

Providence Conversation with Water Board Sr. Director of Administration, Jeanne Bondarevskis, and Chair, Xay Khamsyvoravong, January 30, 2014

***Quality:** The water passes more stringent standards than most bottled water, is continually tested and retested by topflight chemists, must meet Department of Health regulations. Water may be higher quality than that of smaller systems in the state, which have had well-publicized problems.

***Size:** Providence's system is the largest conventional water treatment plant in New England, serving over 600,000 users.

***Construction:** The century-old system runs on gravity; pumps are used only during severe droughts. The Scituate Reservoir, plus 5 tributary reservoirs, collect the water.

***Infrastructure repair:** The Board continually replaces old pipes, though some cast iron pipes, dating from the Civil War, are still in good condition, may need cleaning or relining. The average cost to replace a mile of pipe is \$1 million.

***Lead in water:** The Board is responsible for mains and service lines to the sidewalk; the customer is responsible for the pipes to the house. In older parts of the city, those pipes may still be lead. The law requires the Board to send letters urging customers to run their cold water for a few minutes, to wash out lead (the standard is 15 parts per million, down from 50 parts decades ago). The letter goes to all customers; it does not indicate that their water has lead. This is estimated to cost about a penny per day, or less than \$5 per year. (See excerpt from Providence Water Lead Brochure, attached).

*** Cost:** At a little over one-third of a penny per gallon, water for retail customers is second cheapest in the state (if the other system gets a rate increase from the Public Utilities Commission, it will be the cheapest) of regulated water suppliers. Providence Water sells water wholesale to 9 other customers, which because they control their pipes and manage their administration, will mark up their selling price. The Board recently raised rates ó the first raise in almost four years.

***Labor success:** In 600 days, there was no time lost for injury in the Transmission and Distribution department of Providence Water, which are the employees literally in the trenches, doing the construction work..

***The administrative headquarters:** In a residential neighborhood, the Academy Ave site is not ideal. To move, though, the board must locate an 8-10-acre parcel, near the highway, ideally within Providence and not on contaminated land that must be remediated.

***Billing changes:** the Water Board now bills monthly, instead of quarterly, to make it easier for consumers to budget, and also to provide the consumer with more timely information on their usage. A byproduct is that it should also reduce the Board's accounts receivables.

*** Profit:** As a regulated utility, the system earns no profit for Providence. It pays \$6 million in property taxes, mostly to Scituate.