

REVISION 1

APPROVED

MINUTES OF THE WATER & SEWER COMMISSION MEETING THURSDAY, September 21, 2023 TOWN HALL CONFERENCE ROOM, 1:00 P.M.

Members Present: Richard White, Chairman, Pam Cullen, SB Liaison, Carol Roediger, Scott Stringham, Lorn Buxton, Chris Robillard, Superintendent of Public Works. Alternates Larry Doyle, Jim Rini, Stephen Johnson, Town Finance Administrator, Lori Ruest.

Also Present: Bette Jane Riordan, Recording Secretary

Chair White opened the meeting at 1:00 p.m. and welcomed the new members noting a quorum and stated Voting Members will be Chair White, Mr. Roediger, Mr. Stringham, and Selectwoman Cullen. Chair White explained the process of voting as an Alternate, which can occur when full time member is absent. Otherwise, the Alternates are free to ask questions, but may not vote.

1. Public Questions. None

2. Individual Applications/Petitions.

a. 53 Abigail Lane/Russman – Request waiver of \$40.00 late fees.

Chair White stated he had asked Lori Ruest, Finance Administrator to be present as she oversees the water/sewer billings and can assist in explaining the policies and procedures regarding billing and waivers of late fees.

He stated that Ms. Russman informed she did not receive her first quarter bill, however, received her second quarter bill, along with her first quarter bill balance due and late fees. She is asking for waiver of the \$40 late fees. Chair White stated the issue is whether or not to waive the fees, or proceed as one would do with any utility bill, which is, if you don't pay the bill by the due date, late fees are assessed.

It was noted there could be many reasons, including the timing of the arrival of the bill in the customer's mailbox from the initial mailing from the Town. Discussion was opened to members of the Commission. Ms. Ruest explained that the reason this is before the Commission is that the ordinance dictates that the Commission can waive fee(s). When a request is made to her, it is forwarded to the Commission for decision.

Mr. Buxton asked for clarification on what the customer received. The customer received a second quarter bill and paid it, however, also received an additional bill with late fees for the unpaid balance for the first quarter.

Selectwoman Cullen recalled past instances when she was tax collector, and when questioned about forgiving the late or "interest" due, she did not waive. Property taxes are governed by NH RSA's and are very strict and precise. Mr. Doyle asked about the current policy. Chair White indicated there is nothing in policy that details "how" the process rolls out. It clearly states how the Town is to act for non-payment. Mr. Stringham asked about other late fees were assessed for that time period claiming non-receipt of the bill. Ms. Ruest stated there were no others. Further discussion ensued, and Chair White called for a motion. Chair White noted that he believed that Ms. Russman could seek relief from the Select Board. Mr. Stringham noted there is nothing in the ordinance which allows for that type of relief. Mr. Roediger noted there is a provision dealing with late fees and arbitration which provides an avenue of relief to the Select Board. (Sec. 4.5).

MOTION: To deny the request for waiver of \$40 in late fees for 53 Abigail Lane as presented by Nancy Russman.

MOTION: S. STRINGHAM

SECOND: P. CULLEN

UNANIMOUS.

Mr. Doyle asked how the customer would be notified of the decision. Chair White indicated it was his responsibility to notify her.

b. 3 Oliver Street/Ambrose – Request waiver of \$20 late fee.

Chair White asked Ms. Ruest to provide the background on this issue. Mr. Ambrose informed her that he wrote the check, put it in the mail, and it did not arrive by the last day of the month (the due date). Ms. Ruest explained that her office began sending out an additional bill when someone's account has gone unpaid and was assessed a \$20 late fee, rather than going two or three months until the next quarter's bill. In this case, the customer called Ms. Ruest, said he paid it, mailed it, and the Town should have it. The envelope and receipt for this customer was found, which was post-marked August 1, and date stamped as received at Town Hall on August 2. The payment was due on the 31st. of July.

Ms. Ruest sought direction from the Commission as to whether an amount of time could be identified (such as allowing two or three business days past that due date to post payments without adding the late fee) in order to reduce the time utilized to consider requests for waiver of fees. Further discussion ensued. Selectwoman Cullen felt very strongly to leave the due date in place. Various scenarios were considered. Mr. Roediger reviewed the timing involved in receiving and paying the bill, and pointed out that if the customer chooses to wait until the last minute, this can result in a late fee being imposed. He feels it is important to be consistent, and not get into reviewing all the possible scenarios. Mr. Stringham asked about the possibility of adding 30 days, which he tried to introduce last year, and questioned if there would be a downside, keeping in mind we are a small Town with a need to serve the public. It was the sense of the Commission to not pursue the additional 30-day option. Mr. Roediger asked if the Town had a consistent late fee policy for all bills generated by the Town. Ms. Ruest and Selectwoman

Cullen explained how the tax collections RSA's work. Interest starts to accrue on the date due. (With only penalties of \$10 or less being forgiven). It is a daily interest rate fee which cannot be waived. After discussion, Chair White called for a motion.

MOTION: To deny the request for a waiver of the \$20 late fee for 3 Oliver Street as presented by Mr. Ambrose.

MOTION: L. BUXTON
SECOND: P. CULLEN
UNANIMOUS

Chair White asked to discuss the NEW BUSINESS Item regarding late fees and software capabilities.

