

FINAL APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE WATER & SEWER COMMISSION MEETING
Thursday June 16, 2022
TOWN HALL CONFERENCE 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), Scott Stringham

Members Absent: John Ireland

Also Present: Bette Jane Riordan, Recording Secretary; Lori Ruest, Town Accountant (for a portion of the meeting; Altus engineer representing 115 Walton Rd.

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

1. Public Questions

None

2. Individual Applications/Petitions

- a. 115 Walton Rd., Sewer Tie-in

Discussion was deferred until arrival of Mr. Robillard, but will be reported here. Chair Houle recognized the engineer from Altus Engineering. Mr. Robillard reported that road-cut work was accelerated without complete commission discussion, but with Chair Houle's approval so as to not interfere with planned paving of Mainmast Cir. The engineer was now looking for permission from the commission to authorize completion of the work to abandon a private septic system and hook up to municipal sewer (force main under Mainmast Cir.). The Chair raised the issue of a bond to be posted as outlined in the W&S ordinance. In light of the road cut being done before the paving, the engineer requested a waiver of the bond requirement. Chair Houle noted that there is flexibility in the amount to be set for the bond. After discussion, Mr. Roediger made a motion to waive the bond requirement; seconded by Mr. Liff; motion carried 3-2.

Chair Houle then brought up abandonment of the septic system. The engineer assured the commission that they will comply with state regulations. Mr. Robillard noted that the ordinance contains information and direction. Chair Houle asked if someone from the Town would be overseeing the abandonment. After reading the ordinance, Chair Houle noted Public Works needs to approve the materials used to fill the abandoned system. Mr. Robillard notes it is public works responsibility to check, but he noted the building inspector should also be involved as he is definitely responsible for any septic

installations. Mr. Robillard noted he has the application and check for \$235.00 which he will give to Chair Houle.

3. Approve Minutes of the 19 May Meetings

Chair Houle called for a motion to approve the minutes of the public meeting, which will include the Town's response to EPA Region 1 Boston having designated the Town as a "co-permittee" of the Peirce Island Waste Water Treatment Facility. Mr. Liff made the motion to approve; seconded by Mr. White; motion carried unanimously.

Mr. McGuckin made a motion to approve the non-public session minutes along with the letter to the City of Portsmouth as an attachment to be sealed and filed; Mr. Roediger seconded; motion carried unanimously.

4. Financials

Chair Houle noted that the balance in the Water Trust Fund controlled by the select board has been significantly reduced and asked Mr. McGuckin if it was going to be further reduced. Mr. McGuckin explained that some of the money was used to run a line into the Commons. That trust fund balance is getting near zero. Thereafter, the only capital reserves remaining are the ones controlled by the commission.

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 31 May

Water:

Checking Account:	\$274,208.58
Trust Fund(Select Board)	\$116,061.47 (30 Apr)
Trust Fund (WSC)	\$57,853.80 (30 Apr)

Sewer:

Checking Account	\$294,012.74
Trust Fund (WSC)	\$51,288.43 (30 Apr)

c. Request for Reimbursement

Chair Houle's request for reimbursement for office supplies was approved by the

commission. Mr. White took the opportunity to recognize Chair Houle's efforts in work with Underwood Engineers and others to get the electrical system upgrade applications submitted on time.

5. Selectman's Report

Mr McGuckin has not heard anything from Portsmouth regarding the Town's letter regarding the wholesale sewer rate. Chair Houle hand delivered the Town's response directly to the Portsmouth legal office on 26 May.

6. Superintendent's Report

a. Mr. Robillard reported that he and Aaron (Dep. Supvr. PW) attended training on Advanced Water Distribution and indicated it a good use of their time. They will be attending another training session next week.

b. Chair Houle asked Mr. Robillard if he was going to take up the commission's offer to purchase any big ticket items as we near the end of the fiscal year. Mr. Robillard submitted the following:

1. Hydrant flow test kit: \$1,200
2. Pipe locator: \$3,300
3. Hydrant valve seat wrenches: \$700
4. Needle scaler: \$300
5. Hammer drill: \$250
6. Two road signs "Utility Work Ahead": \$200
7. GPS surveying unit: \$10,000-\$15,000 will have to wait for another day

7. New Business

a. Possible End-of-Year PW Purchases

See item 6.b. above. After discussion regarding "encumbrance" with the Town accountant for the items submitted by Mr. Robillard, Mr. White made a motion to encumber \$4,500 of the water fund appropriation for equipment to support the water utility against budget lines "Equipment Maintenance and Miscellaneous Supplies and Expenses;" Mr. Roediger seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Mr. White made another motion to encumber \$2,200 of the sewer fund appropriation for equipment to support the sewer utility against budget lines "Equipment Maintenance and Miscellaneous Supplies and Expenses;" Mr. McGuckin seconded; motion carried unanimously.

