTES  
EMERGENCY MEETING OF THE SELECT BOARD  
BOARD OF WATER AND WASTEWATER COMMISSIONERS  
DONN B. GRIFFIN ROOM, TOWN HALL  
732 MAIN STREET, HARWICH, MA  
EMERGENCY MEETING 8:40AM  
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 2024**

RELEASED

**MEMBERS PARTICIPATING:** Julie Kavanagh, Chair, Jeff Handler, Clerk, Don Howell and Peter Piekarski were present. Michael MacAskill, Vice Chair participated remotely.

**ALSO PARTICIPATING:** Joseph F. Powers, Town Administrator and Noreen Donahue, Vice Chair of the Water/Wastewater Commissioners

**I. CALL TO ORDER:** Ms. Kavanagh called the Emergency Meeting of the Harwich Select Board and Board of Water and the Wastewater Commissioners to order on Wednesday, April 10, 2024 at 8:40 AM. Ms. Kavanagh read the Open Meeting Law Notice.

**II. JOINT MEETING OF THE SELECT BOARD AND BOARD OF WATER AND WASTEWATER COMMISSIONERS**

A. Town Administrator update

B. emergency relative to drinking water emergency and distribution plan. Votes may be taken

Mr. Powers acknowledged that there may be some representatives from the Board of Water and Wastewater Commissioners present. He explained for the general public, that the Town is operating in an emergency manner. This meeting has come together as quickly as possible, making sure that the Board of Water and Wastewater Commissioners had an opportunity to be present. He also recognized that many of them may not yet be available considering how fast things are occurring. He requested that, for the record, that those present be identified.

Ms. Kavanagh acknowledged Noreen Donahue, Vice Chair of the Water and Wastewater Commissioners who was participating remotely.

Ms. Donahue stated that she has attempted to connect with other members of the Commission. She has connected with Dan Pelletier, Water/Wastewater Superintendent.

Mr. Powers stated that they are also joined by the Town of Harwich Department Heads. He noted that the purpose of this meeting is to ramp up information regarding the drinking water emergency that the Town became aware of late on April 9th. The Town is still under a drinking water ban. There should be no drinking of water occurring in the Town of Harwich at present. Through Dan Pelletier, the Town's Water/Wastewater Superintendent, the information he has as

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of this morning is that the Town is working through the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection in an attempt to get the order localized to the area that was impacted. That area is the Village of North Harwich. As of this time, that has not occurred and it continues as a Town wide ban. The main purpose of this meeting is to have the Select Board declare an emergency for drinking water purposes so the Town may preserve its rights for procurement and any other necessary steps that may occur. He is also working with Department Heads, with Public Safety as the first among them, for the distribution of water. The appropriate action at this time is for the Board to discuss and hopefully declare an emergency for drinking water purposes. He requested a motion, discussion and a vote from the Select Board.

Mr. Howell moved to vote to declare an emergency relative to the incident and to invoke emergency powers for the Town vis-a-vis procurements. Seconded by Mr. Handler.

Vote: 5:0 in favor by roll call vote. Motion carried.

Mr. Powers commented that he can give the Board more information if needed. At this time, they will be resuming the Department Heads meeting to discuss water distribution. He noted that there may be a single point of contact such as the Community Center. They will continue that discussion and get the information out to everyone as soon as possible. He did note that they have been able to secure water immediately through the immediate efforts of the Superintendent, Public Safety and the Health Department. Having the inventory is not the issue. Distribution and length of need for distribution are the issues. He expects to have more information as the day progresses.

Dan Pelletier, Water/Wastewater Superintendent reported that crews have been out since they received the first call at 4:30PM yesterday. They opened hydrants and flushed the system until approximately 2:00 AM. They observed foam in Great Western Road and around the corner on Depot. He does not believe that any of the foam went towards the east. He believes it is localized to the northwest portion of town. The way the distribution system operates and at the time at which the pumps were running, the pumping for the water system shut off right before firefighting activities went into place. The firefighting foam that was introduced into the system was not distributed broadly throughout town. He noted that they got the appropriate samples bottles from the Barnstable County Lab. They are now coordinating testing samples to get the samples up to the lab for analysis. Once they received confirmation that there is no longer PFAS present, he expects that they will be able to lift the ban. He is presently waiting for a call back from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and he is hoping they will be allowed to reduce the ban to the localized area. There are only two water mains that feed that section of Town.

Mr. Piekarski asked how frequently the additional testing will occur.

Mr. Pelletier replied that, following DEP's guidelines, they're doing the initial sampling round. He is unsure if DEP will be requiring additional sampling but they can do it on their own in a couple of weeks.

David LeBlanc, Fire Chief referred to the email that he had sent to the Board. He highlighted that approximately 3 or 4 years ago, using a program through the DEP, the Fire Department replaced all of their foam. They had identified all the legacy chemicals that had been identified as hazardous. The DEP funded the clean up process and then the Department spent additional funds to get rid of foam that had not been identified as hazardous but may contain harmful chemicals. He noted that it is biodegradable and has no legacy chemicals or PFAS in it. He emphasized that those facts are important when they look at the totality of the incident. It is a small area and the hazard is minimal. However, he is not minimizing where they are now. As a way of an explanation of the incident, he noted the following: Harwich had responded to a building fire in Dennis at 11:00 AM on April 9th. On the town line, behind the Great Western Deli there are storage buildings and the fire was involved in two bays of the building. He went on to describe that Harwich arrived first and as they arrived, the Harwich engine connected to a hydrant on the Harwich side of the Town line and laid into that supply line. It's a dead end main that ends at the Town line. Those typically have poor pressure and are typically not used for firefighting operations as they are not satisfactory. When they started operations, they didn't have enough water. The second engine that arrived was from Dennis. They connected to a hydrant on the Dennis side and augmented the Harwich water supply. He described how Harwich's engine had a one hydrant line connected from Dennis and one from Harwich. During the firefighting operation a gas tank let go on one of the vehicles, creating a flaming puddle of gasoline coming out of the building and towards people. They immediately switched to a foam operation, knocked the fire down and put the fire out in the building. He explained how the foam system works. What has been determined is that the pressure on the Dennis side is greater than the pressure on the Harwich side and it was able to push that foamy water back through the hydrant line and into the water main. He estimates that the amount of foamy water that went back in solution into the water main is minimal but a little bit of foam looks like a lot. He expressed regret that the situation happened and commented that it was not something anyone could have anticipated. It was two different water systems and the perfect storm of events. At the Town Administrator's request, he reached out to the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). They will be available to assist the town with the distribution of water.

Mr. Powers noted next steps. They are resuming the Department Head Meeting for the purposes of the distribution plan. The regulatory departments have and will be reaching out to businesses in the Town of Harwich and they are relying on CERT. The emphasis is for Harwich residents and Harwich families to have access to drinking water. They will be relying on all communication channels, social media, the Harwich Channel, the distributions through CERT and the Town website. He reminded everyone to sign up on the website to receive Town alerts.

Mr. Howell expressed on behalf of the Board, their appreciation for the efforts from the Fire Department and Dan Pelletier and his people, for doing what they did yesterday. He commented that we should be proud of all their efforts.

### **III. ADJOURNMENT:**

Mr. Handler moved to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. Howell.

Vote: 5:0 in favor by roll call vote. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Judi Moldstad  
Board Secretary.