Discussion included many issues regarding changing the due dates for invoices to 30 days, and the complications that could ensue such as varying due dates each month, and the shortening of time frames in some instances to pay the bill. The timing of when the Town receives the necessary billing information from Portsmouth also is a variable factor to take into consideration. Whatever decision is arrived at, possible ordinance changes will need to be made. Ms. Ruest noted that the extra bill she sends out appears to be helping with the late fee issue. She noted the next bills go out in October. By November she will be able to provide an aging report. After further discussion, Mr. Stringham suggested tabling this matter until the November meeting of the Commission. Chair White suggested adding a sentence on the bill allowing 5 days for mailing. Mr. Johnson asked Mr. Robillard to check with Portsmouth and its timing and how it affects some of the late payors. Mr. Robillard explained the readings process with Portsmouth and clarified some questions on which figures he relies upon. It was the sense of the Commission to table the topics involving due date changes and late fee policy until the November meeting.

3. Approve Minutes of the August 24, 2023, Meeting.

After review, Chair White called for a motion.

MOTION: To Approve the Minutes of the August 24, 2023, meeting of the Water and Sewer Commission as amended.

MOTION: S. STRINGHAM
SECOND: L. BUXTON
UNANIMOUS

4. Financials.

a. Review, approve and sign checks.

Water: After review, Chair White called for a motion.

MOTION: To Approve the water utility checks as read and presented.

MOTION: L. BUXTON
SECOND: S. STRINGHAM
UNANIMOUS

Sewer: After review, Chair White called for a motion.

MOTION: To approve the sewer utility checks as read and presented.

MOTION: L. BUXTON
SECOND: C. ROEDIGER
UNANIMOUS

b. Accountant's Report.

No info from Cambridge Trust for this month.

Checking Account Balances.

WATER:

Checking Acct.:		\$220,515.76
Trust Balance: (Select Board)	Last month	\$53,283.95
Cap. Reserve Balance: (W&S)	Last month	\$79,027.15

SEWER:

Checking Acct:		\$261,913.14
Trust Balance (Select Board)	Last month	\$0.8
Cap Reserve Balance (W&S)	Last month	\$92,277.69

Mr. Stringham noted that the Commission should be aware soon (in next report) of the increase from the transfer of funds from the end of the prior Fiscal Year.

5. Selectman's Report

Selectwoman Cullen reported that the Town took possession on the Coast Guard property on Tuesday, September 19, 2023. Mr. Robillard stated the water is off inside the house, and next week, they will be shutting it down.

6. Superintendent's Report

a. Water Asset Management Plan. No new information

b. Sewer Asset Management Plan -update. Working on getting his sewer plans to Underwood. Working on mapping.

c. Sewer Smoke Testing. Mr. Robillard showed the report. May be difficult to get copies. It's in a spiral notebook. Letters have not gone out yet to the homeowners in violation, but Mr. Robillard has given Chair White a draft of what he wants to send out. Mr. Buxton and Mr. Roediger would like some time frames set for the homeowner to contact Mr. Robillard and to start planning for the repairs needed to come into compliance.

d. 2023 Big Ticket Items. Jumping jack compactor will be ordered. He has not dealt with the harness issue.

e. Pre- treatment of Industrial Waste-update, Grease Trap Inventory Permits have been inventoried, but no permits have been issued yet. Need to make ordinance changes and will try and mirror Portsmouth's ordinance.

f. Watertight manhole frames & covers installation. Scheduled for spring. May have a bidder. 2 need to be done.

g. NHDES Leak Detection Survey Grant- Applied and waiting.

h. Water/Sewer Software enhancements, Credit Card Payments 95% complete. People are using the credit card method for payment. of water/sewer bills. Still need to complete the meter replacement fee process in the software. There will be a new line on the bill explaining the payment system to customers.

i. June 2023 Backflow testing update: NCHS still needs to be done, as well as a neighbor across the street.

j. Portsmouth Avenue Sewer Air Release Valve Replacement Update: No information

7. NEW BUSINESS.

a. Review of late fee assessment – 30 days? Tabled until November Meeting

b. NHDES – 2023 Water and Wastewater Rate Dashboard Update
New Castle's rates per Units (748 Gallons) Water \$8.65; Sewer \$20.03

8. CONTINUING BUSINESS

a. Welcome New Member to WSC

Lorn Buxton, Full Member
Larry Doyle, Alternate
Jim Rini, Alternate
Stephen Johnson, Alternate.

The following were provided to you by the Chair.

- b. Water/Sewer Ordinance Adopted 04/17/2023.**
- c. Water System 2023 Map**
- d. Set up new member tour of facilities: Members to contact Chris Robillard.**
- e. Sewer Pump Station Electrical Upgrades**
 - Status report of UE September 5, 2023**
 - Wetlands Permits for River Road & Steamboat Lane 10/03/23.**
 - Conservation Commission. (No need for WSC to go)**

9. OTHER

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Chair White called for a motion.

MOTION; To Adjourn

MOTION: L. BUXTON
SECOND: S. STRINGHAM
UNANIMOUS

Meeting Adjourned at 2:28 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Bette Jane Riordan

Recording Secretary.