

Minutes of 12/12/23 Sewer Commission meeting– via Zoom (Video Conference)

Attendees: Chair- John Reynolds, Vice-Chair- Brett Ramsden, Clerk- Mike Nault, Member: Mike Mackin, Business Manager-Paula Bertram, Minutes Clerk- Jane Ranley

Absent: Dave MacDonald, DPW Director- Bill Bernard,

John opened the meeting at 6:04pm. and did a roll call of attendees. The Commission began the meeting by saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENT- none

ANNOUNCEMENTS – Mike N. announced it is Dave's birthday on 12/14.

CURRENT BUSINESS

Q2 FY24 Commitment- Paula reported the amount billed out for Q2 was \$269,236.80 and they will need to make some adjustments for the bills that were incorrect. Those will be reflected in the Q3 Commitment. Paula asked the Commissioners to vote on it and she will send it out via DocuSign.

Motion: Mike M.

Second: Mike N.

To make the Commitment of \$269,236.80. Roll Call Vote: Mike M.-aye, Mike N.-aye, Brett-aye, and John-aye.

Minutes of 11/13/23

Motion: Brett R.

Second: Mike M.

To accept the minutes of 11/13/23.

Roll Call Vote: Mike M.-aye, Mike N.-aye, Brett-aye, and John-aye.

Leominster Intermunicipal Agreement Negotiations- John stated Paula took the old typewritten version from 24 years ago and entered it into Word. Paula said Dave noted the first copy she sent did not have an indemnification clause, so that if Leominster agreed to do work in Lunenburg, they would be held harmless. Paula added the clause and sent it again but has not heard anything else. If the Commission does not move forward on it tonight, she would like to have a special meeting to talk about it because Jake Fleming is looking to meet again to get their feedback. Paula noted that Dave did not want to send anything to Leominster without the full input of the Commission. John asked how quickly Leominster wanted to meet and Paula replied that Jake asked a couple of weeks ago but he at least wants a red-line version. Paula said she will let Jake know they are working on it and ask if they can meet after their January meeting. John stated he will put it on the 1/9 agenda and asked the Commissioners to go through it to offer any suggestions, so the sub-committee can move ahead. Paula requested to have any suggestions sent to her and she will forward them to the subcommittee.

Line Item Transfer -John reported that payroll informed the office that there was a shortage of \$1,242.56 for the Business Manager and they will take it from the Assistant Business Manager line, which has the necessary funds. Paula noted that line-item transfers need to be approved by Bill and Heather, but she wanted the Commission to be aware. A vote was not needed.

Business Manager Report

Update on System Maintenance & Upgrades- Paula reported she is still waiting for estimates from Clean Basins and Hall Pump for wet well cleanings at the 5 stations. She added that 3 wells need a tank entry and 2 need a police detail. Paula also sent out Robert Lily's (CTE) report and met with him on 12/8. Robert reported some issues with the pipe to the wet well at West St. It had been previously patched but it is failing and needs to be done again. Paula stated that when the company does the wet well for cleaning, Robert wants them to take pictures and really look at the connection. CTE will give a quote on correcting the issue. Robert has also expressed concern about I/I at the West St. station, where he has seen a drastic spike when it rains. The drainage from the street is going directly over the wet well and Robert is working with Bill B. to see if they can direct the flow away from the wet well, to lessen I/I. He is also concerned about the flange and possibly broken bolts on the pipe connection at Mass 1. During the wet well cleaning, they will investigate and repair it as soon as possible. Paula noted they received the generator inspection reports from Power Pumps but they were unreadable, so she has requested readable copies. Paula asked Wade and Robert from CTE to attend the 1/9/24 meeting to discuss capital needs. She has given them a spreadsheet based on information received from the prior technician. Paula asked them to look at the sheet and give a wish list, based on priority rating. Prior to any rate increase, we need to understand capital needs. Paula received costs for repairing a block heater, repairing the blister buttons on one generator and a switch on a generator. She thought the labor and travel costs were high so she and Bill are working with CTE to revise them. John asked if there was more than 1 block heater needing repair and Paula replied the block heaters at Mass 1, Leominster Rd., and

Dana St. need repair but she has only received 1 quote. She noted that Power Pump is looking at charging travel time on all of the work but it won't take place on different occasions, so she is looking for a breakdown on the hours and travel time. John stated he is impressed with Robert's general knowledge. Paula agreed and noted Robert wants to look at I/I, has read the maintenance manual and looked at the manhole reports. He has a committed work ethic and is doing a great job.

Enterprise Fund FY23 Final Report – Paula stated she sent out FY23 Expenditures. There was a surplus of \$190,730.26 which was transferred to Retained Earnings. The balance at the end of FY23 was \$2,124,854.

