

FINAL APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE WATER & SEWER COMMISSION MEETING
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2021
MACOMBER ROOM, 2:00 P.M.

Members Present: Normand Houle, Chairman, Walter Liff, Dave McGuckin, Select Board, Chris Robillard, Department of Public Works Supv., Carl Roediger.

Members Absent: John Ireland, Richard White

Also Present: Christiane McAllister, Accountant, BJ Riordan, recording secretary

Chair Normand Houle opened the meeting at 2:00 p.m. He indicated that Dick White will be unavailable for two months, and hopefully will return in November.

1. Public Questions

None.

2. Individual Applications/Petitions

None.

3. Approve Minutes of the August 16, 2021 Meeting

Mr. Liff moved, and Mr. Roediger seconded, to approve the minutes as drafted. The motion carried unanimously.

4. Financials

A. Review, approve, and sign checks

Chair Houle read the checks as presented. In reviewing the 12 September invoices for Northeast Integration (NEI) services for the SCADA system, Mr. Robillard explained the current PC needed to be replaced because it was based on the Windows 7 operating system for which Microsoft has suspended virtually all updates, most importantly security. The new PC is Windows 10 based. Mr. McGuckin announced that the Town has hired an IT company, Portsmouth Computer Group, to do a complete assessment of all departmental technology needs.

B. Accountant's report

1. Balances as of August 31, 2021

Water:

Checking Account:	\$231,671.03
Trust Fund (Select Board)	\$147,344.77
Trust Fund (WSC)	\$ 57,778.53

Sewer:

Checking Account	\$208,703.00
Trust Fund (WSC)	\$ 58,766.75

There was a brief discussion of July's sewer bill of \$62,776.00 from the City of Portsmouth, which is addressed in agenda item 6.c.

5. Selectman's Report

Mr. McGuckin reported that the Select Board is completing its recruitment process to fill the accountant's position currently held by Christiane McAllister.

6. Continuing Business

a. Status of New England Backflow (NEB) Follow up to June Survey/Tests.

Chair Houle reported that progress is slow but steady in resolving discrepancies from the June tests. The turnover of the cross-connection program to the DPW will occur some time in early calendar year 2022, after second tests (December) have been completed.

b. Access to ARV's (air relief valves).

Mr. Robillard reported the three "Type A" manhole covers have been ordered and are expected to arrive in October. Chair Houle asked Mr. Robillard to initiate an "RFP " for replacing the two manhole covers in question and to feel free to discuss this with Mr. White. Mr. Robillard noted that there would be some street paving soon and that this aspect of replacing the manhole covers might dovetail nicely.

c. July Sewer Consumption.

Chair Houle received an email from Mr. Brian Goetz, Dep. Dir. City of Portsmouth DPW which refuted an assertion regarding the reason for the ~50% increase in July sewer usage, that it was a normal seasonal increase in water consumption. Mr. Goetz believes the heavy July rains and the resultant infiltration from manholes and possible cracks, and inflows from sump pumps, are the basic causes for the increase. The City of Portsmouth also saw significant increases in flows in its own system. Mr. Robillard provided data that explained the increase in sewer consumption, and showed a slide depicting how the heavy rainfall and pump station flows correlated. Mr. Roediger spoke about the adverse effect of sump pumps improperly plumbed to the domestic sewer lines and the need for inspections. Chair Houle will address this issue in an article for the next Island Items. Chair Houle will also consult with Gary Rumph of the Wentworth Homeowners Association to see if/how the use of sump pumps is addressed in those areas.

Chair Houle also noted in passing that DPW should expect NEI to conduct its quarterly maintenance review soon. He also brought up the issue of a septage (effluence from private septic systems) agreement with Portsmouth, and questioned the existence of any

sewer agreement with Portsmouth. Finally, he noted that Mr. White had suggested establishing a line item in the budget for storm water excess. Ms. McAllister proposed a capital reserve account as opposed to a line item in the operating budget.

d. Sawtelle Bridge Water Line Wrapping.

While the Commission agreed this project is of number one importance, there remain financial issues to resolve. The commission believes the re-wrapping of the water main at the Sawtelle Bridge, where the old brackets were removed, is a legitimate water line project expense.

e. Review of Non-payment of Bills.

The Commission is considering a new method of charging for and collecting late fees on overdue bills. Ms. McAllister reported that Portsmouth requires payment within 27 days or incur a 1.5% penalty assessment, effectively 18% APR. Discussion ensued about what New Castle should do and members agreed upon a change to the Water & Sewer Ordinance which would eliminate late notices, and replace them with no-notice automatic penalty assessments, these being clearly explained in the quarterly bills.

f. Ordinance Update.

Mr. Roediger had nothing to report. Chair Houle asked that he include language in the update which would address NHDES septage agreement requirements. Mr. Roediger agreed.

7. New Business

a. Automatic (“drive-by”) Water Meter Reading. Chris Robillard.

Mr. Robillard gave a PowerPoint presentation (attached to final version of these minutes) which included identification of inefficiencies in our current meter reading system, and the benefits of transferring to an AMR (automatic meter reading)-type system, similar to that used by the City of Portsmouth. He highlighted the man-hours taken to record meter reading manually; the introduction of human error; and the effort to manually transfer the meter data to the billing system. There is also concern for customer privacy: meters are not always easily accessible and the meter readers often have to search around customer property to take their readings.

He also provided a comparison between AMR and fixed network Advanced Meter Interface (AMI) which is being used right now in New Castle locations (southside) serviced by the City of Portsmouth water utility.

Benefits of these AMR/AMI systems include reduction in man hours, reduction in human error, leak detection, line break alerts, and over all, they are proactive versus reactive to system problems.

Mr. Robillard stated that he has met with the area representative for Zenner, the company from which Portsmouth has purchased its system. Zenner has preliminarily offered to sell AMI metering at the price offered to Portsmouth, namely \$66.00 per meter plus necessary ancillary support/infrastructure equipment. An initial quote was ~\$40,000 for 300 meters. Ms. McAllister said the number of meters is closer to 370 (including second irrigation meters) and so the cost would obviously be greater. Further, there is a \$3,000 per year software charge. There would need to be a radio wave propagation study to assess the infrastructure needs (radio repeaters and such.) Zenner would install the infrastructure, provide training, while our DPW staff would do the necessary wiring to each water meter. The wiring process would likely take approximately one hour per residence.

Relatedly, Mr. Robillard pointed out that water meters should be replaced on the order of 15 years. There has been no scheduled meter replacement program in the Town's water utility--ever. Funding is always an issue. He will look to provide updated information on the age of each current meter as he conducts the October billing reading.

Chair Houle asked Mr. McGuckin how he thought the Select Board would react to an AMR/AMI initiative and would they approve use of trust fund monies to cover the cost. While Mr. McGuckin supports this, he could not speak for the other selectmen.

Regarding funding, Chair Houle noted prioritization of an AMI project versus the water line re-wrapping address in paragraph 6.d. The water line re-wrapping project is a higher priority and thus AMI funding would have to be carefully assessed against that priority, both of which could vie for funds coming from the select board controlled water trust fund. Mr. McGuckin suggested that Mr. Robillard present his analysis to the select board. In the end it was agreed that Mr. Robillard should get a more accurate estimate and request that Zenner initiate a propagation study.

8. Any Other Business for the Board.

None.

9. Adjourn.

There being no further business to come before the commission, Chair Houle called for a motion to adjourn which was made by Mr. Liff, and seconded by Mr. Roediger. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 3:57 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

BJ Riordan
Recording Secretary