



WATER DIVISION

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John M. Driscoll, *General Manager*

T.M.L.W.P. Response to Jeff Bennett

"Concerning Templeton water main breaks first be aware every water customer pays \$353.64 per year just to receive a water bill, plus cost of water used." – Jeff Bennett circa 4-30-2025

This is a complete falsehood (lie) put onto social media by Jeff Bennett. The \$353.64 is actually the quarterly customer charge of \$88.41 four (4) times per year that each customer pays us. So far in FY2025 we have collected \$606,227.37 in these customer charges and these funds traditionally go toward the water department's cost of paying capital costs off such as bonds/loans, of which we currently have four (4). The water department's actual cost to send our customers their bills is \$3.04 per year, or \$0.76 per billing quarter. Jeff Bennett's figure is incorrect by 11,533%. How could he think it could cost Templeton Water \$88.41 to produce a bill for a customer and then mail it across town? That's pretty crazy.

"You need to go to a meeting of water commissioners and ask why the breaks keep happening and why the water mains are not replaced." – Jeff Bennett circa 4-30-2025

All are welcome, of course, at our water commissioners meetings, but questions about water main breaks in town can also be directed to General Manager John Driscoll or to Water Superintendent Scott Schwinger via email or phone. Water main breaks continue to happen in town because of the age of the infrastructure. As the bulk of our water distribution system was installed circa 1953 as asbestos-cement piped water mains, the acidity of the local ground water is a contributing factor to this pipe's gradual decay. Nearly 70% of the town's water pipes are at the end of their useful life and require replacement. It was for this reason that we have just completed the replacement of approximately 1,800 of asbestos-cement water main on Maple Street in Baldwinville (which included other water mains on School Street and Vernon Street). Maple Street was one our three (3) biggest trouble spots for water main breaks, right behind Patriots Road and Sawyer Street. This project cost our water customers approximately \$1,200,000 to be paid back over a period of 20 years on a general obligation bond, and is paying back immediate dividends to the Baldwinville area with less water main breaks.

Municipal water mains cost approximately \$2,500,000 per mile to replace in 2025, which is precisely why the water mains that we replace in town have to be done strategically on a needs basis. This is exactly why Patriots Road is the next water main replacement project that the water department will be taking on, and we are actively, with the assistance of the town's grant writer, pursuing grants through the state and federal governments to accomplish this. It is

important to remember when discussing expenses of such magnitude, that our 2,317 water customers comprise only about 60% of the town's residents and businesses. So while 100% of the town's residences and businesses pay taxes to the town, only 60% of the same pay the water department, so we are limited as to how much we can charge customers for municipal water before it becomes unreasonable. We would like nothing more than to get all of these water main replacements done in a year, but nobody would be able to afford it. Templeton Water gets no funding whatsoever from town taxation.

"Know also you have water dept. people working light dept. and vice-versa, how does an enterprise fund, Templeton water dept., keep track of actual costs to operate when they mix and match." – Jeff Bennett circa 4-30-2025

(I will do my best to respond here as this statement makes no sense).

The light and water departments are distinct and separate entities operating as municipal departments under their host town, Templeton. Thanks to the state's Special Acts of 2000 legislation the town's light and water departments were merged together for the purposes of governance and management. This allowed the light department at the time to bring their expertise in management of a municipal light department to another enterprise, water. Each department operates separately under one (1) joint Light and Water Commission of three (3) members and one (1) General Manager and has their own distinct and separate operating budget. For 2025 the operating budget for the Light Department is \$10,638,491 and for FY2025 the operating budget for the Water Department is \$2,313,003. Fourteen percent (14%) of the salaries and wages paid to the General Manager, the Business Manager and the Bookkeeper are paid by the Water Department while the remaining eighty-six percent (86%) are paid by the Light Department. This split was determined in 2000 when the Light Department was to take on the role of operating another department and a decision was made that this would allow one department to be compensated enough for the time it spent working on things for the other department. These percentages are looked at from time to time to make sure they are still in line with reality.

All of the invoices that the light and water departments receive for office supplies, fuels, transportation, insurances, maintenance, legal counsel and whatever else are paid for by the corresponding department which incurred the cost. There is no mixing where one department just pays for the cost of another, that would be illegal. If an invoice is received here for the Light and Water Departments that is not segregated per individual department then the General Manager determines what portion of each invoice is to be paid by Light and what portion of each invoice is to be paid by Water. Operating costs here are tracked closely by the General Manager in order to avoid cost overruns that could later on lead to light and/or water rate increases.

"Perhaps town meeting needs to rescind a prior vote and move water with sewer, which would be a good start." – Jeff Bennett circa 4-30-2025

First off, moving the water department back under the governance of the town's board of selectmen would have no effect on the cost of municipal water in Templeton to its water customers, nor would it have any effect on the looming costs of infrastructure improvement staring at the water department right now. The town would still only be able to use the revenues collected from municipal water billing for the water distribution system ONLY, and would not be able to use these revenues for any other town expenses. It is still an enterprise fund. Unfortunately, what you would have is a board of five (5) selectmen with no experience with the operation of a municipal department responsible for distributing and selling the most highly regulated substance on the planet Earth, drinking water.

Conversely, the members of the Light and Water Commission collectively have 71 years' worth of service as elected representatives and have been through both good and bad times for the light and water departments (one has 10 years as a light commissioner, then 25 years as a light and water commissioner, another has 23 years as a light and water commissioner and the other has 13 years as a light and water commissioner). Additionally, the Light and Water Departments have had the same Commissioners going on 13 years now, which promotes stability in the management and operation of BOTH departments. Nobody can tell off-hand how many town selectmen there have been since 2000; too many to count. Both the Light and Water Departments in Templeton are well funded and well managed by our existing Board of Light and Water Commissioners and our General Manager and our Superintendents and our Business Manager and all the rest of our Personnel. Each Commissioner is more than up to the task here and each employee is more than qualified to perform his/her functions here.

Jeff Bennett is not now and has never been a representative of the Templeton Municipal Water Plant. He does not attend regularly scheduled meetings of the Templeton Water Commission and is not present to learn about our water distribution system operation. He does not have discussions with our General Manager or our Water Superintendent to get answers to any questions that he may have. Instead he makes up his own answers and shares them with others in town on social media sites. Jeff Bennett is also not a municipal water customer so he can't possibly have an appreciation for how badly the water department in town was managed and operated before it was combined with the light department. In 1999, forty-two percent (42%) of the water pumped out of the ground by the water department was unaccounted for at fiscal year's end. It wasn't sold to customers, flushed from hydrants, used for fire department training or street sweeping, it was just gone. Since 2000 this number has decreased to as low as three percent (3%) through better record-keeping and better operation of the water distribution system in general. – John Driscoll