

FINAL APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE WATER & SEWER COMMISSION MEETING
Thursday, December 15, 2022
TOWN HALL CONFERENCE ROOM, 1:00 P.M.

Members Present: Normand Houle, Chairman, Walter Liff, Chris Robillard, (Superintendent of Public Works), Richard White, Dave McGuckin (SB Liaison), Scott Stringham

Members Absent: Carl Roediger, John Ireland

Also Present: Bette Jane Riordan, Recording Secretary

Chair Normand Houle opened the meeting at 1:02 p.m.

1. Public Questions

None

2. Individual Applications/Petitions

None.

3. Approve Minutes of the 17 November 2022 Meeting

Mr. Liff moved, and Mr. Stringham 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. McGuckin. Motion carried unanimously.

b. Accountant's report

1. Balances as of 30 November 2022

Water:

Checking Account:	\$283,241.33
Trust Fund(Select Board)	\$66,855.45 (Oct 31)
Trust Fund (WSC)	\$77,646.97 (Oct 31)

Sewer:

Checking Account	\$234,152.32
------------------	--------------

5. Selectman's Report

Mr. McGuckin thanked and commended Chair Houle for his presentation, performance and leadership with City of Portsmouth officials regarding ongoing negotiations of a wholesale sewer rate. At present, there is tentative agreement on a rate of \$11.39 per unit. There was some question as to the effective date of the rate implementation, with Chair Houle noting that the Town's legal counsel needed to review the agreement and that ultimately, the Portsmouth City Council needs to approve it. He explained the rate will be renegotiated every October/November and set in December before the Town begins its budget build.

Discussion ensued about continuing to read the River Rd. flow meter numbers on a monthly basis. Mr. McGuckin noted that the first six months of the process will provide an opportunity to test the new billing process, and that there would be opportunities to revisit and adjust as needed. Mr. Robillard expressed his preference for more historical data from Portsmouth regarding the meter at the Peirce Island Wastewater Treatment Facility (PI WWTF). Chair Houle explained how sewer consumption of the five retail Portsmouth customers on Shapleigh Island would be incorporated into the rate calculations, but that he does expect that the rate for the first year will be \$11.39. Mr. White emphasized the need to continue reading at River Rd. as a way of learning if something is amiss at the WWTF meter.

6. Superintendent's Report**a. Sump Pump Violation Notices.**

Mr. Robillard reported he has drafted letter residents regarding the violation of the Water and Sewer Ordinance.

b. Pump Issue at the Bosn' Hill/Quarterdeck Lane Pump Station.

Mr. Robillard reported a pump issue occurred this morning but he was hopeful it could be easily repaired. He'll report back next month.

c. Zenner AMI Project.

A license and warranty agreement needs to be signed and payment made from the Select Board Water Trust Fund as had been previously approved by the Select Board. There is still plenty of money left. Chair Houle will be reviewing the agreement. Zenner would like this wrapped up by the end of the year.

Mr. McGuckin asked that Mr. Robillard ensure that Aaron While gets his water certification/license.

Chair Houle gave Mr. Robillard the monthly water and sewer expense reports so he can begin to insert numbers for operations and maintenance "nuts and bolts" items for the upcoming budget build.

7. New Business

a. Tablets for Asset Management Plan Implementation.

Chair Houle invited Mr. White and Mr. Robillard to address the matter which concerns the purchase of field equipment which will support the Asset Management Plan for the Water Infrastructure.

Mr. Robillard stated that cost vs. convenience were the countervailing elements of the decision. Actual tablet costs, whether cell capable/ready or only WiFi capable, are comparable. The thorny issue is the monthly recurring cost of cell service readily available all the time vs. a “hotspot WiFi” approach. Mr. White did not support spending approximately \$1,000 per year because he questioned how often the tablets would be used. Mr. Robillard explained the various charges and indicated the upcharge recurring cost for cell ready capability was more on the order of \$400-\$600. Mr. McGuckin recommended the Commission adopt the option that provides the most capability and convenience for Public Works.

Further discussion ensued focussed on an alternative which would permit the Town to abandon cell service if it proved to not be cost effective, and then proceed with the “hotspot WiFi” approach. Chair Houle called for a vote to purchase two cell capable tablets. The vote was 4-1 in favor.

b. FY Budget Build.

As reported earlier, Chair Houle asked Mr. Robillard to review the “nuts and bolts” aspects of the O&M W&S budgets. Mr. Robillard noted that the AMI (Zenner) License is already in the budget, and that we need to plan for overages in support of the Asset Management Plan.

