

FINAL APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE WATER & SEWER COMMISSION MEETING
Thursday, October 20,2022
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, Dave McGuckin (SB Liaison), John Ireland, Scott Stringham

Members Absent: Richard White

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 15 September 2022 Meeting

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

4. Financials

a. Commitments

Chair Houle read the following commitments:

Authority 1 - New Castle North	\$132,281.42
Authority 4 - Coast Guard	\$2,062.34

Mr. Liff moved, and Mr. Ireland seconded to approve the commitments as read. The motion carried unanimously.

b. Accountant's report

1. Balances as of 30 Sep 2022

Water:

Checking Account:	\$248,187.25
Trust Fund(Select Board)	\$66,690.40 (Aug 31)
Trust Fund (WSC)	\$80,801.23 (Aug 31)

Sewer:

Checking Account

\$250,687.59

Trust Fund (WSC)

\$93,878.20 (Aug 31)

c. Review, approve and sign checks

During the review of checks there was extensive discussion regarding large (2" - 4") water meter testing; there was a \$300 invoice for testing of the UNH 3" meter. According to Mr. Robillard, per industry standard, (residential) water meters should be replaced every 10 years; last year the commission embarked on such a schedule. However, 2" and 3" meters should be tested every two years and 4" and larger meters annually. (There are large meters as well as MHT School and at the USCG Station.) The UNH 3" meter failed a recent test and will be replaced.

The extended discussion centered on who should pay for the testing, the property owner or the utility. At first, there seemed to be consensus that it should be the property owner; Chair Houle likened this to the backflow prevention device testing in which New England Backflow tests these devices, bills the Town and we in turn bill the property owner. However, Mr. Robillard pointed out that Portsmouth does not charge property owners for water meter tests as it is deemed an operational expense of the utility. It is to the utility's advantage to test meters to be confident they register consumption correctly, so that utility revenue is not short changed if a meter "runs slow." In the end, the commission agreed with Mr. Robillard; the utility will pay for the test. Similarly, there was an invoice for payment of a new 3" meter which the utility will pay.

Chair Houle pointed out that the ordinance will need to address this issue, probably within the context of the Fees and Fines appendix. As the commission intends to recoup the replacement of residential meters through a "meter replacement fee," there needs to be a similar charge for larger meters which will take into consideration the requirement for periodic testing, and replacement if necessary, of larger meters.

New subject. Chair Houle asked Mr. Robillard about releasing the \$10,000 bond for Mr. Simeonov on Walton Rd. Mr. Robillard reported that all was in order. Chair Houle made a motion to release the bond; seconded by Mr. Ireland. Motion carried unanimously.

Finally, Mr. Roediger made a motion to approve the checks as a read; seconded by Mr. McGuckin. Motion carried unanimously.

5. Selectman's Report

Mr. McGuckin reported that several weeks ago, Chair Houle had completed the response to the City of Portsmouth's August 30 2022, letter regarding the sewer agreement negotiations. Chair Houle delivered the Town's response in person on October 11th to Portsmouth City Hall. Mr. McGuckin will give Portsmouth until the first week in November before contacting Mr. Goetz for a status.

Chair Houle indicated that the draft agreement, probably its next iteration, would be reviewed by legal counsel and that fees to pay for this review would come from the legal services line of the sewer budget.

6. Superintendent's Report

- a. Seasonal flushing of hydrants will take place on October 25 and 26.
- b. Chair Houle reported that on November 3rd, he would be attending a NHDES sponsored seminar in Pembroke, "Demystifying Asset Management" and would like Mr. Robillard to attend as well.
- c. With regard to the ongoing Asset Management Plan for the Water Infrastructure project, Underwood Engineers is wrapping up the mapping phase.

7. New Business

a. Replacement of UNH Water Meter.

Discussed above.

b. Water Meter Installation Procedure Horizontal vs. Vertical.

In his visits to owner properties to install the AMI radios, Mr. Robillard has discovered several water meters improperly installed, i.e. vertically rather than the correct way, horizontally. (Meters do not register flow correctly if installed vertically, costing the utility revenue.) Discussion ensued about who should pay for correcting these improper installations given the errors should have been picked up at the time of original installation. Going forward, the commission has decided to require horizontal installation; the ordinance will be updated accordingly. Chair Houle emphasized that horizontal installation should be noted on applications involving meters. The commission discussed how the utility should proceed to correct these errors and concluded it would reimburse owners up to \$250 for plumbing expenses incurred as a result of having to properly replumb the meter. After further discussion, Chair Houle made the following motion:

Regarding water meter installation, to correct errors of the past in situations where meters were installed vertically, property owners will be asked to replumb to permit horizontal installation. It will be the property owner's responsibility to hire licensed plumbers. The water utility will reimburse the property owner up to \$250.00 upon submission of a plumber's invoice.

