

FINAL APPROVED

**MINUTES OF THE WATER & SEWER COMMISSION MEETING
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2018 - 3:00 P.M.**

Members Present: Walter Liff, Chair, Steve Tabbutt, Supervisor of Public Works, Richard White, Member, Normand Houle, Member, John Ireland, Member, Clint Springer, Alternate, Chet Fessenden, Alternate

Members Absent: Damon Frampton, Ex-Officio Select Board

Also Present: Christiane McAllister, Accountant, Anne Miller, Secretary, Ben Jankowski, Department of Public Works

Public Present: none

Mr. Walter Liff opened the meeting at 3:01 p.m. and elevated Mr. Clint Springer to voting member in the absence of Mr. Damon Frampton.

1. Review, approve and sign checks

Water

Mr. Liff read the checks as presented, which included a Underwood Engineering \$2,553.19 invoice which represents a portion of the billing for “ESR 6” whose cost will be split 50/50 with the City of Portsmouth once the town has received the final ESR 6 invoice.

Sewer

Members discussed the Central Signal Corp. invoice for \$1,080.00 for the full calendar year alarm cost, a term which may not be necessary once the new pumps and the SCADA monitoring system is online, around June, 2018. Mr. Tabbutt questioned whether an external alarm contract will be necessary after the conversion. While the new system’s alarm is expected to be internet enabled, there may be a continued need for the external alarm service. Additionally, when the SCADA system will be operational is uncertain. Members asked Ms. McAllister to inquire as to whether, and at what price, the alarm contract can be reduced to 6 months, and agreed to sign the check to be held by the Accountant until a decision is made.

The City of Portsmouth sewer bill totalled \$32,295.47 for the month of December, 2017.

Mr. Springer motioned to approve the checks as discussed and Mr. Richard White seconded the motion. Motion carried, unanimously.

2. Approve meeting minutes of December 13, 2017

Mr. John Ireland motioned to accept the minutes of the December 13, 2017 Water & Sewer Commission meeting as amended. Mr. Normand Houle seconded. Motion carried, unanimously.

3. Bank Balances

Water

December Revenue:	\$56,960.77
December Expenses:	\$6,231.20

Checking Account Balance as of December 31, 2017: \$155,788.85
Trust Fund as of November 30, 2017: \$131,029.44

Sewer

December Revenue: \$91,914.54
December Expenses: \$35,439.00
Checking Account Balance as of December 31, 2017: \$292,946.52
Trust Fund as of November 30, 2017: \$39,296.28

Mr. White indicated that he has no basis on which to question or relate to the bank information. In a previous meeting's discussion, Ms. McAllister indicated that she would alert members to any unexpected deviations from plan. However, Ms. McAllister offered to make a tracking report available to members. Mr. Houle explained that the bank account reports aren't read for the Commission's approval, but to simply provide a level of assurance that emergency funds could be made available in a case of extreme need. That understood, members agreed that Ms. McAllister won't provide the budget tracking report pro forma.

4. New business

a. FY 2019 Budget

Ms. McAllister distributed budget worksheets for water and sewer appropriations and asked that members review the information ahead of the February 14, 2018 meeting, when, ideally, the appropriation projections should be completed.

McAllister clarified elements of the FY18 YTD budget that was distributed at the December 13, 2018 meeting:

Water

- Despite the town's recent receipt of the Water Quality Report, Ms. McAllister does not recall being invoiced for it by the City of Portsmouth.
- Ms. McAllister increased the software support budget to reflect the cost of the upgraded billing software. Its cost is approximately \$2000/year, which is split equally between water and sewer.
- Engineering charges that were incorrectly posted to the Professional Services line have subsequently been accurately recategorized as Engineering Fees.
- Mr. Steve Tabbutt explained that the hydrant maintenance costs to date (anti-freeze) have likely been posted as Miscellaneous charges, while the Hydrant Maintenance and Repair budget is reserved for larger, unanticipated hydrant repairs.

Mr. Springer questioned why fire hydrant costs are borne by the ratepayers rather than the taxpayers as a fire protection cost. Mr. White explained that the Water Commission owns and subsequently must maintain and repair the hydrants. The Select Board can determine whether the Fire Department should be charged a use fee for the hydrants. The rental fee paid to the City of Portsmouth for hydrants located within the City of Portsmouth's water district is a separate issue.

Mr. Springer asked, and Mr. White explained, that in Portsmouth, the water treatment facility upgrade is being funded by ratepayers via the Water and Sewer Enterprise Funds, not the City's taxpayers.

Ms. McAllister suggested that if the Commission believes a cost is being unfairly charged to the ratepayers, it should address the issue with the Select Board. However, Ms. McAllister explained there is also a converse circumstance in which the cost of water and sewer bill postage -- which accrues to the town's postage account-- is borne by the taxpayers, despite its exclusive benefit to water and sewer ratepayers because it is uneasily separated. Further, the existing salary allocations benefit water and sewer at the expense of the general fund. For this reason, Commission members agreed to leave the costs assignments as they are.

Sewer

- Ms. McAllister suspected the over expenditure by \$13,800 in Engineering Fees was for Underwood Engineering fees associated with the changes to the sewer pumps.

Prior to the February 14, 2018 meeting, Mr. Houle encouraged members to review the budget worksheet and come prepared to ask their questions and suggest changes. The numbers shown in black are not subject to debate.

b. Understanding Your Water and Sewer Bill Rates

Ms. McAllister distributed a document, Understanding Your Water and Sewer Bill Rates, that reflects the history of the town water and sewer rates from 2016. Members discussed that the town's irrigation water rate is the same as its regular rate, while some water districts charge a premium to deter high water usage.

c. Update Water & Sewer Ordinance

After working with Ken McDonald to update the Commission's web page, Mr. Houle determined that he would like the Ordinance to be a linkable document on the town's website to benefit the public as well as encourage the Commission's compliance and consistency.

