

**Richmond Regional Water Workgroup
Meeting 3 Summary**

September 29, 2026, 9:00am - 12:00pm
Richmond Water Treatment Plant
3920 Douglasdale Road, Richmond, VA 23221

Overview: The General Assembly passed HB 30 including provisions for a group process around the Richmond regional utility issue. This was the third meeting of the Richmond Regional Water Workgroup.

The Workgroup is charged with the following per HB30, Item 283:

The Richmond Regional Water Workgroup shall: (i) review and make recommendations concerning the program for maintenance of and capital improvements and repairs to the City of Richmond's Water Treatment Plant to ensure its reliability as a supplier of drinking water; (ii) review and make recommendations concerning the staffing, operations, and long term sustainability of the City of Richmond's Water Treatment Plant to ensure its reliability as a supplier of drinking water; (iii) review and identify compliance concerns for any party to a wholesale water contractual agreement for the provision of drinking water; and (iv) prepare, publish, and deliver a report of its findings, recommendations, and use of funding in this Item to the Governor, the Chair of the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee and the Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, and the chief elected officers of the City of Richmond, and the counties of Chesterfield, Hanover, and Henrico each year by November 1. The Workgroup shall continue to monitor compliance with the grant agreement until all funds provided in this Item have been disbursed and the projects for which the funds were provided have been completed, or until such time as any other state funds appropriated or granted for the Richmond Water Treatment Plant are similarly disbursed and executed.

The meeting was organized by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and facilitated by mediators from the University of Virginia's Institute for Engagement & Negotiation (IEN). What follows is a high-level summary of key areas of discussion. Comments and key areas of discussion are paraphrased and summarized, without attribution.

Attendee List:

Workgroup:

John Budesky – County Administrator, Hanover County.
Kevin A. Catlin – County Administrator, County of Chesterfield
Bentley Chan – Director of Public Utilities, Henrico
Odie Donald II – Chief Administrative Officer, City of Richmond
Matt Longshore – Director of Public Utilities, Hanover County
Jeff McBride – Director of Water and Admin, City of Richmond
Scott Morris – Director of Public Utilities, City of Richmond, Vice-Chair of the Workgroup
Matt Rembold – Director of Utilities, Chesterfield County
Dwayne Roadcap – Director of Office of Drinking Water, VDH, Chair of the Workgroup
Bret Schardein – Deputy County Administrator, Hanover County
Sandra Whitehead – Director of Architecture and Professional Services, Virginia Department of General Services (DGS)
Steven Yob – Deputy County Manager, Henrico County

Subject Matter Experts:

Jessica Cooper – Legal Counsel, VDH

Lee Crowell – Deputy Director of Public Utilities, City of Richmond

Bailey Davis – Chief of Field Operations, VDH

Anthony Hess – Director FCAP, VDH

Rhonda Johnson, Public Information Officer, City of Richmond

James Reynolds – Field Director, Richmond Field Office, VHD

Katie Sallee – Executive Assistant, VDH

Tony Singh – DPU Deputy Director, City of Richmond

Jarrett Talley – Director TCDO, VDH

Mediation Team: [Institute for Engagement & Negotiation, University of Virginia Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service](#)

Tanya Denckla Cobb, Director

Kristina Weaver, Project Consultant

Sophie Delzell, Project Consultant

Tanya Denckla Cobb (IEN) called the meeting to order and provided an overview of the agenda.