b. Transfer of O&M Funds to Capital Reserves

After discussion regarding encumbrance, Mr. Roediger made a motion to transfer \$13,000 from the O&M water appropriation to water capital reserves; Mr. White seconded; motion carried unanimously. Mr. White then made a motion to transfer 13,800 from the O&M sewer appropriation to sewer capital reserves; Mr. Roediger seconded; motion carried unanimously.

c. New England Backflow Device Testing Challenges

Chair Houle discussed challenges experienced by New England Backflow (NEB), our contracted testing company. They got hit really hard by COVID and lost employees in May; the company is just beginning to recover. Their scheduler has just started scheduling the annual (June) tests. Two owners have not yet fixed their systems; and two others stated their devices had been tested by Piscataqua Landscaping. Mr. Robillard confirmed the Town did not receive reports from Piscataqua. Mr. Robillard will contact the two parties who have not yet fixed their systems. A remedy is to sever the irrigation line; the ultimate remedy is notification of non-compliance which could mean turning water off.

Mr. McGuckin stated he feels a letter should go out to the homeowners who reported Piscataqua had tested their device to advise them that their devices would still need to be tested by our provider, New England Backflow. Mr. White suggested that Mr. Robillard contact Piscataqua to determine if they actually do testing as claimed by the homeowners. Mr. McGuckin further noted that homeowners who cannot be personally present during a test should be responsible for providing for a designated contact who can provide access.

After further discussion, Chair Houle indicated he would draft a letter to the two who reported their devices had been tested by Piscataqua indicating that they would have to be retested by NEB.

Finally, given the challenges faced with this scheduling, Chair Houle reported on his discussions with NEB regarding the desirability of having NEB mail a notification letter (drafted by the Town) in advance of testing windows, June and December. He had requested a quote from NEB, which responded with \$150 for the June tests and \$75 for the December tests. Mr. White made a motion to enter into an agreement with NEB at the specified rates; Mr. McGuckin seconded: motion carried unanimously..

8. Continuing Business.

a. 108 Main Street Crawl Space Letter

See entry **8.c** from the May 2022 minutes for background. Chair Houle presented for review a draft letter to be sent to the two affected property owners, advising them of their responsibility to provide acceptable access to their meters. Mr. Robillard is to provide Chair Houle with the names and addresses of the owners.

b. Non-Payment Reminder Letters

Accountants Lori and Kelly report the Accufund software unfortunately cannot easily generate “past due” letters for all situations. The alternative solution will be to generate MS Word files which match different categories of late payment remedies.

c. Water Meter Charge Revisited

Chair Houle distributed extracts of last month’s minutes and explained why he feels the proposed fee schedule is not fair, and asked for commission input. Mr. White questioned where the collected fees would go. A meter “trust fund?” Mr. Robillard indicated that the expense for meter replacement would be directly offset by a meter fee charge and that a separate fund was unnecessary. Matter tabled for further discussion at the next meeting.

d. Water and Sewer Ordinance Update (Round 1)

Mr. Roediger was asked to provide for next month, the Round 1 updates/corrections along with an additional section for the next review (Round 2).

9. Any Other Business for the Board.

a. The City of Portsmouth Updates FY23 Rates Forcing a Revisit of New Castle Rates

Shortly before the convening of this month’s meeting, the City of Portsmouth forwarded updated rates for water and sewer forcing the recalculation of Town rates for FY23. The commission in February had used an estimated 2% increase for wholesale water and 4% for sewer. Portsmouth’s approved budget called for a 3% increase in water and 6% for sewer. However, a report from the Portsmouth comptroller indicated the wholesale water rate had not changed and would remain at \$3.35

After discussion the following motions were offered by Chair Houle:

1. Subject to the City of Portsmouth wholesale water rate remaining at \$3.35 a unit, the retail New Castle water rate is reduced to \$8.47. The motion was seconded by Mr. White and carried unanimously.

2. Subject to the City of Portsmouth Tier 1 sewer rate set at \$15.78 per unit, the retail New Castle sewer rate is increased from \$20.51 to \$20.80. The motion was seconded by Mr. White and carried unanimously.

Mr. White and Mr. Roediger discussed flow rates as measured at the treatment plant vs. how we measure them at the River Rd. station flow meter. We should be able to have access to the treatment plant meter to see how they compare with our flow meter. Mr. McGuckin will contact Brian Goetz (CoP Dep. Dir. PW) to discuss this in context of our discussions regarding a wholesale sewer rate.

b. Chairmanship

Mr. Roediger moved to appoint Normand Houle to continue as chairman of the Water and Sewer Commission; seconded by Mr. White; motion carried unanimously.

10. Adjourn.

Mr. White made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Mr. Liff; motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 4:58 p.m..

Respectfully submitted,
BJ Riordan
Recording Secretary