

## Minutes of Meeting with LI American Water

Attendance: 185 citizens of Malverne, Malverne Oaks, West Hempstead, Valley Stream and Lynbrook, including Bill Varley, President of LIAW and 5 members of LI American Water, Mayor MacDonald, Trustee Joe Hennessy, Trustee Mike Bailey, Assemblyman Brian Curran and the Malverne Civic Association Board of Directors.

Press coverage was provided by the Malverne Patch, the Malverne Herald, PIX News, and FOX5 News

Tom Grech, Malverne resident and past president of the Malverne Civic Association, is the originator of the Facebook page "I love Malverne but hate the brown water" and organizer of tonight's event. Tom opened the meeting with an introduction, agenda, and ground rules to keep the event civil and dignified.

Bill Varley was introduced and gave a background of his credentials. He stated that he is "accountable to us", the customers, for any problems with the water quality. In a good faith effort, he appeared at the Malverne Village Board Meeting this month to explain the problems. He stated that Mayor MacDonald and the board were not aware that there was a delay in opening the plant in Malverne. Mr. Varley took responsibility for not informing the Village and his customers about the delay in the opening of the plant and apologized for his oversight.

An explanation was given for the iron concentration in water on the south shore of Long Island, and a reassurance that iron in the water is safe, and poses only aesthetic problems. The Federal Government sets acceptable limits of iron in the water (1.5 parts per million) above which iron eliminating plants must be built. Up to 1.5 parts per million can be sequestered with chemical agents. Malverne's water supply currently contains both. He further explained that heating the water over 120 degrees will cause a chemical break-down, releasing the iron out of solution. That is the explanation of the brown color to the hot water, while the cold remains clear.

Mr., Varley addressed the fact that PIX News tested Malverne water and found it to be ten times over the limit. He claimed that water from the hot water heater will have higher concentrations, due to the storage of quantities of water at temperatures above 120 degrees.

At this point, the floor was opened for a question and answer session.

**Question:** Is it possible to have clear water with the current facilities, once they are fully functional?

**Answer:** After going into detail on the capital investments of LI American Water, Mr. Varley did finally state "Yes". During his answer, Mr. Varley stated that another plant is scheduled for Malverne in the near future. LI American Water has invested \$15 million in capital improvements. Next week, all of Malverne will be flushed (weather permitting).

Discussion was had at this time regarding the new facility in Malverne. It is "off-line" due to a problem with the curing of the pipe. LI American Water has been working with the contractor to correct this issue, and is confident that the facility will be "on-line" in four to five weeks. Information will be posted

on the LI American Water website to let our residents know where flushing has occurred, as well as to broadcast progress on getting the Malverne facility “on-line”. Mr. Varley is confident that this will reach a positive conclusion.

**Question:** Who’s paying for this? How much will our rates go up? Where will our home values go due to this brown water issue, and the publicity generated about it?

**Answer:** The rate payers will be paying for all capital improvements to the water system. The cost is spread among all LI American Water customers, not just those immediately affected by the project. Mr. Varley has no idea how much our rates will increase, which was challenged vehemently by the resident. Mr. Varley doesn’t think this issue should affect home values, because iron deposits are an island-wide phenomena.

**Question:** Will these solutions to Malverne’s water quality issues affect neighboring towns (West Hempstead was mentioned in particular).

**Answer:** Any improvement to the water delivery system will have an effect on customers in other areas. Mr. Varley specifically mentioned that the positive effects will be felt in Inwood. His point was that W Hempstead and the surrounding areas should also see improvement in water quality.

**Question:** A STATEMENT A LI American Water customer service representative came to the resident’s home and told them they needed extensive plumbing work. At this point, several residents shouted out and stated that phone reps told them to change their water heaters.

**Answer:** Mr. Varley asked that anyone affected in this way give their name to his assistant so he could “investigate” the issue. A statement was made by his representative that filters are “consumer’s choice” and completely unnecessary. They are not required by the health department. LI American Water cannot check them. They have no control. A filter was shown to the reps of LI American Water to show the extent of the residue picked up by it. The answer was “the filter is doing its’ job”. An outcry arose at that answer, as no one was satisfied that the filter should look the way it did. The resident who displayed the filter claimed the instructions call for a filter change every four to six months, and the blackened filter was only several weeks old. The rep again stated that the water is safe to drink. It was mentioned again at this point that an iron reduction plant will be built in a few years.

**Question:** Is there proof that the water is safe?

**Answer:** The annual water quality report, which LI American Water has provided for the past thirty years. They have only been required to provide it for the past ten years. At this point, more comments were shouted from the audience, the most distinct: the Health Dept needs to be approached to validate the safety of the water.

**Question:** Not everyone can ingest iron for medical reasons. Are there any other harmful chemicals in Malverne’s water?

**Answer:** We were again turned to the Annual Quality Report to see what chemicals were tested in the water supply. The taste and odor of the water was discussed. The chlorine taste and sulfur smell were singled out. It was again stated that these are aesthetic issues and that they were not harmful to the human body. When the treatment plant goes on-line, it was explained that the filtered water would mix with unfiltered water before reaching our homes. This should be sufficient to lower iron concentrations.

**Question:** What happens when you heat cold water?

**Answer:** Over time, iron will drop out of the solution of heated water.

**Question:** A STATEMENT I replaced my hot water heater two weeks ago, and the water color is still the same

**Answer:** The water is still being heated. Iron will still drop out of solution. The new plant will reduce the overall iron load.

