Nashoba Valley Voice

Editorial: Joint legislation gives overdue relief to private well users

State Rep. Meghan Kilcoyne co-filed a House bill with state Rep. Natalie Blais that would develop minimum statewide quality standards for private wells, as well as expand financial assistance for residents trying to remediate wells contaminated by so-called “forever chemicals,” or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). (SEEKING SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHY)

PUBLISHED: January 29, 2025 at 12:44 AM EST

Communities serviced by municipal systems can be reasonably confident that the water used for drinking, washing or irrigation contains no elevated levels of toxins or other contaminants.

However, state residents who rely on private wells don’t have that same protection, and must ensure the safety of their water supply individually or by hiring a testing service.

But proposed joint legislation would develop minimum statewide quality standards for private wells, as well as expand financial assistance for residents trying to remediate wells contaminated by so-called “forever chemicals,” or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

State Rep. Natalie Blais co-filed the House bill with Rep. Meghan Kilcoyne, while Sen. Jamie Eldridge filed the Senate version.

The bill would instruct the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection to develop standards and define testing requirements for new and existing wells, as well as

require testing of a private well when transferring ownership of a home, similar to Title 5 septic system regulations.

Financial assistance would be made available to assist homeowners with upgrading wells or remediation.

Blais, a Deerfield Democrat, characterized well contaminants as both a “public health” and “equity” issue, since not all private wells get tested regularly.

“If you are a resident living in a rural community that will probably never have access to public water, we should be doing everything we can to make sure water is safe,” Blais told the Daily Hampshire Gazette newspaper. “People who are relying on public water systems have confidence their water is safe because there are people monitoring it and testing it. … There’s no reason for rural residents to expect anything less.”

Supporters say that more than 500,000 Massachusetts residents, located generally in rural areas but also in some of our other 351 cities and towns, rely on private wells for their drinking water. They also note that many people consume water that may be unsafe because the source is not regularly tested, and thus could have harmful contaminants such as PFAS, arsenic, radon, and uranium, among other toxic elements.

State concerns over PFAS compounds in drinking water accelerated in 2018 after traces were detected in water from wells around the former Fort Devens, now run by MassDevelopment as an economic enterprise zone.

Contractors for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers tested and sampled the groundwater in Ayer, Shirley and Harvard, eventually determining the compounds could have seeped into nearby wells over time.

In July 2021, local officials, including Ayer’s DPW chief, called on legislators to consider creating more unified approaches to managing the impact of PFAS-contaminated water by increasing funding for municipalities, and rolling out more public education programs to inform residents of potentially harmful health effects.

Town administrators and public works employees spoke to the Legislature’s PFAS Interagency Task Force, informing state lawmakers that they needed more resources to prevent and control the effects of PFAS contamination in water supplies.

Ayer Public Works Superintendent Mark Wetzel told legislators managing PFAS took up a significant portion of his staff’s time. The local water system serves about 90% of the town, roughly 8,000 residents, with several large food and beverage operations using about 60% of the water.

In nearby Stow, there is no town water, Town Administrator Denise Dembkoski said at the time; residents rely on private wells and septic systems.

A two-year study from 2020 to 2022 conducted by RCAP Solutions, a Worcester-based nonprofit serving communities around the northeastern U.S., found that approximately one-third of the 500 private wells tested contained levels of contaminants higher than state health standards.

The introduction of minimum statewide water quality standards is also the subject of a MassDEP study, funded by a $100,000 appropriation in the fiscal 2025 budget.

Blais said she's hopeful the bill can move forward, especially because of support from communities closer to Boston, like Marlboro, Sen. Eldridge's hometown.

"As the Legislature continues to address PFAS contamination in communities across the state this session, it's crucial that the hundreds of thousands of households relying on private well water have access to clean and safe drinking water," Eldridge said in a statement. "That's why I'm proud to once again file legislation to empower the DEP to regulate private wells and establish a program to help homeowners test their wells for dangerous contaminants."

Representatives from RCAP Solutions, as well as The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, both of which lead the Coalition for Safe Drinking Water, said the proposed legislation could provide some extra protection for private well users.

"Wells require regular testing and maintenance, just as public water systems do, but not everyone is aware of the need or can afford these services — creating a regional equity issue that can be addressed through this legislation," Amie Shei, president and CEO of The Health Foundation, said in a statement.

Given all the evidence of contamination in private wells on which many state residents rely, we're surprised that the common-sense solution contained in these two pieces of legislation haven't already been enacted.'

