

APPROVED

**MINUTES OF THE WATER & SEWER COMMISSION MEETING THURSDAY,
November 16 ,2023
TOWN HALL CONFERENCE ROOM, 1:00 P.M.**

Members Present: Richard White, Chairman, Pam Cullen, SB Liaison, Scott Stringham, Lorn Buxton, Carl Roediger, Larry Doyle, Alternate, Jim Rini, Alternate, Chris Robillard, Superintendent of Public Works.

Members Absent: Steve Johnson, Alternate.

Also Present: Bette Jane Riordan, Recording Secretary. Resident Tim Driscoll, Treasurer, New Castle Historical Society.

Noting a quorum, Chair White opened the meeting at 1:00 PM. Voting members are Chair White, Select Board Member, Pam Cullen, Carl Roediger, Scott Stringham. The Chair proceeded to the Agenda

1. Public Questions. None

2. Individual Applications/Petitions: NCHS water meter issue.

Tim Driscoll, Treasurer of NCHS, presented the issue of water and sewer usage and the amount charged for August-September and July-September, requesting an abatement of 19 units for a total of \$400.60. Mr. Driscoll and Mr. Robillard explained NCHS needed a backflow prevention device, which was installed In July, and had to have a New Castle meter. NCHS had a meter installed by Port City, which was not acceptable (not in right location). Mr. Robillard has since confirmed installation of the New Castle meter. Ms. Cullen reminded Mr. Driscoll, that NCHS should have asked the Select Board, as landlord and owner of the building for permission to install the particular meter. After further discussion clarifying the amount in question, Chair White called for a motion.

MOTION: To Reduce the amount of the sewer bill for NCHS by the sum of \$395.20.

MOTION: S. STRINGHAM

SECOND: C.ROEDIGER

UNANIMOUS

3. Approve Minutes of the October 19, 2023 Meeting .

After review of Revised Draft Minutes, Chair White called for a motion.

MOTION: To Approve the Minutes of the October 19 ,2023 Meeting of the Water and Sewer Commission as amended.

MOTION: P.CULLEN
SECOND: L.BUXTON
UNANIMOUS

4. Financials.

a. Review, approve and sign checks.

Water: After review, Chair White called for a motion.

MOTION: To Approve the water utility checks as read and presented.

MOTION: LBUXTON
SECOND: C. ROEDIGER
UNANIMOUS

Sewer: After review, Chair White called for a motion.

MOTION: To approve the sewer utility checks as read and presented.

MOTION: L.BUXTON
SECOND: C.ROEDIGER
UNANIMOUS

b. Commitments.

Chair White read the following for approval:

Authority #2 (Spring Hill, Lavengers and Abigail)	\$10,655.96
Authority #3 (Wentworth Housing)	\$35,212.74
Wentworth By The Sea	\$97,225.62

After review, Chair White called for a motion.

MOTION: To Accept the Commitments as presented.

MOTION: LBUXTON
SECOND: C.ROEDIGER
UNANIMOUS

c. Accountants Report.

Chair White related the following figures from the Financial Administrator:

Water

Checking Acct.	\$240,786.22
Trust Balance: (Select Board)	\$53,442.29
Cap. Reserve Balance: (W&S)	\$106,843.71

Sewer

Checking Acct.	\$204,876.97
Trust Balance (Select Board)	\$.08
Cap. Reserve Balance (W&S)	\$202,878.78

4. Selectwoman's Report.

Selectwoman Cullen reported that the tax bills have been sent out this week, and include the special assessments. The bills are due by December 15, 2023. She noted that the tax rate of \$4.98 is up from \$4.50, but while New Castle's rate is low, the assessments are quite high compared with other areas of the State.

6. Superintendent's Report.

a. Sewer Smoke Testing – PDF Format

Mr. Robillard reported that the report is now in PDF Format. Chair White will make some format adjustments, and asked Mr. Robillard when the property owners who are in violation, will receive notification. Mr. Robillard stated they will be notified in early Spring 2024.

b. 2023 "Big Ticket" purchases- 2 items left to purchase.

Mr. Robillard reports that the Tripod harness (fire safety) still needs to be purchased.

c. Watertight manhole frames & covers installation. Sewer Manhole remediation. 2023 CWSRF Project.

