

HOUSE No. 19

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

THE FINANCE COMMISSION,
73 TREMONT STREET, BOSTON, MASS., Dec. 6, 1922.

HON. FREDERIC W. COOK, *Secretary of the Commonwealth, State House,
Boston.*

SIR:— In compliance with the provisions of section 33 of chapter 30 of the General Laws, I have the honor to present herewith such parts of the fourteenth annual report of the Finance Commission for the year ended Jan. 31, 1923, as contain recommendations for legislative action, accompanied by drafts of the bills embodying the legislation recommended.

Yours truly,

MICHAEL H. SULLIVAN,
Chairman.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FINANCE COMMISSION FOR THE CITY OF BOSTON.

1. TO MAKE UNPAID WATER RATES LIENS ON REAL ESTATE IN THE CITY OF BOSTON.

Income from the Water Service of the Public Works Department of the city of Boston is applied to the cost of maintaining the Water Division as well as meeting the actual water debt requirements and the assessments of the Metropolitan Water Board.

There should be a substantial surplus of water income every year, and this surplus under the law must be applied to the general debt requirements of the city. The prompt collection of water charges, therefore, means a lower tax rate.

About 70 per cent of the water now used in the city of Boston is on metered service. Bills for the metered service are sent out quarterly, credit being extended to the owner of the property for each quarterly period. Thus the city extends credit to the extent of several hundred thousand dollars. A transfer of property while this credit is outstanding usually results in a loss to the city because the transfer of the property takes away from the city the opportunity of shutting off the water as a means of collecting the water rates. Water service may not be denied the new owner because his predecessor in ownership failed to pay for the water used by him. Recently it was found that there existed 4,000 instances where the city suffered a loss varying from \$1 to \$100 because of the transfer of property by water users who had not paid their bills.

A lien upon the real estate for these water charges would have avoided this loss to the city and would have made certain the payment of all water bills.

In August, 1922, the Finance Commission made an investigation of the outstanding balances of water rates and

found that on Sept. 1, 1922, there were annual rates to the extent of \$163,863.79 due the city of Boston from 1915 to Sept. 1, 1922, and that there were \$556,191.28 on the metered rates due the city. The charges date back as far as 1912.

On Sept. 1, 1922, there were outstanding balances uncollected on water rates of \$720,055.07, and these charges remain uncollected for the last ten years.

In other States of the Union laws have been passed providing for liens on real estate for unpaid water bills. Thus the cities of New York, Albany, Jersey City, Providence, New Orleans and Cincinnati levy a lien upon the property situated in those cities for water bills unpaid after a definite date.

The Finance Commission recommends the enactment of legislation which will provide for the imposition of a lien upon real estate in the city of Boston for unpaid water bills.

2. TO FIX THE DATE OF THE CITY ELECTION.

In 1920 the biennial system of electing State officers took effect. This system did away with the necessity of holding State primary and State elections every year. State officers are now nominated and elected in the even numbered years. No State primary or State election is held in the odd years. By chapter 288 of the Acts of 1921 it is provided that the city election in the city of Boston shall be held on the first Tuesday after the second Monday in December. The mayor of the city is elected in the odd numbered years. Thus, the present mayor was elected in 1921, and the next city election for mayor will occur in the year 1925.

Now that the State elections come every second year and that the mayor is elected for four years, — his election coming in a year when there is no State election, — it leaves only the three city councilmen and not more than two school committee members to be elected in the year when the Commonwealth officials are elected. The ordinary expense for salaries of attendant officers and janitors for each election day is about \$17,752. There are other expenses such as cartage, light, heat, rent, etc., which would bring the total to about \$20,000 to \$23,000.

If the municipal election in Boston was fixed for the same date as the State election, the city would save this latter sum.

Such a change would make less demands on the citizens in the matter of voting, and the election day would come at a time when weather conditions are more dependable.