

**FINAL APPROVED**  
**MINUTES OF THE WATER & SEWER COMMISSION MEETING**  
**Thursday March 16, 2023,**  
**TOWN HALL CONFERENCE ROOM, 1:00 P.M.**

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

**Members Absent:**

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

Chair Normand Houle opened the meeting at 1:00 p.m. With the resignations of Walter Liff and John Ireland, Scott Stringham is elevated to full voting member.

**1. Public Questions.** None

**2. Individual Applications/Petitions.** None.

**3. Approve Minutes of the 16 and 23 February 2023 Meetings**

Mr. McGuckin moved, and Mr. White seconded, to accept the 16 February minutes as drafted. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. White moved, and Mr. McGuckin seconded, to accept the 23 February minutes as drafted. The motion carried unanimously.

**4. Financials**

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

Chair Houle read the checks as presented. He noted that the sewer bill for January was over \$50,000 and asked Mr. Robillard if there was a problem which could account for this high amount. Mr. Robillard stated that there was no unusual event and that next month's bill would be in the vicinity of \$32,000. Mr. White made a motion to approve the checks as a read; seconded by Mr. Stringham. Motion carried unanimously.

**b. Accountant's report**

1. Balances as of 28 February

Water:

Checking Account:	\$177,037.46
Trust Fund(Select Board)	\$58,178.49 (Jan 31)
Trust Fund (WSC)	\$77,887.26 (Jan 31)

Sewer:

Checking Account

\$440,214.37

Trust Fund (WSC)

\$90,946.67 (Jan 31)

## **5. Selectman's Report**

Mr. McGuckin had nothing to report regarding the sewer agreement negotiation with the City of Portsmouth.

Mr. McGuckin reported efforts are underway to recruit new commission members. This initiative will also be posted on the website. Chair Houle will also note recruitment in the notice he has drafted for the upcoming April bills.

The updated ordinance has yet to be reviewed and approved by the Select Board.

## **6. Superintendent's Report**

a. Mr. Robillard reported he was meeting next week with Ms. Ruest, the town administrator, to establish the meter replacement fees in Accufund with the intention of having them ready for the April bills. Chair Houle cautioned that the new ordinance, which addresses the fee, needs to be adopted by the select board first and an official notice needs to go out with the April and May bills. The actual charge would not go into effect until July and the October/November bills would reflect the change for the first time.

b. Mr. Robillard reported he had sent a non-compliance letter regarding sump pump discharge to the owner of 104 Main Street, who had tied into the municipal sewer system. Water from that property had been flowing onto Route 1B, freezing on the road during cold weather, thereby creating a road hazard which had to be curtailed. The property owner is "between a rock and a hard place." Chair Houle opined that possible resolution might come in the form of a "sump pump surcharge?"

c. Chair Houle raised the question of having Mr. Robillard, as Superintendent of Public Works, sign and send out the curb stop notice letter, which was discussed last fall, to customers whose curb stops could not be located by DPW. Mr. Roediger noted that the revised ordinance transfers many responsibilities from the Commission to the Superintendent. Further discussion took place regarding the increased workload imposed on the superintendent. Mr. Robillard stated his preference is to send out the curb stop notices a few at a time rather than all at once. The commission agreed. Mr. Robillard will sign the notices.

## **7. New Business**

### **a. Northeast Integration (NEI) Assessment of River Rd. Meter Accuracy**

Mr. Robillard reported that test results of the meter were uncertain and possibly problematic. While data was generated/collected, it may not be reliable for the intended purpose, which was to see if our meter readings were accurate. The commission concluded that NEI has much to explain. Mr. Robillard said the NEI representative, Rick Bogle, could provide little insight. After further discussion, the commission agreed to have Mr. Dylan Kimmel of NEI come before the group to provide answers. Chair Houle expressed concern about whether the SCADA system is functioning correctly if this evaluation of accuracy proves to be correct. Chair Houle will contact Mr. Kimmel.