Mr. Robillard noted that he needs to provide NHDES with a timeline. We need to enter an agreement with NHDES for \$77,000 with \$19,250 forgiveness. The method of payment for the remaining \$57,750 will be tacked on to the sewer bill, and will be included as a line item in the budget. As of September 2023, there is \$202,878 in the Sewer Capital Reserve.

He stated that the \$77,000 needs a Warrant Article as we are borrowing from the NHDES Revolving Fund. The agreement needs to be approved. The Project is to start in June 2024.

Following this information, discussion ensued about when to expend capital reserves. Chair White gave a history of the capital reserve and how it gets built up. He asked Mr. Robillard to get the budget for the cost of the camera, which Mr. Robillard stated would part of O&M. Mr. Doyle raised safety issues with the ladders which are used, and the need to get the Tripod harness

as soon as possible. He had toured all of the facilities and assets with Mr. Robillard earlier in the week.

d. NHDES Leak Detection Survey Grant – Applied and Waiting for Response

e. Water/Sewer Software Enhancements, Credit Card Payments 98% complete.

There is an issue with the Accufund software which is being worked on. Chair White noted that there is a 3% charge on the utility bills, and some people are backing off and paying by check. Mr. Robillard indicated that there others who are signing back up to use the website for payment.

f. Portsmouth Avenue Sewer Air Release Valve Replacement Update.

Mr. Robillard will be speaking with a representative from MAC in the next couple of weeks to determine a beginning date. It is is expected this will be winter work.

g. Camera Piscataqua Street Sewer Main 2024 m—Previously discussed.

7. New Business

a. Changes to Water/Sewer Billing Cycle

Mr. Robillard reported he had discussed this matter with the Finance Administrator, Ms. Ruest, and the propose change would result in a 1 month lag, so there would be no January or July billing. Authorities 1 and 4 would be billed at the same time.as February, May, August and November. After discussion and explanation, Chair White called for a motion.

MOTION: To change the current billing cycle to the following:
January 1-March 31 will be billed in May; April 1 – June 30 in August; July 1-September 30 in November; and October 1-December 31 in February.

MOTION: L.BUXTON
SECOND: S.STRINGHAM
UNANIMOUS

Chair White noted the Ordinance will need to be changed and the change should be posted on the Town’s website’s front page.

b. FYI 2025 Budget Schedule

Chair White noted that last year, the Finance Administrator and Mr. Robillard put together the numbers and it worked well. This will be worked on in December and January, then the Commission will set the rates. Chair White made note of the fact that as for the loan forgives, the interest itself is not forgiven.

Chair White noted that the Sawtelle Bridge Force Main Report Phase Contract has been fully executed. (See Emails provided with Agenda).

c. Loan Forgiveness Details. Budget for interest on Loan. (See emails)

8. Continuing Business.

Irons in the Fire: Chair White indicated we are dealing with 5 projects with the State of NH, and 4 of them are with Underwood Engineering.

- a. Review late fee assessments (Tabled at the 9/21/2023 meeting)**
- b. Underwood Engineering Status updates:
Status report on two pump stations electrical project; (See Emails.)**
 - **Water asset management plan (Discussed)**
 - **Sewer asset management plan (Discussed)**
 - **Sewer rate study proposal (See Emails) Discussed need for outside assistance.**
 - **Sawtelle Bridge force sewer main replacement design.**

Mr. Robillard reported that he has drafted a proposed grease trap permit.

Using the Oliver Street property as an example he explained the new surcharge which Portsmouth initiated in order to hook up for sewer service. Portsmouth is treating New Castle the same as its own residents for expanded sewer services. There was discussion about possibly including this in a potential rate hike when formulating the budget.

Mr. Robillard pointed out that under US EPA rules, we are a co-permittee and when the time line starts December 2023, we have six months to present a broad strokes plan. He will be getting further information from the O&M Manual and other resources.

9. Any Other Business for the Board.

Larry Doyle, Alternate asked if the Commission would consider holding the meetings via Zoom, as he is unable to make the next meeting, and would like to participate. After discussion, it was the sense of the Commission to try Zoom on a test basis for the December meeting.

There being no other business to come before the Commission, Chair White called for a motion.

MOTION: To Adjourn

MOTION: L.BUXTON
SECOND : S.STRINGHAM
UNANIMOUS

Meeting Adjourned at 2:30 PM

Respectively submitted,

Bette Jane Riordan
Recording Secretary.

a. December Meeting 12/21/23 @1PM