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Study of the Three Chelmsford Water Districts

Status Update to the Select Board & Town Manager

Prepared by Capital Strategic Solutions:

William G. Keegan, Jr. | Senior Project Manager

Mary Ellen Kelley | Senior Project Manager

John DeLuca | Senior Project Manager

Purpose of the Study…

- Assess existing conditions and performance of all three Water Districts
- Identify opportunities for coordination and efficiency
- Evaluate shared services and consolidation options
- Provide clear, actionable recommendations

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Districts Evaluated

East Chelmsford Water District	Chelmsford Water District	North Chelmsford Water District

Each district operates independently with:

- Elected 3-member boards (staggered terms)
- Separate budgets and rate structures
- Varying staffing levels and operations
- Independent infrastructure and capital planning

Work Completed to Date

Document Review

- *Bylaws, budgets, capital plans, reports, policies*

Stakeholder Engagement

- *Town Manager and District leadership interviewed*

Data Collection

- *Governance, staffing, infrastructure, finances*
- *ECWD data collection still in progress*

Preliminary Analysis

- *Initial comparisons (primarily CWD & NCWD)*

Governance (Preliminary)

- Independent operations with limited coordination
- Similar board structures across all three Districts
- Administrative capacity varies significantly
- Opportunities for shared admin services
- Inconsistent strategic planning approaches

Operations (Preliminary)

- Staffing levels and certifications vary
- Preventative maintenance is inconsistent
- Limited emergency systems in place
- System maintenance relies on small teams

Infrastructure (Preliminary)

- Asset age and condition varies widely
- Some systems nearing end of life
- Existing interconnections lack redundancy
- Capital needs in general are significant

Financials (Preliminary)

- Rate structures have some similarities, annual bills are not drastically different, only ECWD does not have a base fee of some sort
- Reserves are limited and not planned by policy
- Debt levels vary considerably - is not part of a long-term investment plan
- Capital funding needs are not viewed strategically

Financials (Preliminary)

- Budget structures for CWD and NCWD have almost identical expenditure types and categories
- Benefit costs are increasing and could benefit from joint administration
- Revenue categories are also similar, more than 90% of revenue is from rates
- Financial sustainability is unplanned

Emerging Themes

- Increasing regulatory demands (PFAS, cybersecurity)
- Uneven infrastructure burdens across all three Districts
- Opportunities for shared services and procurement
- Potential long-term administrative, operational and financial benefits from consolidation

Further Analysis Needed

- Asset condition assessment
- Capital planning and cost projections needed for all three Districts combined
- Budget assessment and rate modeling (in process)
- Legislative Solution Needed
- Engineered interconnection feasibility
- Billing and customer service system alignment
- Consolidated Staffing and Organizational plan

Study Progress

1. **Interviews** – Completed
2. **Data Collection** – Near completion (ECWD pending)
3. **Comparative Analysis** – Will be finalized by 3/31/26
4. **Recommendations** – In development but will stress the need for consolidation
5. **Draft Report** – Targeting May 2026 for completion

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Key Takeaways

- Study is progressing; delays due to data collection gaps
- Clear operational differences exist across the Districts
- Strong opportunities for coordination and efficiency
- Long-term sustainability for each District to operate independently appears unlikely
- Consolidation is the most logical path to maintain existing service
- Regulatory pressures will challenge independent operations

THANK YOU!

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