

MARBLEHEAD WATER AND SEWER COMMISSION



THE FLOW N' GO

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WATER AND SEWER DEPARTMENTS HAVE A LONG HISTORY

The Marblehead Water Department and Marblehead Sewer Department have an interesting history dating back nearly 150 years. While today these two departments are overseen by the Water and Sewer Commission, at one time both departments were separate and had their own governing boards. They remain, however, fiscally individual with each department having their own budgets and needs. In this issue of The Flow N' Go, we will take a look at the evolution of the water department from its inception to today as well as some of the major projects and improvements over the years. We will delve into the history of the sewer department in a future issue of The Flow N' Go.

WATER SUPPLY WAS ORIGINALLY FOR FIRE PROTECTION

Like most public water systems in the 1800's, a water supply in Marblehead was first established for the purpose of fighting fires and not for drinking water. Drinking water was likely provided by private or cooperative wells.

The first mention of a water system in Marblehead was a Town Meeting vote in September, 1869, "to clean the public well at the southeasterly corner of the Common." (The Common was the location where Abbot Hall would be constructed eight years later.) As early as 1870, the Town Fathers started giving thought to the increase in the demand for water throughout the Town.

A Town Meeting vote in 1877 appropriated \$10,000 to construct a reservoir at Redd's Pond and to lay ten-inch cast iron pipe. (A section of that original pipe laid in 1877 is still in use today.) It was voted in 1879 to extend the Redd's Pond pipe line to a holding area on Pleasant Street near the location of the current-day Warwick Theater. The water line was further extended in 1882 from Washington Street to School and Sewall streets—again, for fire protection purposes.

Reference to a Board of Water Commissioners to oversee the Town's water system first appeared in the Massachusetts Legislature's Acts of 1883 when it was voted to incorporate the Marblehead Water Company (as it was then known) and to purchase the

franchise and corporate property of the Marblehead Water Company.

A series of legislative amendments and Town Meeting votes followed, resulting with the election in April 1887 of the first three members of the newly-formed Water Commission: William J. Goldthwait, John F. Harris, and Robert C. Bridge.

One of the first actions of the new Commission was to oversee the extension of the water main to Atlantic Avenue, Ocean Avenue, and the Neck. An appropriation of \$42,000.00 for this project was approved by Town Meeting on April 20, 1887.

With attention now turning to a growing population and the need for a drinking water supply, a Town Meeting in 1888 voted to petition the Massachusetts General Court (Legislature) to permit the taking of land and water rights in the City of Salem. This area was known as Thompson Meadow and was capable of drawing over one million gallons of water a day. A further source of water was secured by a 1912 Town Meeting vote to acquire additional land in Salem.

While Marblehead now purchases its water from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) and no longer uses the wells located in Salem, the Water and Sewer Commission still retains ownership of the

Continued on back)

Did you know ... ?

Did you know that the water and sewer departments are totally self-sustaining and receive no tax-payer dollars?

The operations of the Water and Sewer Commission are supported solely by the revenues generated from the sale of water and sewer services. No funding comes from the Town's tax rate.

The rates you pay for water and sewer cover not only those services but also pay for all water and sewer construction.

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1880'S SAW NEED FOR DRINKING WATER IN ADDITION TO FIRE PROTECTION (Continued from front)

Salem land and wells.

The Town's first stand pipe was erected on Vine Street in 1889. This water tower collected and stored water from the Salem wells to maintain a water supply for the Town. A new water tower was put up on Tower Way in 1924 to replace the Vine Street stand pipe and a second storage tank was built at Burke's Hill in 1964. (The Tower Way water tower was decommissioned and taken down in 2021.)

The Legislative Acts of 1913 authorized the Water Commission to set and collect water rates for the sale of water. Residents connected to the Town's water supply now had to pay for their water.

With the demand for water growing, the state Legislature in 1930 authorized

the Town to purchase additional water from the City of Lynn. Then, in 1952, the Water Commission received legislative approval to connect to the then-state agency Metropolitan District Commission's water supply.

The Metropolitan District Commission was abolished as a state agency and the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority was established in 1984 to take over the MDC's water supply system. It is the MWRA that supplies water to Marblehead's residents today.

Whether it be the Marblehead Water Company of the mid-1800's, the Water Commission of the 1900's, or the combined Water and Sewer Commission as established in the 1970's, and whether it be to provide fire protection, drinking water, or both, the overseers of Marblehead's water supply system have for near-

ly 150 years shown to be proactive in providing the best water system possible at the lowest cost possible.

What many residents don't realize is that the water department receives no money from property taxes. The water provided to our customers as well as all maintenance and construction on the system is funded entirely by the water rates.

This includes everything from routine maintenance of water lines and installation of water meters, constant testing for water quality, and billing for water usage to major construction projects to assure that the system continues to run smoothly such as the recent reconstruction and relining of the water mains along Humphrey and Tedesco streets and the reconstruction of the Tedesco Street pump station.

DATA CONFIRMS DECREASED WATER USAGE DURING RAINY SUMMER OF 2021

In the last issue of *The Flow N' Go* there was an article comparing rainfall amounts for June, July, and August of 2020 to 2021. Data gathered from the Water and Sewer Commission's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather reporting station showed that for those three months in 2020, Marblehead received a total of just 6.19 inches of precipitation. Compare that to June, July, and August of 2021 when there was 20.49 inches of rainfall.

The article reported that residents who took advantage of the excessive rainfall and turned off their outside irrigation systems saw a marked reduction in their individual water usage during those summer months. But how did this translate into lower water consumption town-wide?

Statistics released by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), from which Marblehead purchases its water, paints an interesting picture of just how much less water the town used during the summer of 2021 as compared to 2020.

As can be seen by the accompanying graph provided by the MWRA, Marblehead as a whole used 86.0 million gallons (MG) of water in June, 2020 versus 84.0 MG for June, 2021. Not a huge reduction but keep in mind that this was just the start of our 'summer of deluge.' (The line on the graph identified as #1 represents 2020 while the line identified as #2 represents 2021.)

In July, 2020, we collectively used 97.3 MG of water (with rainfall of only 2.59 inches) compared to July, 2021 when the town consumed only 66.2 MG (in

a month that saw 11.63 inches of rainfall.)

It was a similar story in August when, in 2020, the Commission purchased 96.2 MG of water from the MWRA (with 1.91 inches of precipitation) and in 2021 we consumed just 73.5 MG (when rainfall for the month measured 6.99 inches).

Assuming that inside water use remains relatively constant regardless of the amount of rainfall, this comparison clearly shows that residential outside water use decreases significantly when there is sufficient precipitation. For the individual consumer who takes advantage of Mother Nature's bounty by reducing their outside watering, this would translate to their using considerably less water that they have to pay for.

Of course, less water usage translates to less revenue available for future water department construction projects because all construction is funded solely by the department's retained earnings and not from taxation. The construction budget is approved by voters at the Annual Town Meeting.