- I. **Approve Meeting 2 Summary:** A motion was made, and seconded, to approve the Meeting 2 summary.
 - All aye (unanimous).
- II. **Updates from Meeting 2:** The Chair described the VDH Due Diligence Memo that was circulated to Workgroup members ahead of the second meeting. In follow up to the request raised in Meeting 2 that VDH conduct due diligence and provide assurance, VDH met with the City of Richmond and reviewed the City's budget. Having done so, VDH expressed confidence that the City would not be supplanting funds with the proposed VDH award for the filter upgrade capital improvement the Workgroup recommended in Meeting 2. As part of its report out, the Chair explained that VDH learned the City's budgeted estimate of potential General Assembly (GA) funding was higher than the actual amount given, and as a result the City will need to adjust its rates in Fiscal Year 2028 to make up the deficit. The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is not changing as a result of VDH funding, and projects are not being reprioritized. Discussion items included:
 - One member questioned the budget numbers in the memo, expressing some confusion as to what the various figures indicate. It was clarified that the estimated cost of the filter upgrade project is \$43.8 million. Projects are funded through multiple streams including grants, potential rate increases, and locality shares. The reason why the City will receive only \$19.9M (less than its original anticipated funding of \$27.27M) is because the \$32.8M grant for the filter upgrade project will be allocated according to the different agreements with partner localities. So, Hanover's share of the filter upgrade project \$32.8M will be 15.15% and Chesterfield's share will be 24.24%. Henrico's contract is structured differently. That leaves the City's share of funding for the filter upgrade project at \$19.9M, less than the City estimate in its proposal of \$27.27M. Therefore, DPU's current financial plan has a deficit of \$7.4M. This will be funded through fees from customers, wholesale contributions, and grants.
 - It was acknowledged that the wording of the Due Diligence Memo could have been written more clearly, but VDH affirmed that from its perspective it is satisfied that the assurance of no supplanting of funds has been met. No further objections were raised.
- III. **Review of Legislative Charge and Meeting Requests:** The Chair reviewed the legislative charge for the Workgroup, including the requirement for six meetings each year. Discussion items included:
 - The City is continuing to work on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for funding. The Draft MOU has been sent to City Council and is in final review. It could take up to 60 days for approval. When the City has reviewed, they will send the MOU to VDH and the State Commissioner of Health to sign. Once the MOU is in place, the City can be reimbursed for expenses related to the filter upgrade project.
 - The timeline for the Workgroup process is rapid. The MOU was expected by August 31st, and the Report is due by November 1st. These timelines are challenging to meet.
 - The Workgroup is charged with discussing capital improvements and repairs, staffing, operations, long-term sustainability, and compliance concerns. This third Workgroup meeting is focused on compliance. The Workgroup will discuss the remaining issues of repairs, staffing, operations, and long-term sustainability in future meetings.
 - The Workgroup is expected to meet six times each year for the duration of the City's filter upgrade project. One member suggested that some of these meetings be hard hat tours of

the work in progress. This would be possible in a closed session to allow for observation and discussion of critical infrastructure.

- Participation in the Workgroup is a large time commitment and is appreciated by VDH. The Workgroup has accomplished a great deal of work in a short time, from managing logistics and developing technical materials to conducting a site visit and reaching a clear recommendation on one key aspect of its charge.
- Are there consequences if the Workgroup cannot meet six times before the end of the calendar year?
 - The Budget Bill does not specify any consequences, and the intent is to be as diligent as possible in fulfilling all aspects of the charge while also not just holding meetings for the sake of checking the box.
- Could the year referred to in the Budget Bill be a fiscal year or a calendar year?
 - Not clear, but the Chair has been operating under the assumption that “year” means calendar year.
- Meetings will happen when there are updates and items to discuss. The Chair is trying to meet deadlines and expectations, while balancing the need for meetings to be purposeful, productive, and not overly burdensome.
- Could meetings be held remotely?
 - This would be an option for some meetings moving forward, but the Workgroup will need to adopt a policy for virtual meetings to satisfy Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requirements. While specific requirements need to be consulted, the working understanding is that virtual meetings can only be held twice each year and cannot be held back-to-back.
 - VDH will draft a policy to adopt virtual meetings as an option for the Workgroup in time to review and potentially approve at the next meeting.

