

**Final approved Minutes
Town of New Castle Water & Sewer Commission
February 18, 2021, 3:00 PM
Macomber Room**

Members Present: Normand Houle, Chairman, John Ireland, Richard White, Walter Liff, Carl Roediger, Alternate, Steve Tabbutt, Department of Public Works

Members Absent: David McGuckin, Selectman

Also Present: Christiane McAllister, Accountant, Anne Miller, Secretary

Chair Normand Houle opened the meeting at 3:00 p.m.

1. Public Questions

No public comments or questions were proffered.

2. Individual Applications/Petitions

No applications or petitions were presented.

3. Approve Minutes of January 21, 2021 Meeting

Mr. Walter Liff moved, and Mr. Richard White seconded, to approve the minutes as originally drafted. The motion carried unanimously.

4. Financials

a. Review, approve and sign checks

Chair Houle read the checks as presented. Mr. White moved to approve the checks as read, and Mr. John Ireland seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

b. Accountant's report

i. February Commitment

Ms. Christiane McAllister read the February Commitment consisting of sewer invoices for the period October-December, 2020:

Sewer Billed:	\$32,556.10	Wentworth-by-the-Sea Hotel (does not include the Marina)
	\$9190.75	Authority 2 New Castle South
	\$28879.80	Authority 3 Master Association

Mr. Liff motioned to approve the November Commitment as read. Mr. White seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

ii. Balances

Balances as of January 31, 2021

Water:

Cash	\$251,202.83
Trust (SB)	\$147,337.05
Trust (WSC)	\$27,776.46

Sewer:	
Cash	\$242,783.07
Trust (SB)	\$16,493.04
Trust (WSC)	\$45,549.19

Chair Houle noted that the Sewer Trust Fund (SB) is being tapped to pay for a significant portion of the hoop replacement project under the Sawtelle bridge, which will empty that fund. Chair Houle and Vice Chair Ireland signed the release for the funds that will be coming out of the WSC controlled trust fund to cover the balance.

iii. Wentworth Marina sewer billing

Spenser Eppersen, the Marina Manager, did not contest the invoice and indicated that payment was on its way, but has not yet been received. Ms. Christiane McAllister will follow-up with a letter that explains late payment policy and charges to date.

iv. Late Fee posting

To simplify processing in the accounting software, late fees will be applied on the 15th and the 30th of the month rather than a certain number of days after invoice.

5. Selectman's Report

a. Commission input into future water loop evaluations

Chair Houle will address this in an email to selectman Stewart.

b. Sawtelle bridge water lines

Chair Houle reported his conversation with Selectman Bill Stewart on February 8, 2021 in which he suggested that the Water Project budget cover costs related to the water line on the Sawtelle bridge: 1) the need for a rubber membrane over the pipe at the location of the old brackets, and 2) rusted areas where the brackets were removed. A very rough estimate for the rust issue provided by Underwood Engineering is \$50,000.

6. Continuing Business

a. FY22 Budget and Rate Setting

The Commission reiterated their rationale for assigning the Water & Sewer salary costs equally between water and sewer accounts because there is no evidence to suggest an inequitable burden from either the water or sewer department on salaried employee time. As decided last month, each of the budgets will reflect a 10% salary allocation.

Having loaded in budget components— including a decrease in depreciation from \$12,000 to \$3,000 in the water budget (there being no historical basis for setting it at \$12,000)— Ms. McAllister showed the Commission a variety of rate scenarios and their projected impact on the Trust Fund balances. Chair

Houle proposed that the sewer rate increase not exceed 4%, or \$19.52/unit, on par with the expected 4% cost increase from the City of Portsmouth. (The current FY21 rate charged by Portsmouth is \$14.32.)

Given the high cost of virtually any significant repair to the sewer utility, and the fact that the select board controlled sewer trust fund now has a zero balance, the commission's greatest concern is replenishment of the WSC controlled sewer trust fund. Through the scenarios presented by Ms. McAllister, rates of \$8.22/water unit (3% increase) and \$19.51/sewer unit (3% increase) are expected to increase trust fund deposits of \$10,000 in water and \$37,500 in sewer.

Chair Houle moved that the water rate for FY2022 be increased from \$7.98 to \$8.22 and Mr. White seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Chair Houle moved that the sewer rate for FY2022 be increased from \$18.95 to \$19.51 and Mr. White seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

b. New England Backflow Inc. (NEB) proposal

Commissioners discussed the proposal received from NEB as a potential resolution to the Commission's need to survey/inspect and test backflow devices within the New Castle water authority. Hearing no reason that this solution should not be pursued, members agreed to move forward with questions and clarifications to the NEB process of their proposal.

