

COLCHESTER FIRE DISTRICT No. 3

428 Main Street
Colchester, Vermont 05446
802-878-4337

February 2022

Over sixty years ago, residents of the Town of Colchester approached the Town with the idea of developing a potable water supply system for domestic use and fire protection. There was little municipal interest at that time, so these forward-thinking residents organized Fire Districts as separate municipal entities within the larger municipality, and raised funds to construct water supply infrastructure including water storage facilities, water mains, fire hydrants, valves, services and meters to serve area customers. They established Prudential Committees to manage these water systems and developed bylaws, construction standards, budgets and billing systems for their Districts. Colchester's three (3) Fire Districts plus two smaller, private water system including Mallett's Bay Water Company and Colchester Town still provide potable water to the majority of residential and commercial users throughout our Town. While most cities and towns own and manage their water systems, Colchester has five (5) separate water systems within its borders.

Colchester Fire District No. 3 purchases water from Champlain Water District (CWD), a nationally recognized leader in drinking water quality and resells this water to our users at a fair price. CFD No. 3 operates under the direction of a volunteer 3-member Prudential Committee and one Clerk/Treasurer, with distribution system maintenance services currently contracted to CWD's retail division. Given this Fire District's growth over the years, the age of its Prudential Committee members and constant workload associated with running a water system, our business model is no longer sustainable.

The past few years have been busy for Fire Districts in Colchester. The Prudential Committee for CFD No. 1, which serves the Saint Michael's area, also realized their business model was unsustainable and at the beginning of this year merged both its water distribution system infrastructure and maintenance services operations with CWD. In September of last year, CFD No. 3 secured a maintenance contract with CWD's retail division after our 15-year history with CFD No. 2 was abruptly terminated. CWD now owns and manages three (3) of the five (5) water systems in Colchester, including Malletts Bay Water, Colchester Town and CFD No. 1. After reviewing all our options, the Prudential Committee believes our users will be better served by a similar arrangement with CWD. We are asking the members of CFD No. 3 to vote on the following ballot item: Dissolve CFD No. 3 and transfer all its assets & liabilities to Champlain Water District.

Colchester residents will have a voice in the operation of CWD, as our elected District member, Karen Richard, serves as Vice Chair on the CWD Board of Commissioners with her alternate being Aaron Frank, Colchester Town Manager. In the future, CWD plans to transfer ownership of infrastructure (water mains, hydrants, valves, etc.) to the Town and continue operations management for them if desired. This is the present model for CWD with South Burlington and has worked well for decades. We believe that consolidating separate Town water systems under the direction of a professional water system with demonstrated managerial and technical expertise will ensure clean, safe, affordable water for domestic use and fire protection.

There will be an informational meeting on March 22nd at 7:00 PM at the Town's White Meeting House at 830 Main Street to discuss this proposal. We will address questions in addition to the FAQs listed below. A formal vote will be at our Colchester Fire District No. 3 office on March 29th between 7 AM to 7 PM. Your Prudential Committee asks that you to vote in favor of our recommendation to dissolve CFD No. 3 and transfer all assets and liabilities to CWD beginning July 1, 2022.

Prudential Committee: Jay Riedinger (Chair), Mike Chmielewski and Steve Roy
Clerk/Treasurer: Marianne Terrien

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

Q: When will this change occur?

A: With majority voter approval, the dissolution/acquisition will occur July 1, 2022.

Q: Who will I call if there's a problem with my water service?

A: CFD No. 3's phone number (802) 878-4337 will be forwarded to CWD (802) 864-7454. CWD will continue to provide service to you 24/7.

Q: What will this do to my water rates?

A: If approved, CWD has said that rates will remain the same for fiscal year 2023, starting July 1. Our rates typically increase by a small percentage each year based on CWD's wholesale water costs its users plus increases in labor and material costs. Given the fiscal responsibility we've seen from CWD on wholesale rates over many decades, your Prudential Committee is confident they will continue our typical practice into the future.

Q: Why are you doing this?

A: Our business model with a single employee and volunteer Prudential Committee that formally meets monthly but communicates frequently is no longer sustainable. Continued growth in Colchester Fire District No. 3 will necessitate additional staff and maintenance services if we remain a separate entity. We have reviewed all our options (additional staff, merger with other entities, etc.) and firmly believe CWD is the right partner to move us into the future. In other words, our Fire District has run its course and it's time to move on.

Q: What will happen to the office building?

A: All of our assets and liabilities will be transferred to CWD, including the present office building. CWD will use it as a material storage area and satellite office for now and will coordinate with the Town to maintain access to the park. If the Town of Colchester takes over the water systems, CWD will look to maintain a material storage area in Colchester. CWD will consider turning the building over to the Town as long as a suitable storage facility was provided by the Town.

Q: Why isn't the Town taking it over CFD No. 3 now, instead of CWD?

A: The Prudential Committee discussed this option with the Town and were told they are not prepared to take ownership of water systems at this time. This will be a discussion going forward with CWD.

We thank you in advance for your attention to this important issue and again ask for your support to follow the Prudential Committee's recommendation.