

Minutes of 1/9/24 Sewer Commission meeting– via Zoom (Video Conference)

Attendees: Chair- John Reynolds, Vice-Chair- Brett Ramsden, Clerk- Mike Nault, Members: Dave MacDonald and Mike Mackin, DPW Director- Bill Bernard, Business Manager-Paula Bertram, Minutes Clerk- Jane Ranley

Guests: Kevin Olson & Matt Corbin (Wright Pierce), Robert Lilley (CTE)

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- Dave thanked all for the birthday wishes and hoped all had a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. He added in regard to the recent storms, he was very, very impressed with Bill and his DPW staff. It was an outstanding job, despite not having all the equipment he needed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS - none

APPOINTMENTS – Kevin Olson & Matthew Corbin-Wright Pierce – Potential Rerouting of Wastewater from Fitchburg to Leominster Discussion-

Matt stated about 12 years ago, the Sewer Commission asked Wright Pierce to look at moving the flow on certain streets from Fitchburg to Leominster, due to increasing rates from Fitchburg. Recently, the Commission asked Wright Pierce to again look at updated costs in two areas. The first area is Zone 10 of the CWMP, which is east of the split of Chase & 2A, at the gas station. Originally, the flow was to be split between Fitchburg and Leominster, but 2016, it was determined it made sense to just send it all to Leominster. The other area was Zone 4, which is Electric Ave and north of Mass Ave which includes White St. (beyond Walmart complex), Eastern and Upland Streets. Recently there was a poll for extending sewer to those streets but it failed the 2/3 majority vote. They looked at whether they could redirect the flow going to Fitchburg, down Rt. 13 towards Whalom to Leominster. Matt said it could be done but it would involve redoing pump stations at Electric and Twin City. They estimated the 20 year savings of redirecting the flow would be \$2 Million vs the construction cost of \$6 Million, so they do not think it would be cost effective. Kevin said he is curious about how things are going with renegotiating the IMA with Leominster. John stated that was a good overview and did not think it would have been cost effective even 3 years ago. Dave asked if there would be any cost savings if they just do a portion of the upgrading. Matt replied they did not look at that but they would need to see if Twin City and Electric Ave stations could take additional flow with existing or slightly upgraded pumps vs new pump stations. He noted the pumps were generally in good shape a few years ago but they may be close to their lifetime. Dave noted Fitchburg will be increasing rates for the next 5 years and Paula confirmed they will increase 7% each year. Dave added that a resident asked about adding sewer to the West St. and Woodruff properties. John noted there is sewer on West St. from Leominster Rd to Sunny Hill. Matt said they did not escalate the Fitchburg costs over the 20 years or figure in the 7% increase for the next 5 years. Kevin added they can make that adjustment and asked what Leominster's plan would be for the next 20 years--is it possible that Fitchburg and Leominster increase similarly over the next 20 years? Matt noted that Fitchburg is under a consent decree and they still have many phases of sewer separation to go, along with treatment plant upgrades. Kevin added they have been working with Leominster and they just wrapped up phase 3 of their treatment plant upgrade. Fitchburg still has some sizeable upgrades to do also. John asked Matt and Kevin to look at the additional 7% per year. Dave asked Matt if they could turn some of the waste to Leominster without a main trunk line, by gravity. Matt said he would look at that and there may be some redirecting of force mains for Electric and Twin City. Dave said he would like to see the breakeven point. Paula stated there will be a substantial increase initially -more than 10% to start. She added that they need to look at any Capital projects that Fitchburg and Leominster will be doing, because Lunenburg will need to share in that cost. Paula said they will know more information in a month or 2 and the Commission agreed to hold off looking at the numbers until they meet with Leominster. Kevin said they are happy to look at the new draft when the Commission wants.

CURRENT BUSINESS -

Minutes of 12/12/23-

Motion: Mike M.

Second: Mike N.

To approve the minutes of 12/12/23.

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

Request for Extension – 1 Main St. – John noted this has to do with the grease trap at Bad Larry's and the landlord is asking for an extension to 1/29. Paula reported he hired a plumber and they cameraed the lines. A plumbing engineer is in the process of evaluating the grease trap. Bill and Paula agreed to granting the extension.

Motion: Dave M.

Second: Mike M.

To accept the proposal and extend the landlord for Bad Larry's to 1/29.

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

Business Manager Report —Billing/Software Issues—Paula reported the billing/software issues still continue and Munis has several problems. Many of the bill prints were incorrect – the previous balance, interest and payments are off on those bills. Also the applied credits did not work correctly. She worked with Peggy Wintle today and they were able to make adjustments, mainly with irrigation credits. This fixed the existing accounts but if she were to run the bills now, they would still be wrong. Development is working on a fix and she is due to send bills on 2/1. They cannot currently run demands, which development is also working on. This is a loss of revenue because late bills have a \$10 fee added. There are currently 238 bills still outstanding, which is \$2,300 they are losing. Munis is working on it and a due date for the fix. Another issue is with interest calculating incorrectly on some bills. Paula contacted Tom Alanzo as an IT person and he met with John, Paula, and Dave. Tom, Heather, Dan, Paula and Casey from Suzor IT met remotely with members of Munis to discuss the issues. Tom requested Munis put together a spreadsheet with the issues, who is assigned to them and dates to be fixed, asking for updates daily. They have been getting the updates but no fixes. Paula stated she has spent more than 400 hours on this problem. They found out they should be logging daily into Tyler support for fixes and patches, which also did not work, but have since been fixed. She has also joined some forums for Tyler Technologies and she was astounded by the number of issues they have. Paula noted the new Fitchburg bill was wrong so they are also having problems. Dave asked when the problem started and Paula replied she reported it on 11/6. Dave said he is upset that Paula had to spend 400 hours of their time trying to fix this. He is glad that Heather and Tom have gotten involved. Paula will need to print 1,000 dummy bills to see if they are correct, before she does the bill run in February. Dave pointed out the software printed the wrong mailing address on the bills, which caused more problems. The Commissioners agreed they are upset that it is still not fixed and a bill should be sent to Heather for reimbursement.

