



# TOWN OF BURLINGTON

## *Department of Public Works*

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### MEMO

**To:** Town Meeting

**From:** Brian White, Director of Public Works

**Date:** September 29, 2025

### **Re: Water System Capacity and Water Ban Update**

#### **1. Purpose of the Water Ban**

- The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) has mandated a water ban due to the activation of the emergency water connection with Lexington.
- This emergency connection was opened because water demand exceeded the system's production capacity, resulting in decreased storage in water tanks and concerns about maintaining adequate pressure and fire flow.
- MassDEP requires a water ban whenever an emergency connection is used and mandates evidence that the emergency has been resolved.
- We are in communication with MassDEP and anticipate the ban will be lifted within the next one to two months.

#### **2. Factors Contributing to the Water Ban**

- **High Water Demand:**
  - Water usage reached 5.03 million gallons per day (MGD), the highest since 2020 (5.14 MGD) and 2016 (5.11 MGD).
  - These elevated demands reflect periods when water conservation measures were not prioritized.
- **Mill Pond Capacity:**
  - The operational capacity of Mill Pond is still being optimized following the implementation of the PFAS treatment system.
  - Although the PFAS filter project may seem established, it is still in the early stages of operational refinement. The permitting process included a six-month small-scale pilot study, and the full-scale system, operational for over two years, requires ongoing adjustments to determine its maximum capacity.

#### **3. Future Outlook for Water System Capacity**

- The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) project remains ongoing.
- Phase 2A (Lexington construction), which was completed in 2023, primarily focused on replacing the capacity of the Vine Brook Treatment Facility, which had PFAS exceedances, other emerging contaminants, and failing wells. This phase ensures a more reliable and compliant source water.
- Phase 2B, which began construction in September 2025 and is expected to be completed in 2026, aims to increase system capacity and redundancy to minimize future water concerns and emergencies.





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- A zoning article proposed for the September 2025 Town Meeting has raised public concerns about system capacity. The proposed development is not expected to significantly increase system demand and is believed to be manageable, especially if reasonable water conservation measures are followed during summer months. Additionally, the project's completion is anticipated several years after Phase 2B, which is expected to significantly enhance system capacity.

#### **4. Future Water Restrictions**

- Water bans will not be eliminated entirely due to requirements associated with the MWRA connection.
- The MWRA connection permit requires Burlington to adopt the Massachusetts Drought Management Plan for our region. The drought management plan, based on the drought declaration issued by the state's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) requires enforced watering restrictions despite the capacity of a water system.
- Burlington's Drought Plan, based on Mill Pond reservoir levels, may also trigger watering restrictions.
- Emergencies, such as taking the Greenleaf water tank offline (the primary storage tank), could necessitate restrictions, including a full water ban.
- The redundancy provided by MWRA Phase 2B will reduce the likelihood of full bans, with progressive restrictions based on drought status and reservoir levels being more likely.

