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New Water Treatment Plant to Filter PFAS

LITTLETON, Mass. (June 16, 2021) – The Littleton Water Department broke ground today on a new water treatment plant to remove PFAS chemical compounds, first discovered at elevated levels in one drinking water source in 2019, prompting an immediate shut down of the impacted well.

"This project is critical to improving the quality and supply of water in Littleton and ensuring the community has safe drinking water for years to come," said Nick Lawler, General Manager of the Littleton Electric Light & Water Departments. "We thank the Baker-Polito Administration, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, our federal and state legislative delegation, town officials and most importantly, our residents for their support as we've implemented short-term and long-term strategies to ensure the delivery of safe and reliable drinking water."

"I'd like to thank the people of Littleton for their overwhelming support for this project, including multiple Town Meeting votes on funding. By building one plant to remove PFAS, iron and manganese, we are going to get the most out of our money. With this plant, we will be able to continue to deliver clean water to the residents," said James Karr, chairman of the Littleton Board of Water Commissioners.

State environmental officials, the Littleton legislative delegation and town officials gathered today at the Whitcomb Avenue site for a groundbreaking ceremony. The 10,500-square-foot water treatment plant will remove PFAS, iron and manganese from two Whitcomb Avenue wells and the well at Spectacle Pond.

"We are delighted on behalf of the Baker-Polito Administration and MassDEP to work with the Littleton Water Department, which addressed the local PFAS problem early," said MassDEP Commissioner Martin Suuberg. "MassDEP will continue to work with communities on testing, and if there are issues, on solutions."

The plant will have a total capacity of 1.8 million gallons per day. The project includes the ongoing construction of a 3.5-mile underground transmission main to transport Spectacle Pond well water to the new treatment plant.

“PFAS chemicals can pose serious health threats, especially to those drinking contaminated water. I’m grateful to the leaders in Littleton who are addressing this issue with urgency and utilizing partnerships with the state and federal government to clean up their drinking water as soon as possible,” said Congresswoman Lori Trahan. “It’s also time for the federal government to do more to safeguard the health of our communities with clean water. That’s why the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which I’m a member of, is working to advance long overdue PFAS legislation to prevent folks like those in Littleton from being exposed again in the future.”

The \$24.5 million project was supported by the Littleton Select Board, Board of Health, Conservation Commission, Finance Committee and Town Meeting. It will be financed through the State Revolving Fund Loan Program with a zero percent interest rate. Littleton Water also received a \$200,000 grant from the state Department of Environmental Protection to offset some of the engineering and design costs. Construction is expected to be completed in Spring 2023.

"I am so happy to be a part of Littleton's state-of-the-art PFAS filtration plant groundbreaking. I appreciate the dedication, hard work, and commitment of Nick Lawler, General Manager of LELWD, and the persistence of the Board of Commissioners, to ensure the delivery of safe, clean drinking water to Littleton residents," said State Senator Jamie Eldridge (D-Acton).

In 2019, the water department’s proactive testing discovered PFAS at 25 parts per trillion in the Spectacle Pond well, above the state limit of 20 ppt. In response, LELWD stopped pumping from the Spectacle Pond well while it developed short-term and long-term solutions. In the short-term, LELWD reduced the use of the Spectacle Pond well as much as possible, and when it was used, the water was blended with water from the Beaver Brook wells to reduce the PFAS below the state limit. The long-term solution is to build a new treatment plant, which will result in all Littleton water being treated prior to distribution.

Despite the presence of PFAS in the Spectacle Pond well, Littleton’s public water supply is a safe and reliable source of drinking water. Regular testing shows Littleton’s water, as delivered to consumers, meets all MassDEP standards and is safe for all consumers.

Last fall, MassDEP adopted new limits on PFAS in public water and required public water suppliers to begin testing. Across the Commonwealth, public water suppliers are finding PFAS levels that exceed the new regulations. In this area, Acton, Ayer, Shirley, Chelmsford and others have elevated PFAS levels in their drinking water supplies.

PFAS is an acronym for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, a family of chemical compounds known for their non-stick properties and resistance to breaking down in the environment. PFAS have been linked to numerous health effects with state regulators cautioning pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, infants and immunosuppressed individuals to avoid consuming water with PFAS levels above 20 ppt.

More information is available at www.lclwd.com/pfas or by calling LWD at 978-540-2222.

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