



**STATE OF MARYLAND**  
**BOARD OF WATERWORKS AND WASTE SYSTEMS OPERATORS**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON:**  
**Thursday, October 20, 2022 At 10:00 A.M**  
**Virtual Video Conference Meeting via Google Meet**

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**MISSION OF THE MARYLAND BOARD OF WATERWORKS & WASTE SYSTEMS OPERATORS**

The Treatment Systems that provide drinking water for our citizens and handle the wastes generated by our daily activities play an important role in protecting Public Health and the Environment of Maryland. Through the Certification Program established by State Law, the “Board of Waterworks and Waste Systems Operators” sets the education, experience and examination standards for Operators and Superintendents who work in these vital systems.

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**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT**

Jay Price	Sanitary Districts; Board Chair; CSAWWA Liaison
Benjamin Thompson	County Governments; Board Vice-Chair
Bruce Darner	Agriculture; WWOA Liaison
Joseph Wright	Maryland Environmental Service
Hiram Tanner	Public-At-Large
Eric Dutrow	Public-At-Large
Doug Abbot	Water Supervision
Ed Hogan	Industrial Superintendents
Connie Luffman	Wastewater Supervision
Tony Sierra	Maryland Department of the Environment
Clark Howells	Municipal Governments; CWEA Liaison

**LIASONS, GUEST & STAFF PRESENT**

Dee Settar	Board Secretary
Jennifer Bowman	Board Counsel
Martin Fuhr	Board Staff
Tara Jones	MCET Liaison
Andy Glenn	Worcester County
Krysten Kruper	MDE

**01. CALL TO ORDER**

Board Chair Jay Price called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM. Roll Call was conducted by Dee Settar, Board Secretary. The Board meeting was conducted online using Google Meet.

**02. REVIEW AND ADOPTION OF PROPOSED MEETING AGENDA**

Board Members reviewed the October 20, 2022 Draft Agenda. Dee Settar noted there were two changes; there would be no closed session, and exam statistics are reviewed quarterly. Ben Thompson moved to adopt the proposed meeting agenda. Bruce Darner seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

### **03. REVIEW AND ADOPTION OF DRAFT MEETING MINUTES**

Board members reviewed the draft of August 18, 2022 open meeting minutes and made several changes consisting of spelling and grammar. Bruce Darner made a motion to adopt the minutes as ammended. Ed Hogan seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

### **04. BOARD CHAIR’S COMMENT & GUEST INTRODUCTIONS**

Board Chair Jay Price opened the meeting by thanking everyone for their hard work, dedication and attendance. He then apologized for the cancellation of the September meeting, stating that he traveled to Jackson, Mississippi to assist in the repair and re-start of the city’s water plant which had failed, leaving the residents without potable water. Mr. Price then asked guests to introduce themselves and state the purpose for their attendance.

Mr. Andy Glenn had attended the October 12 Superintendent Seminar, and wanted to learn more about the workings of the Board.

Krysten Kruper is the new division chief of the planning and compliance division. She stated she was in attendance to learn more about the function of the Board, so that she may possibly find ways to move department initiatives forward.

### **05. BOARD STAFF’S REPORTS**

#### **A. Revenue & Expenditures Update**

Dee Settar presented the revenue and expenditures as of September 30, 2022. The Revenues and Expenditures are as follows:

FY 2023	\$250,711.00
Cumulative Revenue (9/30/22, draft )	\$48,225.00
Cumulative Expenses (8/31/2022)	\$30,624.83
Encumbrance (8/31/2022)	\$34,897.97

Dee stated the FY22 elevated appropriation of \$390,093.00 was based upon higher historic revenue and the Board’s budget for the new database initiative, which was developed in-house at zero cost. The reduced FY23 appropriation was based upon 2019-2021 period revenue that was reduced substantially due to decreased number of applications during the pandemic

#### **B. Exam Statistics**

Martin presented the exam statistics for the third quarter of calendar year 2022.

Board Staff discussed the examination statistics for the month of July, August and September 2022. There were fifty-seven total exams taken in July, with an overall pass rate of 40%. Thirteen operators sat for the paper water exams, scoring a pass rate of 54% and ten operators sat for the online (AMP)

water exam, scoring a pass rate of 60%. In July, twenty-eight operators sat for the paper wastewater and industrial wastewater exams, scoring a pass rate of 29%, and six operators sat for the online (AMP) wastewater and industrial wastewater exams scoring a pass rate of 33%.