Update on Software System Conversion- Paula stated this has truly been a nightmare and it has consumed hundreds upon hundreds of hours. They are close to going through all the bills and have 23 more to do tomorrow. Per the report she sent out, there are 126 incorrect bills out of the 1,000+ that they sent. Most of the bills had correct amounts billed but they had other information wrong. Paula sent out a report for those that were not correct. Munis is still trying to identify what went wrong. The response from Munis has been lackluster but they looked at it remotely today and she is meeting with them tomorrow. The Demands have not gone out yet and will not until the bills are straightened out. The delinquency rate is high and receipts are low but she is not sure if everything has been posted to the general ledger. Paula has emailed Accounting to find out what has been posted. The majority of the bills were correct—it was the history that was not correct. Paula was able to fix the problem with the form but they still do not have an answer on what went wrong. She met with the Town Manager about the bills and Heather has sent a very strong email to Munis. Brett asked how far back the bills were incorrect and Paula replied the 8/1 bills were correct, under the old software. The 11/2 bills were the ones that the history went haywire and that was with the new software. Some of the issues are conversion migration issues, which mostly affected irrigation meter accounts. The system made adjustments to some accounts, going back to 2019 and she does not understand why. Paula noted all of the data for the current quarter that was uploaded was correct, which is her part of the process. The way the billing process works is they receive information from Leominster and Lunenburg Water District and bring it into our Access database program. They verify the data, export it as a CSV file, and upload it into Munis. The problem was with the history and just on the November bills. She does not want to go through this again and until Munis can say what happened, she does not want to send out new bills or demands. John said he cannot begin to explain the amount of time wasted and frustration Paula has experienced with Munis. He added that Paula has a database background and he has some but it has been extremely frustrating – mostly because of a lack of support from Munis. Heather has put pressure on and there have been emails say it is being escalated but nothing seems to happen. John agreed with Paula – they can't run the bills again until this is fixed. Paula noted they took copies of all the bills that were wrong, handwrote what the errors were and will attach them to the case- about 140 pages. She added she wants them to know there is no consistency on the errors. Brett noted it is effecting numbers across the board. Paula will go through the adjustments with the tax collector and will need to do manual corrections and write-offs on the various accounts. Brett said the Commission greatly appreciates all the incredible effort and horrifically wasted time to make this correct. John asked if they should make the Select Board aware of this and ask to be on the next agenda. Paula noted the way the problem came to light was she received a call from a prompt paying customer who said his bill showed a past due balance, which he never has. She also received calls from customers who were over-billed. In some instances, the amount due is correct on the bill but the math is not correct. Brett agreed about contacting the Select Board about what has been happening, so it can be corrected before the next billing. Mike M. asked if the Town Manager is well aware of the problem, wouldn't she have contacted the Select Board. John replied he did not know. Paula noted that she talked to Elaine Peterson, who does the water billing for the board of Selectmen which is also the Water Commission. Even though Elaine only has 11 accounts, she has not been able to generate her water bills and is extremely frustrated. She ended up on support for 6 hours last Thursday and still cannot do her bills. Paula has also given a heads-up to the Tax Collector who is currently working on the tax bills and she has joined a forum from Munis, finding out this is not the only community having problems. There is also a blog talking about concerns that W9s and W2s are not calculating correctly, which Paula relayed to the Tax Collector and payroll. She added since the Selectmen ended up in such a horrific situation with the real estate bills, it would be a courtesy to let the Selectmen know there is another potential issue in town with the Munis software. Paula has not seen it on any agenda or town manager update and does not think it is a bad idea to let them know as a memo from the chair. John said they do not need a vote as long as all agree to have John talk to the Select Board. Paula said her biggest issue

right now is the lack of support and the uncertainty about the next billing. Hopefully the tax bills don't have the same problem.

Sewer Business Manager Job Description – Paula reported she sent out the revised job description, done by Bill and Julie, which she has no concerns about. She noted the Personnel Board is in the process of going through and ranking all the positions under the salary admin plan. She was not happy with the ranking they gave the Sewer Business Manager position which was equivalent to a seasonal worker at the cemetery or the Council on Aging van driver. Paula and Bill worked on a revised job description and sent it to Julie, who tweaked it. It will now go to the Personnel Board who will hopefully adjust the rating. John said he read it and would have liked to have seen something on having a basic understanding of engineered plans but would defer to her and Bill. Also, it did not mention that many times Paula meets people at the pump stations so she is not always in the office, doing “office work”, but Paula did find reference to off-site tasks.

