

FINAL APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE WATER & SEWER COMMISSION MEETING
Thursday June 15, 2023
TOWN HALL CONFERENCE ROOM, 1:00 P.M.

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

Members Absent: None

Also Present: Bette Jane Riordan, Recording Secretary; Andy Sharpe, Underwood Engineers.

Chair Normand Houle opened the meeting at 1:00 p.m.

1. Public Questions. None

2. Individual Applications/Petitions. None.

3. Approve Minutes of the 18 May 23 Meeting

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

4. Financials

Before proceeding to the next agenda item, Chair Houle asked Mr. Robillard for a clarification of the total number of hydrants on the southside which the Town rents from the City of Portsmouth. Mr. Robillard confirmed the total number is 15. Chair Houle asked that he create an inventory for future reference. Then Chair Houle advised the members that he had signed the check which had been withheld at last month's meeting, noting that Portsmouth billing would reimburse the Town for the 16th hydrant they had charged us.

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.

More discussion about hydrants on the south side. Selectwoman Cullen asked about maintenance. Mr. White believes the Master Association (MA) needs to arrange for maintenance of their private hydrants with the City. Further, he explained the City has an easement with the MA to operate the water line coming from Little Harbor Rd. in

Portsmouth and through the MA area. Chair Houle noted that in the past, the New Castle water utility had been paying the hydrant rental fee. However, going forward in FY24, the General Fund will pay the fee as it is viewed as a safety and security issue and not a water service issue. In response to a question from Selectwoman Cullen, Chair Houle explained that the Town will not provide winterization of private hydrants, no matter where they are located.

b. Accountant's report

1. Balances as of 31 May

Water:

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| Checking Account: | \$235,291.84 |
| Trust Fund(Select Board) | \$52,990.36 |
| Trust Fund (WSC) | \$78,591.72 |

Sewer:

| | |
|------------------|--------------|
| Checking Account | \$337,680.28 |
| Trust Fund (WSC) | \$91,769.25 |

i. "Big Ticket" Purchase Proposal

For the benefit of Selectwoman Cullen, Chair Houle explained how at the end of the fiscal year, the commission looks to determine: (a) what unspent O&M funds can be swept up and transferred to capital reserves; and (b) what funds might be available for DPW for expensive items which were not budgeted but could help improve efficiency. Mr. Robillard was asked to generate his "wish list," and the commission approved all of it: a jumping jack compactor, magnetic manhole cover lifter, tripod and harness for hazardous space access, and shared expense for a utility trailer (roads 50%, water 25% and sewer 25%). The totals are \$3,225 charged to water and \$9,325 to sewer. After discussion, Mr. White made a motion to approve the list; it was seconded by Mr. Roediger. Motion carried unanimously. Mr. Roediger noted that Mr. Robillard might want to check into the state's "White Barn" which sells/auctions equipment no longer needed by the state. Mr. Robillard is familiar with the program.

ii. "Sweep Up" of O&M Funds into Capital Reserves

Via an earlier email, Chair Houle had provided the members with the details supporting a possible transfer of O&M funds to capital reserves. Mr. Roediger moved to add \$10,000 of water O&M funds to the \$17,500 budgeted capital reserve for a total of \$27,500. Mr. White seconded. Motion carried unanimously. On the sewer side, Mr. White moved to transfer \$60,000 in O&M funds to the budgeted \$50,000 for a total of \$110,000. Mr. Stringham seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

5. Selectman's Report

Selectwoman Cullen reported that at its June 5, 2023 meeting, the Portsmouth City voted to approve the sewer agreement with the Town of New Castle, with authority given to the City Manager to sign. Chair Houle reported that our Select Board is scheduled to vote to sign the agreement at its meeting on June 19, 2023, and then Chair Houle will take the agreement to City hall for signature by the City Manager.

Importantly, Chair Houle noted that the agreement presumes New Castle will be setting aside capital reserves to invest in its sewer infrastructure, and further, our retail rate can never be less than the City of Portsmouth's retail rate. The Chair and Mr. White noted that it will be important to keep a record of how the Town invests in its infrastructure to demonstrate compliance. Mr. Robillard noted that the Asset Management Program should help substantiate these improvements. Further, Chair Houle noted this documentation will be helpful in substantiating efforts regarding "co-permittee" EPA expectations that the Town will look to mitigate inflow and infiltration.

Mr. Robillard expressed concern about the information in the Chair's notice to be inserted in the July/August bills, which will explain how the sewer rate will be adjusted in response to the new sewer agreement. Mr. Robillard believes the rates in Portsmouth will be going up 4-6% each year, and he does not want the public to be confused by language that states that the Town will try to keep the sewer rate "in the low \$20.00 range." He is concerned that we may not be allocating sufficient funds for capital reserves. Chair Houle stated there will be a meeting every fall to establish the wholesale sewer rate, and that it would not be subject to the "automatic" 4-6% we have typically experienced. Rather, it would be reassessed annually by the City's rate specialist with total participation of the Town. There was also discussion about depreciation, and how it has been ignored, which impacts our capital reserves. The philosophy in the past was keeping the rate low. It is hoped that there will be a capital improvement process which will have a significant bearing on future reserves and commensurately on the rates. Chair Houle reviewed language in the notice and will leave it as is, acknowledging that, at some point, the "low-20's" rate will need to be increased.