Mr. Carl Roediger emphasized the importance of having Select Board support when the process is announced to the customers. Chair Houle agreed and noted that he has attempted to acclimate customers over the last year about the coming requirement via Water & Sewer newsletter articles.

The Commission agreed to invite NEB to attend the March 18, 2021 meeting of the Water & Sewer Commission to respond to Members' questions with the goal of reaching an agreement to contract with NEB for backflow prevention services. Assuming an agreement is reached, Chair Houle will sign the contract and envisions that notices will be sent out with April water bills to announce that testing will be conducted at a to-be -determined time in the spring, preceded by direct NEB outreach to customers. Mr. White will follow-up with NEB.

The initial survey cost will be borne by the water utility; testing and any required repairs will be borne by the customer. Ms. McAllister will adjust FY22 budgets to insert line items for inflow and outflow of the costs.

c. Quarterly Water Report to NHDES

Mr. Steve Tabbutt and Ms. McAllister confirmed that the quarterly water report has been made to NHDES.

d. Air Release Valves (ARVs)

Members responded to NEI's proposed deployment of a Xylem SmartBall technology, which pinpoints force main leaks or "air pockets," but determined that it was an unnecessary extravagance and was not addressing directly what the commission hoped to achieve, namely advance warning that some

component of the sewer force main--in this instance an air release valve--was about to fail. Chair Houle will follow up with NEI to let them know this decision.

Mr. Roediger suggested that all sewer system data potentially collectable by the SCADA system be pursued. He asked what instrumentation could be added to SCADA to enhance its functionality. NEI has reported that pressure sensors, at \$3,500 per unit, could be added.

Before moving forward with any added equipment, Members are hoping to participate in a SCADA training session (concurrent with the anticipated training of the new DPW hire) in order to better understand the SCADA monitoring potential and its data.

Mr. Tabbutt indicated that the DPW will work to open the rusted enclosures at the Portsmouth Ave./Tarbell Lane and Walton Road locations in the spring to gain access to those ARVs. Mr. White suggested bringing in a vendor to estimate a cost for replacement covers as well as to provide their advice for opening the compartments. Mr. Tabbutt hopes to be able to salvage the existing enclosures and cover, but will have a steel plate available in the event the fix requires more time or new materials.

Originally the Commission had considered taking advantage of the already-on-site EVROKS bridge inspection equipment to replace the ARV under the Sawtelle bridge, but had to defer after receiving an estimate of \$87,000. At this point, the Commission will pursue access to the two other ARVs and a better understanding of SCADA data and regroup before moving forward on ARV replacements.

e. Water Conservation

Mr. Roediger discussed different potential tactics for encouraging water conservation. Chair Houle noted that the number of “heavy users” is few and the excess water used by those customers is relatively minor in the context of utility wide consumption. Addressing the issue with tiered rates may not be cost effective given the significant added expense to modify the billing/accounting system. It may be more effective, at least as a reasonable first step, to send letters to the heavy users highlighting their usage and asking them to conserve.

Another tactic might be to replace existing meters with “smart”/remotely readable meters (like those utilized by the City of Portsmouth) that return real time water usage data to a central monitoring station. These smart meters could detect irregular usage, sync with the billing system and save the DPW the task of manual readings. However, again, the investment in new technology for such a small customer base may not be cost effective. Further, while collection of data is desirable, it has little value without someone trained and devoted to analyzing it.

The Commission ended this discussion without conclusive next steps.

f. Utility Planning Solicitation/Resources for Communities and People (RCAP) Solutions

The Commission was approached, unsolicited, in December, by RCAP Solutions, a non-profit organization that offers technical and supportive services to small communities. Mr. White ascertained that RCAP Solutions acts as a middle man. They don’t do engineering. Rather, they help small towns

through the process of hiring the right talent or finding grants. One of their listed services is “asset management and mapping.”

The issue of asset management has been discussed off and on by the commission and is now a topic of discussion as the water line improvement project draws to a close. A condition of the Town’s participation in the State Revolving Loan Fund (SRF) is that the Town have an asset management plan that incorporates the new water infrastructure.

Ms. McAllister noted that based on RCAP information, the Town may be able to tap into NHDES’s asset management development resources. Ms. McAllister will reach out to Mr. Luis Adorno of NHDES for further information.

At this point, the Commission does not believe RCAP Solutions services are necessary.

7. New Business

a. Meeting Time

Members agreed to move future meetings to a 2:00 p.m. start.

8. Adjourn

Mr. Liff moved, Mr. White seconded, and Members voted unanimously to adjourn.

The February 18, 2021 meeting of the Water & Sewer Commission adjourned at 5:54 p.m.