Assistant to the Sewer Business Manager Position- Paula reported that she is very happy to welcome Camille Farrar, as the Assistant Business Manager. She started on 11/28 and is doing a great job. She was Sewer Administrator in Shirley and instrumental in setting up the initial Sewer Department. She developed a betterment tracking program in Shirley and has a strong background in sewer billing. They did not use Munis but she has already picked up a lot of Munis skills. She is very experienced in sewer operations and maintenance and asked very good questions about the system when Robert comes in. She has very strong administrative skills and we are very fortunate to have her. John said in addition to her strong skill set, she has a great sense of humor. Paula added that she fits in well with the crew and public.

The Re-Boot –50 Mass Avenue—Payment Agreement – (*Unanticipated topic*) John stated that Re-Boot has not paid a sewer bill since they opened up. They had come before the Commission earlier to ask about extra time for the pumping of their external grease trap, which the Commission granted. Previously they met with Paula to set up a payment plan because they were approximately \$13K behind. The original plan was to pay \$500/week but that did not happen. They came in today to pay \$1,500 to bring them up to date because the Selectmen will be reviewing whether to renew their liquor license. She noted there is a bylaw stating if a business owes property or utility bills, they may not get a license, at the discretion of the licensing authority. With the \$1,500 they received today their balance is \$13,221. Paula suggested requiring a payment of \$600/week and require any new bills be paid by the due date, with all bills paid by 5/28/24. In February 2024, this sewer balance will be put on the tax bill for 50 Mass Ave. Paula talked to the tax collector and any payments for sewer bills will be directed to the sewer lien. One concern she has is that the property owner be made aware of the issue but unfortunately there is no clear address for the property owner. The assessors have it as 50 Mass Ave but Paula found 2 addresses for Silver Lining Investments--an Orange, MA address which is on the deed and another Fitchburg address. She will send copies of this correspondence to both addresses and the owner of Re-Boot is required to notify the property owner in writing. Mike M. asked if the sewer bill goes on the tax bill, will that go to the owner? Paula replied correct and stated there will be a separate line for the sewer lien. Her main concern is that they don't own the property. However If the business closes, the bill will become the responsibility of the property owner. Mike N. and Brett agreed with Paula's plan. John stated they can recommend that the Select Board not renew the liquor license at the 12/19 meeting or they do the new agreement. If he is unwilling to sign the agreement, the Commission agreed they would need to recommend the Select Board not renew his license. Paula said she will notify the business of the Commission's decision and that they will need to come in to sign it by 12/15. She will need to let the Select Board know by the 19th what the situation is. Paula would also add if the business defaults on the agreement, it will be brought up again to the licensing authority, subject to possible revocation.

Motion: Mike M.

Second: Mike N.

The payment plan as developed by the Business Manager be approved by the Commission, that the debtor shall pay \$600 per week beginning December 19, 2023, the debtor pay all future sewer quarterly bills in full by the due date and the debtor agrees that the outstanding balance shall be paid in full by May 28, 2024. The debtor understands that the outstanding sewer balance shall be transferred to the real estate tax bill for 50 Massachusetts Avenue in February of 2024. Thereafter, the outstanding sewer balance will be reflected on the Real Estate Tax Bill. The Debtor, as a tenant of the property, agrees to officially notify the Landlord/Landowner of this Agreement in writing, a copy of said notification shall be delivered to the Lunenburg Sewer Commission office no later than December 30, 2023. Payments made under this

Agreement shall be applied to the sewer lien placed on the real estate tax bill for property located at 50 Massachusetts Avenue, Lunenburg, MA 01462.

Roll Call Vote: Mike M.-aye, Mike N.-aye, and Brett-aye. (John temporarily lost signal)

Paula asked, in addition to the agreement, to send a memo to the Select Board, as the Licensing Authority, letting them know the terms of the agreement and requesting, in the event the business owner defaults on the agreement, the Licensing Authority would consider revocation of the liquor license. John returned to the meeting and Paula updated him saying that Mike M. read the terms of the agreement as a motion and the Commission voted to execute the agreement. Also a memo will be sent to the Select Board, as the Licensing Authority, asking in the event that the business owner defaults, the Licensing Board would hold a hearing to consider revocation of the liquor license. Paula added that only the business owner's signature needs to be notarized. John will also come by to sign it.

PUBLIC COMMENT – John noted the next meeting will be 1/9/24 with CTE attending and discussion of IMA.

UPCOMING SCHEDULED SEWER COMMISSION ACTIVITIES:

January 9, 2024 @ 6pm – Regular Meeting, Remote Participation

January 30, 2024 @ 6pm – Regular Meeting, Remote Participation

February 13, 2024 @ 6pm – Regular Meeting, Remote Participation

February 30, 2024 @ 6pm – Regular Meeting, Remote Participation

Motion: Brett R.

Second: Mike N.

To adjourn at 7:09pm

Roll Call Vote: Mike N.-aye, Brett-aye, Mike M.-aye, and John-aye.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane L. Ranley

Minutes Clerk