

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC UTILITIES

D.P.U. 23-65

HOUSATONIC WATER WORKS COMPANY

DIRECT TESTIMONY OF MARK PRUHENSKI
ON BEHALF OF TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON

1 **Please state your name and business address.**

2 Mark Pruhenski, Town Hall, 334 Main Street, Great Barrington, MA 01230.

3 **What is your position with the Town of Great Barrington?**

4 I am the Town Manager, appointed by the Selectboard, and have held that position
5 since June 1, 2019.

6 **As Town Manager, do you have any duties or official interactions with the**
7 **Housatonic Water Works Company or customers of the company?**

8 As the Town's chief administrative officer, I do interface with the Housatonic
9 Water Works Company ("HWWC"), with respect to water service to its customers.
10 In addition, the office of the Town Manager is generally the central point of
11 contact for residents who want to express an opinion or comment to the Town,
12 either in general, or to the Selectboard in particular; and I typically receive and
13 review those opinions and comments.

14 **Are you aware that public comments have been submitted to the Department**
15 **of Public Utilities (DPU) in connection with the HWWC's current rate**
16 **increase petition?**

17 Yes.

1 Is there any connection or relationship between the public comments
2 submitted to the DPU and any comments or opinions received in the office of
3 the Town Manager?

4 Yes, many of the comments submitted to the DPU include issues and concerns that
5 have been identified in prior comments to the Town or Selectboard.

6 What are those issues and concerns?

7 They relate to water service and customer payment of water rates and include:
8 complaints that water from the tap is brown; financial strain, or hardship for
9 customers to pay water use fees; residents stating that they believe they must use
10 bottled water and/or filters for HWWC-supplied water on account of concerns with
11 the quality of water supplied by the HWWC; the water meter reading system
12 adopted by the HWWC not operating so as to properly transmit water use data;
13 fear about drinking the water supplied by the HWWC; damage to home appliances,
14 such as washing machines and dishwashers from brown and discolored water;
15 insufficient water pressure in hydrants designated for firefighting purposes;
16 compliance with water quality requirements of the Department of Environmental
17 Protection (DEP), including the presence of chemicals or other substances in the
18 water, such as haloacetic acid; responsiveness to customer inquiries and requests
19 on service issues; customer expenses and work arounds to avoid bodily harm or
20 damage to or staining of fabrics or furnishings from HWWC-supplied water, such
21 as avoiding showers, purchasing bottled water for drinking, and taking white
22 laundry items to a commercial laundry; and the request that no water rates be
23 increased until water quality has improved.

24 Did you attend the public hearing conducted by the DPU in Great Barrington
25 for this case on September 26, 2023?

26 Yes.

1 **At that public hearing, the chair of the Selectboard, Stephen Bannon, made a**
2 **statement and referenced the role of both the DPU and the DEP in connection**
3 **with the rate increase request. Why is the role of the DEP important to the**
4 **Town in this case?**

5 The HWWC has made statements that a substantial reason for the rate increase
6 being requested is system improvements required in order to comply with
7 requirements of the DEP. From the Town's perspective, it is very important that
8 DEP-required improvements actually take place in the time required and achieve
9 the intended result if customers will be required to pay the increased rates that are
10 proposed to fund that work.

11 **Does the Town have any particular requests with respect to the factor of DEP**
12 **regulatory requirements in this rate case?**

13 Yes, it is the Town's strongly held position that the DPU should obtain as much
14 information as possible regarding improvements and proposed costs related to DEP
15 requirements so that to the extent any rate increase amount is related to work being
16 required or directed by the DEP, there is an accurate and complete record of costs
17 actually associated with meeting the DEP requirement.

18 **Are there any other Town concerns with respect to the proposed rate increase**
19 **that you would like to note?**

20 Yes. An obvious and major concern is the amount of the proposed increase. It is
21 nearly 120% on the average residential customer's bill. It would be unfair, if not
22 impossible, to many of the customers to allow such an increase to take place all at
23 once. Any rate increase approved by the DPU should be on a phased basis, so that
24 customers will have some opportunity to adjust to the additional charges, and so
25 that there can be oversight of the timing of the proposed system improvements, as
26 well as satisfactory completion of those improvements.

1 Another concern is unnecessary or wasteful expenditures by the HWWC. From a
2 review of the 2022 annual report to the DPU, there appear to be opportunities for a
3 reallocation of resources that could make funds available for the improvement
4 projects the HWWC has identified. As Selectman Bannon stated at the September
5 26 public hearing the Town understands the need for, and endorses, upgrades to the
6 HWWC system, but payment for those upgrades should not come solely from
7 increased customer rates. Customers are already burdened enough, and any rate
8 increase should reflect a reduction of the HWWC request by redirecting the use of
9 existing HWWC revenue sources.

10 **Does this conclude your testimony?**

11 Yes.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, David J. Doneski, hereby certify that I served the foregoing Direct Testimony upon all parties of record or counsel for the same in accordance with 220 CMR 1.05(1), including:

William E. Martin, Esq.
Martin, Oliveira & Hamel, P.C.
75 South Church Street, Suite 550
Pittsfield, MA 01201

Jed M. Nosal, Esq.
Jesse S. Reyes, Esq.
Womble Bond Dickinson (US) LLP
Independence Wharf
470 Atlantic Avenue
Boston, MA 02210

Bryan W. Bertram, Esq.
Miyares Harrington
40 Grove Street, Suite 190
Wellesley, MA 02482

Timothy D. Zessin, Esq.
KP Law, P.C.
101 Arch Street
Boston, MA 02110

Joseph W. Rogers, Esq.
William C. Rose, Esq.
Asst. Attorneys General
Massachusetts Attorney General
Office of Ratepayer Advocacy
One Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108

DATED: 11/14/23



David J. Doneski