### **b. Contingency Fund – Yes or No**

Chair Houle sought to put to rest the question of establishing a contingency fund for each utility to cover unexpected expenses, notably expensive repairs or spikes in our sewer bills from Portsmouth. Based on his research, Chair Houle had concluded that such establishment would require warrant approval at Town Meeting. In the interim, he had in effect provided for contingencies by incorporating a \$20,000 “Sewer Purchased but not Billed” line in the budget after an excessive bill in July 2021. This proved to be a wise move in light of a \$52,000 sewer bill for December 2022. Noting multiple warrant articles for this year’s Town Meeting, Mr. McGuckin recommended no additional warrants. After discussion, it was the sense of the commission not to establish a contingency fund.

### **c. Water Meter Replacement Fund –Yes or No**

After discussion, it was the sense of the commission to not go forward with a separate fund for water meter replacement.

### **d. Notice to Accompany April and May Bills**

The commissioners had been given a draft previous to the meeting and provided feedback. After discussion, Chair Houle agreed to revise the draft and to resend it to the members for final feedback.

### **e. Smoke Tests**

In the context of sewer systems, the purpose of smoke tests is to determine sources of inflow/infiltration. Non-toxic smoke is injected into manholes to see where unintended/illegal water, especially stormwater, may be making its way into the system. The tests would be conducted by a technician from the Granite State Rural Association. Tests would not occur until after July 4th. Given some limited experience with this technique, Mr. Stringham indicated he was interested in participating.

**f. New England Backflow Contract 2023-2024**

After discussion, Chair Houle called for a motion to approve the contract for the period April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024. Mr. Roediger moved to approve; seconded by Mr. White. Motion carried unanimously.

**8. Continuing Business.**

**a. Electrical System Upgrade Project - Status**

Chair Houle reported that NHDES still needs to approve the Environmental Review, but otherwise, Underwood Engineers (UE) could proceed to design. A site visit by UE Andy Sharpe and Lee Carroll, the electrical engineer who performed the 2015 electrical systems evaluation of the pump stations, is scheduled for 23 March. Messrs. Houle, White and Robillard will accompany.

**b. DPW Winterizing of WBTS Master Association Hydrants**

Mr. White and Mr. Roediger will develop a “white paper” for the Select Board regarding Town liability issues as a result of the current situation where our DPW winterizes (limited to draining and replacing antifreeze) Association hydrants, which are considered private. Mr. White wants also to clarify the difference between winterizing versus “servicing.” He also suggested the Town’s insurance company, Primex, be consulted. Chair Houle stressed the importance of making the Select Board aware of any liability risks, and he opined the Fire Chief needs to be informed of the situation.

**c. Status of Water Service at the USCG Station**

The station lost water service due to the “hard freeze” of 3 February. Mr. Robillard reported water was back in service on February 25.

**9. Any Other Business for the Board.**

Chair Houle updated information regarding the \$30,000 grant for the Assessment Management Plan for the sewer infrastructure. There needs to be a public hearing on acceptance of the funds by the Town. Chair Houle has spoken with Ms. Ruest and Ms. Barnes, who are now aware of the need for a hearing. Hopefully, this can be scheduled for the 3 April Select Board meeting.

Chair Houle encouraged members to participate via Zoom in the NHDES Water Infrastructure funding workshops which will be held over the course of several days in April. Members were given information to register.

Mr. White asked Chair Houle, who is resigning from the commission on June 30, how many hours per week he has put in performing commission work. Chair Houle stated he puts in 10-30 hours per week. Mr. White wanted the minutes to reflect Chair Houle’s dedication, hard work and effectiveness during his tenure. Mr. McGuckin praised the

Chair's efforts and how he had undertaken the lion's share of the workload. Chair Houle thanked the commission for their accolades, and singled out Mr. Robillard, complimenting him on his hard work and effectiveness.

**10. Adjourn.**

Mr. White made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Mr. Roediger. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 3:45 p.m..

Respectfully submitted,  
BJ Riordan  
Recording Secretary