There were fifty-four total exams taken in August, with an overall pass rate of 33%. Seventeen operators sat for the paper water exams, scoring a pass rate of 53% and six operators sat for the online (AMP) water exam, scoring a pass rate of 67%. In August, thirty operators sat for the paper wastewater and industrial wastewater exams, scoring a pass rate of 17%, and one operator sat for the online (AMP) wastewater and industrial wastewater exams scoring a pass rate of 0%.

There were sixty-four total exams taken in September, with an overall pass rate of 36%. Twenty-five operators sat for the paper water exams, scoring a pass rate of 36%. Five operators sat for the online (AMP) water exam, scoring a pass rate of 80%. In September, twenty-six operators sat for the paper wastewater and industrial wastewater exams, scoring a pass rate of 27%, and eight operators sat for the online (AMP) wastewater and industrial wastewater exams scoring a pass rate of 38%.

After the quarterly exam statistics were presented, the discussion turned once again to what might be done to improve the exam scores, specifically the wastewater 5A, 5, and A. Board Members discussed the possibility that treatment methods used in different parts of the state may contribute to operators not scoring as well as expected. For example, many utilities on the eastern shore utilize wastewater membrane treatment, while many utilities in Central or Western Maryland generally utilize conventional treatment. Board Members requested operators who sit for an exam document their employing plant to develop a geographical analysis of exam passing rates. Board staff will also pursue statistical analyses of W5, WA and W5A exam questions scoring from the owner, Water Professionals International, or “WPI” (formerly ABC) to evaluate problematic questions.

### **C. Board Initiatives & Inquiries**

Dee Settar addressed the push to move applications to an electronic platform. She stated that she has requested the Board be given preferred priority based upon workload, security and audit concerns and hopes the project will begin in early FY24.

Dee then brought up that turnaround times for applications are now being tracked differently. Due to the high volume of incomplete applications, completion times are dramatically impacted as staff spends staggering amounts of time collecting the information necessary to process. The database includes a method to document applications received as incomplete, and Board staff are working with MDE’s Office of Information Management and Technology to further streamline accuracy of processing times. This procedure will also provide prioritization for those applications received as complete.

Dee updated the Board on the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators (ASDWA) Conference she had just attended, which included discussions about federal funding, PFAS, lead service lines and operator certification, as well as States’ and utilities’ need for properly trained and qualified workforce, as well as the importance of long term maintenance of infrastructure, especially for federally funded projects. Bill Shreve noted that often maintenance is the first to suffer when funds become tight.

On the topic of operator retention and training, it was suggested the Board secure a table at the Maryland Association of Municipal Waste Agencies (MAMWA) and Maryland Association of Counties (MACO) conferences so the Board may gain more knowledge, exposure, and ideas on how to do just that.

Jay Price noted that turnaround times for exam applications are now on the website for operators to take advantage of. Martin added that for 2023, the cutoff time for exams will now be one month, up from two weeks. Hopefully this will solve the issue of not receiving exam applications until after the exam has already taken place. Martin also noted that this will be much less of an issue when electronic registration goes live.

#### **D. Review of Applications Received**

Martin then presented applications for Education Substitution and Reciprocity.

**Jefferson McQueen:** Mr. McQueen applied for reciprocity from the state of Tennessee for Distribution 1 certification to operate in Frederick County. Martin noted that the requirements for this class and category were identical to Maryland's, including the ABC examination. He then recommended Mr. McQueen's request be granted. Joe Wright made a motion to accept Martin's recommendation, with Ed Hogan offering a second. The motion passed unanimously.

**Mohammed Almafrachi:** Mr. Almafrachi requested education substitution toward the minimum time requirement for his water treatment class 4 certification. Based upon the 47 credits of math and science obtained in earning his M.S. in Chemical Engineering, Martin recommended Mr. Almafrachi be granted the maximum of 12 months' time, making him eligible for full certification on April 1, 2023. Ben Thompson made a motion to accept Martin's proposal, with Joe Wright offering a second. The motion passed unanimously.

**Teliksew Endale:** Mr. Endale requested education substitution toward the minimum time requirement for his wastewater 5A treatment certification. Martin presented to the Board Mr. Endale's college transcript containing 95 credits in math and science, that ultimately led to a Bachelor's degree in Applied Chemistry. Martin then recommended Mr. Endale be granted 12 month's education credit, making him eligible for full certification immediately. Bruce Darner made a motion to accept Martin's recommendation, with Ed Hogan offering a second. The motion passed unanimously.

**Matthew Bowen:** Mr. Bowen requested education substitution toward his minimum time required to gain his wastewater treatment 5A certification. Martin noted that Mr. Bowen had earned an Associate's degree in Environmental Science, accumulating 38 credits along the way. Martin recommended Mr. Bowen be granted the 12 months necessary to make him eligible for full certification. Bruce Darner made a motion to accept Martin's proposal, with Ben Thompson offering a second. The motion passed unanimously.