Since that's not the case, we urge the Legislature to act on these bills expeditiously and deliver the relief that private well users need.

https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:VA6C2:3a45bda6-daa9-4b64-8f99-c9236e4d8afa

NBC Boston:

This brewery's hidden outpost is an attractive oasis along Route 2

https://www.nbcboston.com/eat-new-england/devens-sterling-street-brewery-beer/3634318/

Harvard Press: February 21st

MassDevelopment appoints Delorier permanent executive VP for Devens

by John Osborn · Friday, February 21, 2025

MassDevelopment announced this week that interim Executive Vice President of Devens Operations Meg Delorier can now remove the word “interim” from her title.

The agency announced Tuesday that effective immediately, Delorier has been appointed permanent EVP Devens, responsible for the delivery of services to residents and businesses located there. In addition, she will continue in her role as director of military initiatives for the agency.

Garrison Commander Lt. Col. Carlos Poventud-Estrada (left) and Meg Delorier, appointed this week as the permanent Executive Vice President for Devens. (Courtesy photo)

In a statement to the Press, MassDevelopment President and CEO Navjeet Bal said that MassDevelopment was fortunate to have Delorier. “Meg first came to work at MassDevelopment almost exactly 24 years ago in a role supporting the transition of former

Fort Devens into a thriving and sustainable mixed-use community. As we continue this important work today, there is no one who has more firsthand knowledge of Devens than Meg or is a fiercer advocate for its residents, businesses, visitors, and the Devens operations staff," Bal said.

Delorier joined MassDevelopment Feb. 12, 2001, as vice president of community relations-Devens. Her subsequent roles at MassDevelopment included chief of staff and director of military initiatives. She was named interim executive vice president in June 2022, following the departure of Jessica Strunkin, the previous EVP, from the agency.

Devens Committee Chair Laura Scott said in an email that the committee was delighted with the appointment. "Meg has been providing excellent service to the residents and businesses at Devens as Acting EVP. Her deep familiarity with the operations here will continue to serve the community well."

Prior to joining MassDevelopment, Delorier served as the executive director of the Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce and station manager for the American Red Cross at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona and Fort Devens. She is a graduate of Nathaniel Hawthorne College, where she studied criminal justice.

As MassDevelopment's director of military initiatives, Delorier also oversees MassDevelopment's support for military missions in Massachusetts, which is home to six military installations—including the Devens Reserve Forces Training Area—that provide more than 57,600 jobs in the state.

Devens water connection on schedule; commission mulls betterment fees

by Joan Eliyesil · Friday, February 21, 2025

All is going well with the $7.1 million project to connect Harvard's water supply to the Devens water system. At the Water Commission's Feb. 5 meeting, Tighe & Bond engineers said the project is on track to meet the scheduled 2026 completion date within budget. The commission also began discussing betterment fees for all the properties along Depot Road, which will be able to replace their existing well water with Devens water, which is treated for perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

Engineer Tom Mahanna said the water main portion of the project, which runs the full length of Depot Road, is more than 90% complete. He added that all but two service connections to the homes and businesses along the road had been installed, and those two were scheduled to be completed last week. The sitework, foundation, and utility work

for the pump station, to be constructed across the railroad tracks at the end of Depot Road, is also done, and underground plumbing will be installed over the next month.

As soon as the weather gets warmer, construction on the building will start, and it should be finished by early spring. Work will then move to the interior of the station, where electricity, plumbing, and a bathroom need to be installed.

Good news about the budget came from engineer Mary Danielson, who said the available contingency for the project is still $300,000. The biggest change order to date, she said, was for the bathroom, which had to be added after design was complete when state building codes changed. Danielson added that she doesn't anticipate any future expensive change orders.

The commission then briefly discussed betterment fees, which are charged to property owners whose property values benefit from a municipal project such as water or sewer installation. There are 37 homes and businesses along Depot Road that could connect to the new water main, and all are likely to be charged a betterment fee. Town Administrator Dan Nason told the Press that money from betterment fees would go into the Water Enterprise fund and be used to pay down the loan that is financing the project.

Department of Public Works Director David Smith said he had researched betterment fees for water service in neighboring towns, and, based on that data, he suggested a fee of $25,000 for residential properties and $50,000 for commercial properties. Smith also suggested a connection fee of between $5,000 and $7,000, depending on the size of the pipe needed for the connection.

There were some questions about six properties with large setbacks near the Devens end of Depot Road. Nason told the commission those homes would need to install their own shared water main to connect to the service. Water Commission Chair Cindy Russo questioned whether those residents should have to pay the same betterment fee since they will have to pay for a share of a dedicated water main.

Russo also expressed concern that the people who are benefitting the most from this project are the 100 or so customers who currently rely on town water, which is contaminated with PFAS, and there is no plan to charge those residents a betterment fee.

The commission agreed to discuss betterment fees at its next meeting, which has not yet been scheduled.