

**FINAL APPROVED**  
**MINUTES OF THE WATER & SEWER COMMISSION MEETING**  
**Thursday, January 20, 2022**  
**MACOMBER ROOM, 2:00 P.M.**

**Members Present:** Normand Houle, Chairman, Walter Liff, John Ireland, Chris Robillard, (Superintendent of Public Works), Carl Roediger, Richard White, Dave McGuckin (SB Liaison), John Ireland

**Members Absent:** Scott Stringham

**Also Present:** Bette Jane Riordan, Recording Secretary

Chair Normand Houle opened the meeting at 2:00 p.m.

**1. Public Questions**

None

**2. Individual Applications/Petitions**

None.

**3. Approve Minutes of the November 18, 2021 Meeting**

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

**4. Financials**

**a. Review, approve, and sign checks**

Chair Houle read the checks as presented. Mr. Roediger made a motion to approve the checks as a read; seconded by Mr. White. Motion carried unanimously.

**b. Accountant's report**

1. Balances as of November 31, 2021

Water:

|                          |                       |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Checking Account:        | \$273,540.33          |
| Trust Fund(Select Board) | \$147,349.79 (30 Nov) |
| Trust Fund (WSC)         | \$57,780.50 (30 Nov)  |

Sewer:

|                  |              |
|------------------|--------------|
| Checking Account | \$304,268.06 |
|------------------|--------------|

**2. Commitments**

Chair Houle read the commitments for the period October 1 - December 31: Authority 4 (USCG) \$2,217.60; Authority 1 (NC northside) \$80,466.06. Mr. White made a motion to approve the commitments as read; seconded by Mr. Roediger. The motion carried unanimously.

Chair Houle reported that the accountant's assistant, Kelly Williamson, sent out six letters to customers with overdue accounts. Of the six, two customers have paid up. A brief discussion ensued regarding action the commission can take regarding recalcitrant customers. There is a lien process, which is explained in the ordinance, but there is no mention of turning off water as a penalty. The subject will be addressed at a future commission meeting.

**5. Selectman's Report**

Selectman McGuckin discussed the status of his communications with Mr. Brian Goetz, Dep. Dir. Portsmouth DPW, regarding a sewer agreement and the Town's justification for a lower sewer rate. He has attempted again to get movement on the issue. But, as before, Mr. Goetz reported that he has referred our rate argument to his consultant and deferred any meeting until after he has heard back from the consultant. Mr. McGuckin intends to follow up with a telephone campaign to try and elicit a response. He also noted that any change in sewer rate will likely not take place until FY23. Chair Houle concurred.

**6. Superintendent's Report**

A. Mr. Robillard has communicated to the contractor the commissions' intent to replace the radiators of the emergency diesel generators at Quarterdeck Ln. and River Rd. The contractor is waiting for replacement parts and will proceed with the repair shortly thereafter. Relatedly, Mr. Robillard reported that next year's service plan will be less expensive (under \$5,000) and that it will be synchronized with our fiscal year.

B. Regarding the Advanced Meter Infrastructure (AMI). Zenner has installed the external infrastructure backbone, notably two antennas, one at the DPW building and the other at the River Rd. pump station. Mr. White asked if there were other associated costs, such as phone connection or Internet connectivity requirements. Answer: no. Mr. Robillard explained that most costs are included in the annual fee of \$2,800, but that for the current fiscal year, it would be less, because of a shorter year of performance and a lesser number of energized modules (among other things, the fee is dependent on the number of active modules). He is working on a five-month proration of this charge. Further discussion ensued regarding the fee for the current fiscal year and whether it

was included in the overall system quote, or whether the water utility would have to cover that expense “out of hide” from the FY22 budget as the expense had not been foreseen/planned. Chair Houle’s preference is that it be covered within the ~\$57K capital reserve expense. Selectman McGuckin said it will probably be rolled into the capital expense and thereafter, the annual fee will have to be incorporated into the water utility budget.

C. Laurel Lane hydrant status. Mr. Robillard explained that the problem was a piece of debris (possibly from the water line project) jammed in the mechanism and that the hydrant will be inoperable until repaired some time in February. Availability of the company representative is the challenge, but the company representative indicated that he wouldn’t charge for labor for this repair. The fire chief is aware.

D. Splash over at River Rd from the recent storm. Chair Houle expressed concern about ocean/river infiltration into a manhole near the pump station. Infiltration was seen as the cause of the \$20K excess sewer charge in July 2021 and Chair Houle is concerned that we might have a similar problem as a result of the recent storm. Chair Houle asked Mr. Robillard to investigate that manhole to see if there was standing water in it which might indicate that no water entered the manhole. The January sewer bill will be carefully scrutinized.

## **7. New Business**

### **a. FY 23 Budget Build**

Chair Houle reported he had met with the accountant several times and asked the commission to bear with him as there are numerous questions that need resolution. Chief among them: there is no definitive answer at this time as to whether or not Portsmouth will increase its rates and by how much. Portsmouth staff has been told not to provide any estimates. Currently, the Portsmouth wholesale water rate is \$3.35/unit and retail sewer \$14.89. New Castle could be looking at a 2% increase in water and 4% increase in sewer. The commission will assume these increases as it builds the budget and sets local rates.

Chair Houle proceeded to review the sewer budget first, starting with a review of the expense sheets as of 12/31/21. The water budget was similarly reviewed.

Of particular note, Chair Houle raised the issue of depreciation of the new water line and how he had been unsuccessful in determining if and how the \$4.6M project could/should be depreciated. Further he questioned whether it would be correct for the water utility to assume the depreciation since the new line was being paid for by Town taxes, not water ratepayers.

In light of Mr. Robillard's recent discussion regarding water meter replacement, Chair Houle presented his analysis of how we might proceed to get this initiative off the ground. There are approximately 400 meters in the system. Anecdotal information suggests meter replacement every 10-20 years. Portsmouth replaces theirs about every 10 years. In summary, Chair Houle proposed that the select board be approached about paying to "front load" this initiative by using select board controlled water capital reserve trust funds to buy 60 meters (40 replacements and 20 to place in stock) during FY22 at an estimated cost of \$4,500 (60 X \$75) and then budget for 40 every year thereafter with operational funds. While we cannot be certain that DPW would be able to replace 40 meters per year, we should be able to replace all of them over a 10-11 year period and consistently replace 10% per year thereafter. Chair Houle will coordinate with Mr. McGuckin to inform the select board of his plan/request.

Formulation of the FY23 budget will continue at next month's meeting at which time the Town water and sewer rates will be determined.

**b. Funding Source for Emergency Generator Radiator Replacements.**

Chair Houle outlined the issue which calls for the commission to decide how the estimated \$8-\$10K should be paid. Should it be from the "Equipment Maintenance" line, which will likely be overspent, in the current FY22 budget, or, as an unanticipated infrastructure event, should it be from WSC capital reserves. The question before the commission was: **Are you in favor of using the O&M (operations and maintenance) "Equipment Maintenance" line as a funding source for this repair, or alternatively, using sewer capital reserves?** The unanimous vote of the commission was to use capital reserves.

**c. NHDES Asset Management Plan Grant Application Status.**

Chair Houle reported that the New Castle application had been received and accepted by the 7 January deadline.

**8. Continuing Business.** None.

**9. Any Other Business for the Board.** None.

**10. Adjourn.**

Mr. White made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Mr. McGuckin. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 4:07 p.m..

Respectfully submitted,  
BJ Riordan  
Recording Secretary