**Question:** A statement made condemning LI American Water for lack of transparency on this issue. Will LI American Water agree to split sample testing, with half going to the Health Dept at a different facility to ensure the water quality?

**Answer:** Mr. Varley respectfully disagreed regarding transparency. He feels he has been open and honest regarding the water situation. He does acknowledge, and had previously apologized for, not informing the Village and its residents that the opening of the plant had been delayed. As for the split testing, Mr. Varley saw no problem with that, provided the health department was willing to do say testing.

**Question:** Are these tests done for infants, who are still developing, or just for adults.

**Answer:** The tests are done for adults. All Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) standards are met for approximately 130 different chemicals. After repeating the question, the answer is no, tests are NOT done for the safety of infants.

**Question:** A STATEMENT You are profiting from the sale of unacceptable water.

**Answer:** LI American Water is investing in infrastructure to improve the quality of the water. The capital investment program will be available on the website.

**Question:** Is the water testing random? Or is it specific to Malverne/W Hempstead?

**Answer:** There are several water testing sites spread throughout the service area. There are two in Malverne, one on Aberdeen and another on Ocean Ave, near Lakeview Ave. There are several in Lynbrook and several in W Hempstead.

**Question:** How much of this problem is due to the water lines being too small? How much is due to old pipes? Why hasn't the Village been given detailed plans from LI American Water? (This question was posed by Trustee Hennessy)

**Answer:** LI American Water claims that a map was provided to the Village two years ago. Work had been coordinated with road projects in our area. A little back and forth ensued and it was decided to take this issue up separately. As far as the diameter issue, LI American Water has and intends to continue to replace small diameter mains with larger ones.

**Question:** With the new plants, are you planning on adding additional chemicals?

**Answer:** No.

**Question:** This was more of a testimonial. A resident has had serious health issues for the past several years. Her liver enzymes were elevated. No reason could be found. Liver biopsy revealed a very high concentration of iron. These levels have dropped since extreme measures had been taken to filter the water into her house.

**Answer:** There is iron in many things, vitamins we take, a steak, etc. It is in our food, our water.

**Question:** Why is the water getting worse if plants are being built?

**Answer:** Iron levels increase over time, requiring more and more intervention.

**Question:** How do we know what chemicals are being put into the water?

**Answer:** There are guidelines as to acceptable levels of chlorine, lime and other chemicals.

**Question:** Is training happening for Customer Service Reps not to suggest replacing water heaters?

**Answer:** There was no real answer here. LI American Water didn't really acknowledge that their people were giving out that answer.

**Question:** Are there tests being done on the effect of skin contact, or just drinking?

**Answer:** Tests are only done for effects from drinking the water.

**Question:** How are hot spots determined?

**Answer:** Hot spots are determined by customer complaints.

**Question:** A STATEMENT I don't want to pay for water that is unacceptable to drink or bathe in. There is no competition so no accountability.

**Answer:** NYS Public Service agencies are the competition. They set guidelines and regulate the water delivery system. Every capital expenditure must be approved by them.

**Question:** What is the effect of the water quality on our appliances?

**Answer:** I don't know the answer to that question. A resident spoke up and said that she had to have her dishwasher serviced three times for excessive iron deposits in the machine. It is only a few years old. Other residents shouted their affirmation.

**Question:** Why are the competitive water company's prices so much lower in West Hempstead than LI American Water? Can I switch?

**Answer:** The public owned companies do not have to pay school taxes, etc., so appear less costly. Once that's factored out, the prices are comparable. No, switching is not an option.

**Question:** How sure are you that the facility will work once it goes on-line.

**Answer:** Positive. It works in the facilities that are already on-line.

**Question:** Is the water fluoridated?

**Answer:** No. There were some shouts from the crowd about chemicals again and the iron concentration. Mr. Varley stated that the concentration of iron is the same in the hot and cold water. It is the sequestering that makes the cold clear and the hot brown.

**Question:** Are tankless water heaters the answer?

**Answer:** There are not enough of them in service to make any real studies. There are fewer complaints from these customers, but it could be due to simply fewer customers in that category.

**Question:** How much water do we use in Malverne?

**Answer:** I don't have the figures for Malverne alone, but the total of all customers is 20 million gallons per day in winter and 55 to 60 gallons per day in summer.

**Question:** Where is the water sampling done?

**Answer:** Water is tested at the well, as it leaves the plants, and at commercial sampling locations.

**Question:** Why at commercial sites? Can it be collected from residences?

**Answer:** It is simply a matter of access. The water is the same at these sites as it is in residences.

**Question:** Why do some residents of Malverne not have a problem while so many do?

**Answer:** There are many different reasons, which is what makes it so difficult to eradicate. Where the home is, as in a dead-end versus a through street, the size and age of the pipes servicing the home, etc. all play roles in the quality of the water to the individual homes.

At the conclusion of the Q & A portion of the meeting, Mr. Varley summed up his intended actions.

- Flushing of all of Malverne next week
- Reverse calling system to notify residents of flushing schedules
- Updating of the website to keep customers apprised of company actions
- Keep investing in capital improvements

Tom Grech concluded the meeting with a request for volunteers to continue the dialogue and monitoring of the situation.