Mr. Houle described updates to sections of the proposed Ordinance that were previously reviewed:

- In the section titled Ordinance Elements Common to Water and Sewer, Mr. Houle, with members' approval, added:

How Water and Sewage Usage are Measured

Water meters measure in cubic feet. Bills are calculated against "units" of measure. One "unit" of water equals 100 cubic feet. One cubic foot of water equals 7.48 gallons and so one "unit" of water equals 748 gallons.

Sewage rates are assessed against fresh water units, one-for- one. For customers who receive their fresh water directly from the Portsmouth system but dispose of their sewage through the town's system, water readings are obtained from the city of Portsmouth to calculate the sewer bill.

- In the Water Utility section of the proposed Ordinance, Mr. Houle suggested, and members agreed, to increase the notice period for water turn-off and turn-on to 72 hours and to specify the contact for these requests as the Town Accountant, which is consistent with the utility procedure for property transfers.

- In the Sewer Utility section of the Ordinance, Mr. Houle asked the Commission to scrutinize the proposed language:

At such time as a public sewer becomes available to a property served by a private septic system, unless such private septic system is already in full compliance with the law, a direct connection shall be made to the public sewer in compliance with this ordinance, and any septic tanks, cesspools, and similar private facilities shall be abandoned and filled with suitable material approved by the Public Works Department. However, if and when the private septic system were to fail, the owner will not be allowed to remediate the system and will be required at that time to hook up to the public sewer system.

Mr. White asked whether the qualifying distance that defines the sewer as “available to a property,” should be increased from 100’ to 200’ as it is in Rochester, NH. Mr. Tabbutt argued that the preponderance of ledge results in more expensive installation in New Castle. Members agreed not to change the qualifying distance.

Members agreed to the language as proposed and agreed to repeat the proposed language later, in the Ordinance section, Private Septic.

- Mr. Houle asked whether the Ordinance section, Prohibited Uses, could be shortened.

For legal reasons, and because the waste is transmitted to the City of Portsmouth, members believed the language should remain as is and consistent with that of the City of Portsmouth.

- In the Prohibited Uses section of the Ordinance, Mr. Houle proposed, and members agreed, to more specifically describe “Industrial Wastes” by adding “and liquid wastes containing grease in excessive amounts, or any flammable wastes, sand, or other harmful ingredients” to the section that specifies the requirement for a control manhole, meters, and equipment.

- In order to prevent concealment of illegal discharge, Mr. Houle proposed replacing the current language in Ordinance section, Service Connection Requirements,

“Whenever possible, the building sewer shall be brought to the building at an elevation below the basement floor. In buildings in which a building drain is too low to permit gravity flow to the public sewer, sanitary sewage shall be lifted by means approved by the Water and Sewer Commission and discharged to the building sewer.” with:

“Whenever possible, to prevent concealment of illegal connections, the building sewer shall be brought to the building at an elevation above the basement floor. In buildings in which a building drain is too high to permit gravity flow of all sources of sanitary sewage to the house sewer, sanitary sewage shall be lifted by means approved by the Water and Sewer Commission and discharged to the building sewer.”

Members agreed.

- In the Installation, Maintenance and Repair section of the Ordinance, Mr. Houle proposed, and members agreed, to add:

“The homeowner owns the piping from building to the sewer main, and is therefore responsible for all charges relating to the sewer connection. Repairs and/or modifications to a

sewer line and street are the responsibility of the owner.”

- In the Billing and Payments section, Mr. Houle proposed, and members agreed with, revised language that reflects the current billing timeline:

“Customers who receive water from the city of Portsmouth will be billed for sewer usage based on the water meter readings provided by Portsmouth, and will be on the same trimester schedule as indicated in the “Ordinance Elements in Common” section, except that usage is billed the second month following the end of a trimester. That is, usage between April 1 through July 31 will be billed in September; August 1 through November 30 in January; and December 1 through March 31 in May.”

- Based on Mr. Tabbutt’s statement that private septic is not the purview of the Sewer Commission, but instead is subject to approval by NH DES and the town’s Building inspector members elected to remove the last two sentences --No permit shall be issued for any private septic system employing subsurface soil absorption facilities where the percolation test results indicate poor drainage conditions exist and No septic system shall be permitted to discharge to any natural outlet--from the Ordinance section, Private Septic, and change the prior sentence to read:

“No statement in this section shall be construed to interfere with any additional requirements that may be imposed by DES or the Town Building Inspector.”

- Members agreed to delete the section titled Application for Private Septic.
- Members agreed to delete the application fee for private septic systems in Appendix B, Schedule of Fees and Fines.
- Other fee and fine changes reflect previous Commission decisions:
 - Violation fee is up to \$500 per violation per day
 - Shut-off and turn-on fee, and property transfer service is \$40

Mr. Houle plans to finalize the revised Ordinance document for the Commission’s approval at the February 14, 2018 meeting and presentation to the Select Board in February or March, 2018. Accordingly, Mr. Houle will incorporate the changes and circulate the document for members’ review prior to the next meeting.

5. Adjourn

With no further business to come before the Commission, Mr. Houle motioned to adjourn. Mr. Ireland seconded the motion. Motion carried, unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 4:44 p.m.