

FINAL APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE WATER & SEWER COMMISSION MEETING
Thursday, February 17, 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, Scott Stringham

Members Absent: None

Also Present: Lori Ruest, Town Accountant; Bette Jane Riordan, Recording Secretary

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

1. Public Questions

None

2. Individual Applications/Petitions

a. Amy Gworek representing the Agnes Palmer Trust, 34 Oliver St., a request to forgive late fees on delinquent water/sewer bills.

Ms. Gworek had communicated with Chair Houle via email (all commissioners were informed via "cc") with this request. Chair Houle proceeded to note that all past due balances have been paid, including \$300 in late fees. The petitioner was asking that the late fees be forgiven. In the ensuing discussion, it was noted that the administrative costs in pursuing this delinquent account were not insignificant. Mr. White made a Motion to Deny the petitioner's request; Mr. Roediger seconded. Motion to Deny carried unanimously.

3. Approve Minutes of the 20 Jan 22 Meeting

Mr. Liff moved, and Mr. Roediger 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. White made a motion to approve the checks as a read; seconded by Mr. Roediger. Motion carried unanimously.

b. Accountant's report

1. Balances as of January 31, 2022

Water:

Checking Account:	\$257,120.56
Trust Fund(Select Board)	\$147,350.33 (Dec 2021)
Trust Fund (WSC)	\$57,780.71 (Dec 2021)

Sewer:

Checking Account	\$273,577.23
Trust Fund (WSC)	\$58,768.97 (Dec 2021)

2. Commitments

After announcing the commitments for Authority 2, 3 and Wentworth by the Sea, Mr. White made a motion to approve as presented; seconded by Mr. Roediger. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Selectman's Report

Mr. McGuckin reported that even with repeated emails to Mr. Goetz, Dep. Dir. Portsmouth DPW, he is still waiting to enter discussions with the City of Portsmouth regarding sewer rates.

6. Superintendent's Report

A. Status of Radiator Replacements at Quarterdeck Ln. and River Rd. Mr. Robillard reported no new information; he is still waiting for parts to arrive and the vendor has been less than cooperative. He did note that the generators are currently operational.

B. Status of Laurel Ln. Hydrant Repair. Mr. Robillard showed the commission the item removed from the hydrant: a large rubber pipe gasket. The hydrant is currently disassembled, awaiting parts.

C. January Flow Readings at River Rd. Station. In light of a major January storm which washed up onto the roadway, Chair Houle was concerned about infiltration which would result in a large bill like the one experienced in July 2021. Mr. Robillard distributed a chart showing the flow readings from October 2020 through January 2022. The January 2022 reading was ~2,000 units, lower than recent tabulations. Concern alleviated.

Concerned about flooding, Chair Houle proceeded to ask about the status/condition of the cover of the River Rd. wet well. Mr. Robillard noted it would cost about \$5,000 to

elevate the cover. He recommended not replacing it at this time. To his knowledge, the wet well has not flooded. Work on this will be deferred until absolutely necessary.

7. Continuing Business

a. FY23 Budget Build

Chair Houle noted that the key outcome of this process will be setting the water and sewer rates for FY23. He prefaced his remarks noting that the rates were subject to change depending on rates charged by the City of Portsmouth, which have yet to be finalized. Chair Houle distributed the completed proposed budget spreadsheets which demonstrate different rates depending on which amount is chosen for capital reserves.

He first addressed the water budget. The City of Portsmouth had advised that the wholesale water rate might be increased by 2%. The budget presumes that increase. Chair Houle proposed \$17,500 in capital reserve which would result in a water rate of \$8.54, up from the current \$8.22. After discussion, Mr. Roediger made a motion to set the FY23 water rate at \$8.54; Mr. White seconded; and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Houle turned to the sewer budget and opined that it was imperative from his perspective that we increase dramatically the capital reserves, which could best be described as “marginal” at their current \$58,000. The rate being proposed includes the expected 4% increase in the Portsmouth rate charged to the Town. Further, the calculations include the addition of \$20,000 contingency in light of the unexpected \$20,000 “overage” in the July 2021 bill.

Chair Houle asked the members whether they preferred \$40,000 or \$50,000 for capital reserves. After discussion, Mr. White made a motion to proceed with \$50,000 resulting in a sewer rate of \$20.51 up from the current \$19.50,; Mr. Liff seconded and the motion carried 4-1. Mr. McGuckin preferred the \$40,000 option rather than the \$50,000 one..

b. Update to CWSRF Pre-Application re: Electrical System Upgrades

Chair Houle reported that, as of February 9, the amount requested was increased from \$335,500 to \$341,900 to account for 7.1% inflation. Chair Houle also reported an opportunity to apply for a federal ARPA grant in the amount of \$100,650 to be applied against the \$341,900. He has initiated a grant application.

c. W&S Ordinance: Cross-Connection Section Update

Mr. Roediger provided the members with new language for the base ordinance. After discussion, the commission agreed to include fire suppression (sprinklers) in the list of systems requiring a backflow prevention device. Chair Houle requested further detail

about a “new residences” requirement for a dual check backflow preventer after the main water meter. Mr. Roediger was asked to meet with the building/plumbing inspector to discuss requirement vs. desirability of this dual check backflow preventer.

d. W&S Ordinance: Non-Payment Penalties

In light of a recurring problem with a number of routinely delinquent accounts, Chair Houle distributed a paper to members outlining possible options. Currently, the Town assesses a \$20 late fee after 30 days and an additional \$20 every 14 days thereafter. He asked the commission to consider a 1 ½% charge on outstanding balances every 30 days or so. Turning off the water for non-payment will be addressed to NH Municipal Association legal counsel for a reading on legality.

Whatever changes the commission might consider, the terms would have to be clearly spelled out in our bills. Chair Houle proposed such language to be printed on the back of the bill.

In the ensuing discussion, Mr. Ireland suggested continuing a minimum late fee much as we do now. Mr. White thought that charging 1 ½% was way too low. Chair Houle noted that any change in the late fee assessment process will depend on the adaptability of the Town’s accounting software to implement any change.

Resolution of this matter was tabled to a future meeting.

.

8. New Business.

a. Select Board Approval of Trust Funds for Water Meters

Chair Houle wanted it on record that, at its 7 February meeting, the select board approved use of \$4,500 in water trust funds to pay for the purchase of ~60 water meters to “jump start” water meter replacement.

b. River Rd. Wet Well Access Hatch

See the discussion at the Superintendent of Public Works Report above.

9. Any Other Business for the Board.

In light of Portsmouth DPW noting that the New Castle sewer effluent readings at the WWTF are higher than those reported out of our River Rd. pump station, Mr. White suggested we start compiling a history of our flow meter readings.

10. Adjourn.

Mr. White made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Mr. Roediger. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m..

Respectfully submitted,
BJ Riordan
Recording Secretary