## **07. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. Open Meetings Act**

Board Counsel Jenn Bowman informed the Board that, effective October 1, 2022 and per the Open Meetings Act, closed meeting statements must remain public for three years, where previously only one year was required.

## **08. OLD BUSINESS**

### **A. Regulatory Changes**

Dee Settar raised the need for follow-up concerning the proposed regulatory changes. She stated that some were still not finalized, and that Jenn Bowman should first have a look at them. Jay Price asked if it would be helpful to make the list smaller than the current proposed list of changes. Dee stated that she will work with Jenn to determine what is feasible. She then stated that she would like to increase the penalties to encourage better compliance. Jenn suggested prioritizing the changes. Jay Price then suggested perhaps combining them would be a good idea. Jenn agreed, and would investigate the possibility, or perhaps prioritizing more of the proposed changes.

### **B. MAMWA**

Ben Thompson stated that he received an email from the Maryland Association of Municipal Wastewater Agencies (MAMWA), stating that utilities are experiencing difficulty in hiring and retaining operators, and noted the exams are difficult to pass and the exam the mastery sheets of the exams are not provided. Dee Settar stated she reached out to speak to MAMWA, but received no response.

Martin Fuhr noted the mastery sheets originated from ABC and were definitely provided with each exam result on the back page. Board Members consider the mastery sheet somewhat vague new need-to-know criteria could be developed. Martin advised he would be able to provide examples of the mastery sheets for the Board to examine, after redacting any personal information. Dee suggested starting with the wastewater mastery sheets to start the analysis.

Jenn Bowman provided an update of the W5A exam breach and noted a referral was made to MDE's Environmental Crimes Unit. Jenn also requested addition information from Martin concerning the timeline of the breach he provided and would be in contact.

Dee Settar then addressed the Integrity Statement to sitting examinees. The question was posed of where should it be posted, and when? Should it be posted on the website? Jenn suggested not, as it should be signed as an acknowledgement. How would electronic exams be addressed? Doug Abbott suggested making the statement part of the application. Jay Price asked for a motion to accept the Integrity Statement as written. Ben Thompson offered a motion, and Bruce Darner seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Martin then presented the training curriculum approved by the Committee at the last TRE meeting for

Board approval. Joe Wright made a motion to accept, with Ed Hogan offering a second to the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## **09. DISCUSSION WITH BOARD LIAISONS AND GUESTS**

**Clark Howells, CWEA** – Clark informed those present that there would be a rate increase for new membership in CWEA, but the cost for operators would not change. They were also exploring ways to improve management of scholarship funds.

**Bruce Darner, WWOA** – Bruce stated that 75% of the booths available for Tri Con have already been sold. Income from the event will be used to increase membership and provide operator training. On December 6, the Western section of WWOA will hold its next meeting, and is now down to seventy-four members due to in-house training at Hagerstown and Frederick.

**Tara Jones, MCET** – Tara announced the EARN Grant was allocated funds once again. She stated they will be updating classes, no longer using “my learning”. Exams will be selected when registering for classes. For the last year, 189 students were enrolled, with 84 exams taken, and 80 of those results reported to MCET. She went on to say that hopefully moving forward, the exam will be taken within six weeks of completion of the program, and would like to post the schedule for the next two years to generate more interest. Connie Luffman suggested a refresher course for those who were close to passing but did not quite make it. Tara was receptive to the idea. Tara stated she would like to have a round of classes end just before the Short Course, so operators could attend EARN, the Short Course, then sit for the examination. She went on to say virtual classes were running more often, but they were having issues with host colleges cancelling classes due to poor enrollment. At this time there are no plans to go to virtual enrollment exclusively.

**Andy Glenn, Worcester County** – Inquired if there were any exam prep classes. Tara Jones stated she would be happy to supply information on the EARN Program.

**Eric Dutrow, MRW** – Stated Maryland Rural Water was still searching for an “Energy Person” candidate, as the person they had intended to hire fell through.

**Jay Price, AWWA** – Jay told everyone of the Mid Atlantic Utility Conference. He stated it was a great two-day event where topics such as asset management and the effects of Covid on the industry were discussed at length.

**Ben Thompson, CSAWWA** – Ben invited anyone interested to a plant tour of the Patuxent facility on Monday the 24<sup>th</sup> of October if they were interested.

## **10. ADJOURNMENT**

Ben Thompson moved to adjourn the open meeting at 12:40 PM. The next meeting will be held on November 17, 2022 Video Conference Meeting held via Google Meet.

*The October 20, 2022 Meeting Minutes were approved by the WWSO Board on November 17, 2022*