The issue of rental costs for hydrants was discussed as to which entity, the Water Utility or the General Fund, should be responsible for paying. Historically, the Water Utility has paid the annual bill from the City of Portsmouth for service on the south side. Chair Houle believes the taxpayers should pay this as it is a Town safety and security expense, thus the bill should be presented to the General Fund. The Commission agreed that the rental charge for the south side should be presented to the General Fund. There was unresolved debate as to whether the Water Utility should charge the General Fund for hydrant rental on the north side, again as a safety and security service to the Town at large. However, the reality is that north side customers would be paying for this service, whether as water customers or taxpayers and so presenting a water bill to the General Fund for north side hydrant service is moot. Mr. McGuckin suggested Ms. Ruest, Town Administrator, be consulted.

8. Continuing Business.

a. Safety Building Water Meter.

Mr. Robillard reported the meters have arrived and are ready for installation.

b. Discharge Permits.

Mr. Robillard broached this subject several months ago, concerned that the Wentworth Hotel might be discharging water, which might not have been purchased from Portsmouth, from hot tubs or pools into our sewer system. In short, if this is accurate, all sewer rate payers would be paying to have this water treated at the Peirce Island WWTF rather than the Hotel. This further devolved into discussion as to the appropriate method to dispose of large quantities of chlorinated water. Directing it to the ocean is unacceptable to NHDES. Chair Houle contacted NHDES regarding the latter issue and, in that “gray” water introduced into the sewer stream would end up at Peirce Island WWTF, he was encouraged to contact Portsmouth Public Works to see if they had any concern in this regard.

c. Asset Management Plan for Water - Status.

Chair Houle reported that he had received a status report from Margaret Blank of Underwood Engineer, who promised to develop a Gantt (schedule) Chart for the project. Mr. Robillard reported that we would adopt the same component naming conventions established by Portsmouth for their asset management plan; and that a Level of Service meeting would be held in January or February.

d. Water Meter Replacement Charge.

After months of discussion, Chair Houle made the following motion: “The Water and Sewer Commission establishes quarterly meter replacement fees according to the following schedule: (read meter size followed by charge per quarter) $\frac{5}{8}$ ” - \$5.00; $\frac{3}{4}$ ” - \$5.25; 1” - \$6.00; 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ” - \$13.00.

The purpose of the fee is to underwrite the 10-year meter replacement program. Customers had been advised that they would not be charged for initial replacement as the initial buy of approximately 50 meters was funded from the Select Board Water Capital Reserve. This new fee is to sustain replacements into the future.

While this decision addresses the replacement of most meters, the Commission has yet to determine how to address replacement of larger meters (2” and greater), in that a testing regimen has to be considered. Thus, the new fees will not go into effect until the April water bills at the earliest.

e. Fire Service Fee.

The Commission has been debating whether or not to have a fire service fee. Elements of the debate include encouraging the installation of fire suppression system; not requiring meters on independently plumbed water service lines which feed fire suppression systems; and deciding on whether a fee would be based on the size of the service line or simply a flat fee for all systems regardless of the size of the line. Mr. McGuckin felt a fee should be charged as it is a provided service. The Commission will postpone a final decision until a rate analysis included in the Asset Management Plan project has been conducted.

f. Electrical Systems Upgrade Project - Status.

At long last, after 18 months of application processing, the Governor and Executive Council approved the project on November 22, 2022. A draft contract with Underwood Engineers for the design phase of the project is in hand and will be signed soon. We expect to get underway in January,

g. Grease Trap Inspections. Tabled.

h. Air Release Valve Testing.

Mr. Robillard reported that the manholes containing the air release valves at Mainmast/Walton and on Portsmouth Ave. have been accessed. They are both flooded and it is presumed these ARVs have not been tested since installation some 45 years ago. We will “leave well enough alone” until spring, at which time we will plan for their replacement.

i. W&S Ordinance Update (Round 7).

No progress to report. The last big hurdle is to address Appendix B, Fines and Fees. There is agreement among the commissioners that fees be addressed in the context of the budget build and that proposed changes (increases) be submitted to the Select Board for their customary public hearing in the spring, at which the Board approves other changes to Town fees.

9. Any Other Business for the Board.

With the budget build coming soon, Chair Houle took the opportunity to recommend to Mr. McGuckin that the Select Board establish an administrative assistant position in support of the Superintendent of Public Works. Mr. Robillard countered that he has asked the Board to establish a third full-time laborer position so as to free himself to address the ever increasing administrative responsibilities that are being imposed on him. The Commission endorses the establishment of the third full-time laborer position.

10. Adjourn.

Mr. White made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Mr. Stringham. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 4:02 p.m..

Respectfully submitted,
BJ Riordan
Recording Secretary