IV. Compliance Discussion and Initial Overview of Staffing Changes: VDH and the City jointly presented compliance updates for the City’s Water Treatment Plant (WTP). The presentation slide deck is enclosed as an appendix; in brief, the presentation covered the following: Eighteen months have passed since WTP’s failure in January 2025. Since then, the City has made significant improvements to resolve issues and is now 94% compliant. The City compiled a list of 233 items to resolve, 219 of which have been resolved. The failure points from the 2025 water crisis have been addressed, and remaining work is primarily comprised of 13 capital improvement projects that are underway according to their required timelines. The City has hired more staff, created Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and installed automatic transfer switches on backup generators. VDH noted that the culture at the WTP has shifted from one of reactivity to proactivity, which will help to sustain improvements over time. The City has made staffing changes, including hiring additional operators and an emergency coordinator. A significant amount of discussion covered these staffing changes and the positive impacts they are having on operations. The City’s Lead-Free Water Program is in progress to replace lead lines around the City. The City holds weekly check-ins to proactively manage potential issues, including weather and system maintenance. The City has received recognition from water sector associations, including the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies and the Virginia Water Environment Association. Discussion items included:

- Does VDH survey the WTP every year?
 - Usually every three years, but more attention has been devoted to Richmond’s plant after the crisis. The City submits quarterly reports to VDH with updates on projects and status.

- During the Byrd Park reservoir upgrades, how will the City maintain water?
 - The City is working proactively and using lessons learned from the water crisis. The upgrades are being done during a lower demand period, and other reservoirs will be held at higher levels. Additional projects including the feeder channel dredging will improve capacity for water pumping.
- VDH feels confident about the water quality provided by the City. During the crisis, VDH observed siloed operations and other issues. The City has made institutional changes, including building the culture and leadership that will help address future issues. Leaders and staff are proactive and communicative.
- Localities expressed appreciation for the increased communication from the City.
- How is the City treating lead and copper?
 - The City aims to maintain neutrality to prevent corrosion. The City's website has an interactive mapper. The City is making progress to identify lead and copper lines.
- Is there still concern about water pressure?
 - The experience of the 2025 water crisis was traumatic and will perpetually remain a concern because the City wants to continue to take all necessary precautions to prevent another crisis from happening. VDH believes there is a striking difference between the old and new leadership and culture. The City has a "healthy fear" and continued focus on emergency management. As an illustration of this, the City is currently coordinating a series of tabletop exercises to drill emergency preparedness and create a muscle memory for emergency situations.
- Localities expressed appreciation of the shared knowledge around improved standard operating procedures (SOPs), many of which have been shared between localities.
- Of the 233 projects, have the low hanging ones been addressed?
 - Yes, for the most part. There are 14 outstanding, all but one are capital improvement projects. All should be completed by 2029.
- The IEN mediators pressed Workgroup members on the issue of whether they have any specific outstanding concerns or recommendations related to compliance; none were raised.

V. **Next Steps:** IEN noted that this is the final meeting for which the mediation team had been retained to support the Workgroup's process. IEN then led the group in a discussion of next steps, including the final report and future meetings.

- The report is due by November 1st. IEN will draft and circulate a report for comment by November 9th. The Workgroup and VDH will review the report concurrently. The report will then be sent to VDH's Secretary's office for review. This typically takes up to 60 days, but a quicker turnaround is necessary to meet the November 1st deadline. The Workgroup would benefit from a brief meeting to discuss edits to the report once it has been circulated. VDH will send out a poll for Workgroup members to find an hour of time for a review meeting between October 13-16. That meeting will need to be in-person because a motion to hold virtual meetings has not yet been drafted and approved. VDH can prepare to have that ready at the next in-person meeting.
- The Meeting 3 summary could be approved in the October meeting or could be included in the Final Report as a draft, if necessary.
- How will the report address staffing, operations, and other items not discussed?
 - Next year's report will include this information after additional meetings are held. This report will provide updates on the topics discussed.

- The compliance discussion introduced the topic of staffing, which will continue to be discussed in future meetings.
- The report should highlight the accomplishments of the Workgroup, including that it began discussions of the staffing and sustainability issues, and make it clear what work is continuing.
- The quicker that the Workgroup can finalize the report, the faster it can be sent for executive review.

VI. **Closing Remarks:** The Chair acknowledged the great work accomplished by the Workgroup, noted the tasks ahead, and thanked all for their time and commitment to this process. The Vice Chair noted that he appreciates the time committed by members.

The meeting was adjourned.

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Appendix – VDH memo, technical presentation

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