Mr. McGuckin seconded and the motion carried unanimously. The commission acknowledged there might be some exceptions which would be handled on a case-by-case basis.

c. Safety Building Water Meter.

The Public Safety Building was constructed without a water meter which means rate payers have been subsidizing that facility's water use. Mr. Robillard stated that the building needs a meter. Chair Houle looked into this recently and wondered if this was even doable given space constraints. Perhaps a flat rate should be considered? Mr. Robillard assured the DPW would get a meter. He will look over the plans and report back to the commission. Mr. Ireland cautioned that this could be a large hit to the Fire Department's budget.

d. Curb Stops on Private Property.

In the course of conducting the inventory for the asset management plan for the water infrastructure, curb stops have not always been installed in the town right of way or at the property lines (or property lines are ill defined). Accordingly, Chair Houle noted that property owners need to be notified that they are at risk if their curb stops are not accessible, e.g. under driveways, in gardens, should there be a need to turn off water in case of an emergency. DPW's new geolocator tool should help locate hidden curb stops. Chair Houle will draft a letter of notification to property owners for commission consideration.

e. 27 NHDES Training: Setting Right Rates.

Chair Houle attended this training. He noted that the Asset Management Plan requires the Town to develop a rate model. While a change to our rate structure would be premature during the current fiscal year, it may be appropriate to consider for FY24 and that we should think about this for the upcoming budget build.

Chair Houle also reported that at this meeting he learned that some utilities have established "contingency" funds to pay for unexpected costly repairs, rather than use capital reserves which should be earmarked for capital investment. Chair Houle opined that capital reserves should ideally be for capital investments, not for emergencies. He had looked into this in the past with NHMA which reported that the Town could approve the establishment of contingency funds but only through a warrant at Town Meeting.

f. Discharge Permits?

After hearing from Mr. Robillard about the Wentworth possibly discharging chlorinated pool/hot tub water into the sewer system, it was agreed that more information was needed.

8. Continuing Business.

a. Faulty Circuit Breaker at River Rd. - Status. Repaired.

b. Asset Management Plan for Water - Status.

Mr. Robillard reported that ~90% of the field work is done. Computer workstation and tablets have been identified in concert with Town IT support company, PCG. However, the cost is significantly more than budgeted. Mr. Robillard and Margaret Blank of Underwood Engineers will be conferring with NHDES' Luis Adorno to get permission to spend more on equipment given we have underspent on the inventory task.

c. Water Meter Replacement Charge Revisited.

Mr. Robillard reports that he estimates that by January, he will have identified the size of all water meters (most are 5/8), the data which has been lacking to start imposing a water meter replacement fee.

d. Fire Service Fee Revisited.

Mr. Roediger explained the two basic ways fire suppression service is plumbed: (1) a "parallel" line to a property separate from the line which provides domestic water service; and (2) an arrangement where the fire suppression system is downstream from the main property water meter. The latter is in effect metered and there should be no fire service fee applied; the former would not be metered (decided by the commission at a previous meeting), but a fire service fee, amount to be determined typically based on the size of the water line, would be applied. This could be addressed in the Fees and Fines appendix of the ordinance.

e. Electrical Systems Upgrade Project.

Chair Houle explained that an Environmental Review (ER) of the project is a requirement which must be fulfilled before solicitation of bids. It must be reviewed and approved by NHDES. However, with the large number of projects submitted in the last DES call for projects, virtually all original bid date estimates have been pushed back, ours to April 2023. Chair Houle and Underwood Engineers (UE) are investigating the possibility of accelerating the ER to advance the solicitation. This might be possible by using FY23 O&M funds rather than having to wait for Underwood to be under contract and then conducting the ER. Chair Houle is awaiting a cost estimate from UE.

f. Ordinance Update (Round 5). Continuing.

9. Any Other Business for the Board. None.

10. Adjourn.

Mr. Liff made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Mr. Ireland. Motion carried unanimously.
Meeting adjourned at 4:43 p.m..

Respectfully submitted,
BJ Riordan
Recording Secretary