6. Superintendent's Report

a. Regarding co-permittee issues, Mr. Robillard noted that Portsmouth has established a coordinator for pre-treatment of industrial waste. Mr. Robillard will be working with this coordinator and noted that a permitting process will likely be established. For New Castle this program/process will focus primarily, if not exclusively, on waste grease resulting from food preparation.

b. Mr. Roediger clarified for Mr. Robillard questions regarding fees as listed in Appendix B of the new Ordinance. Finding these on the website is not user friendly. Mr. Robillard will try to clean up/streamline the information on the website. Further, he indicated that a copy of the new ordinance needs to be provided to NHDES, which he will take care of.

c. Chair Houle asked Mr. Robillard to verify that he had generated a memorandum for the record regarding the sewer connection challenges at the Michelin property, intersection of Mainmast and Walton; a memorandum regarding the rented hydrant locations (completed); and completion of an asset management plan (AMP) status report due to NHDES. Mr. Robillard still needs to get with Margaret Bland, Underwood Engineers, to get the AMP report done.

d. Three watertight manhole frames and covers have been received to address the sanitary sewer overflows which occurred in January 2023. Summer installation is anticipated.

7. New Business

a. Update FY24 Sewer Rate

See the earlier discussions regarding an adjustment resulting from the sewer agreement with the City of Portsmouth. At the February 23, 2023 commission meeting, the rate had been set at \$23.14. Chair Houle had earlier provided an email to the members explaining a reduction. Mr. Roediger made a motion to reduce the FY24 sewer rate from \$23.14 down to \$20.03; Mr. White seconded and the motion carried unanimously. Customers will see this reflected for the first time in the October/November bills.

b. NHDES Leak Detection Survey Grant

The application is due July 31, 2023. Mr. Robillard will apply. This will demonstrate to Portsmouth that we are proactive in improving our water infrastructure.

c. July Smoke Tests

Mr. Robillard outlined the plan for July 10-12 smoke tests of the sewer system, weather permitting. This will be performed by a specialist of the Granite State Rural Water Association. Mr. Robillard will be get signage from NHDOT to place on the Rte. 1B entries to the town. Informational flyers will be published. Police and fire departments are all on board. Door hangers will be put on all houses. Mr. Stringham will join the team on 11 and 12 July.

d. Mr. Andrew Sharpe, Underwood Engineers, Presentation Regarding Sea Level Rise and Its Impact on Elevation of Emergency Diesel Generators in the Context of the Electrical Systems Upgrade Project

Mr. Sharpe had generated a draft technical memorandum regarding this subject and asked to present his preliminary findings and to request commission feedback. One aspect of the project, to the extent funding will allow, is to consider sea level rise and see

what rudimentary actions we might take to minimize adverse effects, notably raising the platforms under the new generators by some amount to provide margin for 30 years into the future, the likely lifespan of the new generators.

When all was said and done, the commission recommended that the elevation of the generators be increased from their current elevations by the following amounts:

- River Rd.: two (2) feet
- Steamboat Ln.: two (2) feet
- Quarterdeck Ln.: no change

There will be future exchanges with Mr. Sharpe to update/finalize his technical memorandum incorporating the commission's recommendations. And Chair Houle will request the complete results of his assessments as a project deliverable which will serve not only to inform this elevation decision, but also to provide a valuable source of data for future capital improvements to the pump stations.

8. Continuing Business.

a. Status of Software Enhancements

Mr. Robillard reported that the credit card portal will be ready for payment of July/August bills for water/sewer. There will be a "how to" guide included in the bills. In response to a question from Mr. Roediger, Mr. Robillard stated that as of now, there is no EFT feature, however he will look into it. Customers will be responsible for any fees associated with use of a credit card. Mr. Robillard is also working on incorporating the backflow device test charge, and the meter replacement fee.

b. Status of 2022/2023 CWSRF Pre-Apps and Applications

Pre-Apps for Manhole Remediation, for State Aid Grant (SAG) for the Electrical Systems Upgrade, and for Construction of the Force Main Replacement at the Sawtelle Bridge (submitted by Underwood Engineers on behalf of the Town) were all received on time and have been validated for competition. Now we wait to see if we "make the cut" for funding.

The Asset Management Plan for Sewer Infrastructure (\$30,000) was approved by the Governor and Executive Council.

The (\$100,000) application for planning for the replacement of the force main at the Sawtelle Bridge was signed by Selectman Stewart at the 5 June Select Board meeting and NHDES has confirmed that it has been "introduced into the system." In short, we now wait for the requisite administrative/bureaucratic action which ultimately results in Governor and Executive Council approval however many months hence.

9. Any Other Business for the Board.

a. Status of Chairmanship

Chair Houle asked for discussion on who might assume chairmanship when his resignation becomes effective June 30, 2023. Mr. White, with reservation, indicated he would be willing to accede to the chair on July 1, 2023, so long as Mr. Roediger acceded to vice chair. Mr. Stringham nominated Mr. White to become chairman and Mr. Roediger as vice chairman; Chair Houle seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Mr. White stated his concern about getting administrative help given the significant amount of time Chair Houle had devoted to the position over the last five years. Mr. Stringham indicated he would help with administrative tasks. This led to further discussion about the role/authority of the Superintendent of Public Works, the introduction of a new Town Administrator, and the increased need for administrative support across the board. Mr. Roediger also stressed the importance/value of volunteers who, in effect, provide much support to the Town.

10. Adjourn.

Mr. White made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Mr. Roediger. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 4:17 p.m..

Respectfully submitted,
BJ Riordan
Recording Secretary