Update on System Maintenance & Upgrades – CTE – Robert Lilley – John introduced Robert, who started at CTE in September and noted he is doing a great job. Robert stated he is a wastewater operator, has had some past experience with this collection system and he has a good idea about the upcoming issues. Since December, he reported there have quite a few pump clogs at a variety of stations. Leominster Rd. has had multiple clogging on 1 pump and smaller submersible grinder pumps getting bound up and clogged. They need pump outs of the wet wells at 6 stations. The Dana St. dialer is not holding a charge and needs to be replaced. They have been cleaning out the clogged pumps and everything has been functional. They are waiting for new Control Panels for West St. and Francis St. John asked if there is a lot of debris at the bottom of the wet wells, such as flushable wipes that are not flushable and Robert replied yes, along with nylon or elastic. The stations due for pump outs are Dana, Mass 1, Leominster, Meadowwoods, West and Francis. Paula finally got a quote from Hall pump for \$7,500 plus disposal for all but Meadowwoods. Robert said they could pump it down to its lowest level and then skim the grease off. Paula said she has not received a quote from Clean Basins. Robert noted Meadowwoods and Mass 2 have the biggest problem with grease– usually due to disposals. Paula stated they had a clog cleared at Mass 2, which is the first one from the center. John asked if they should discuss adding a grease interceptor at Meadowwoods. Robert said possibly but the station had not been pumped in over a year and a half. John noted Robert replaced a solenoid on 12/22 and asked if they need to reorder a spare. Robert replied they have a complete spare kit but will get some more spares. Mike N. asked when they recommend pumping the well and Robert replied annually but it is based on visual. Paula noted they haven't been doing that. Brett asked if he saw buildup of grease at Mass 1. Robert replied not a lot but Dana shows the most grease, which has to do with the restaurants.

Capital Planning – Paula reported they have spent \$52,559 on Capital this year and they budgeted \$95,408. She noted that Wade (general manager at CTE) sent over a list of things to look at and Paula asked Robert what the top priorities are. Robert replied the pumps and motors at the 3 largest stations should be replaced over the next 6 years, with Mass 1 being the priority this year. Other priorities would be the hatch cover for the wet well at Electric Ave. and the dialer at Dana St. Paula added the wet well cleaning is #1 priority. She noted that they have not been putting money into Capital and she wants to bring the stations up to where they need to be. In FY25, they are looking at replacing generators and Robert agreed Electric Ave. and Twin City would be priorities. He suggested looking in the storage shed to see what pumps are there and noted a few are interchangeable. Robert said they are using the Maintenance Plan as a guideline. Dave suggested getting generators from the same vendor and Robert noted the ones at Francis and Mass 3 are Cats. Paula stated that Robert has been doing a lot of extra things at the stations and she appreciates all his work. The Commissioners discussed doing visits to the stations on 1/12. Paula noted that in the past years they have not spent more than \$25K on Capital and they will spend the \$95K budgeted for FY24. However looking forward through FY32, she is looking at spending up to \$120K per year on Capital Expenditures. They need to look at a rate increase based on increases from Fitchburg and Leominster but need to also factor in upgrades as well. Dave pointed out they funded the Maintenance program with \$100K per year but it was not all spent. Paula said she is working through the budget, looking at all the accounts and fund transfers which have not been tapped into. They need to look at what is in those accounts and put it towards upgrades at the stations. Any money not spent went into retained earnings. Paula and Bill have been discussing what needs to be done at the pump stations, including groundskeeping and wet well cleaning annually.

Leominster Intermunicipal Agreement Negotiations- Paula stated what the major changes are to the IMA and pointed out that the changes are in Sections 9 & 10, with no big changes to the rest. Dave said he wished they could break up the fee increases over 2 or 3 years. Paula noted they are asking Leominster for 100 hours of maintenance services each fiscal year, free of charge, with 30 day advanced notice. The services would include inspection technologies, cameraing, and jetting of lines. Also, in the event of an emergency, they would want Leominster to assist with personnel and equipment. They have added an indemnification clause for holding Leominster harmless when they assist. John asked if they discussed the changes to Sections 9 & 10 in the previous meeting with Leominster and Paula replied no. Dave's thought was if Lunenburg is going to be charged a rate similar to Leominster residents, then services should be provided too or give us a reduced rate. Paula noted the IMA will go to Counsel when they are finished with negotiations. John asked to make a correction to Section 18-1 (connection charge), where they redlined a factor of 70% and Paula will correct that.

Motion: Mike M.

Second: Brett R.

That the Commission authorize the Negotiating Committee to go to the next step with the town of Leominster and the IMA.

Discussion: Paula suggested in the discussions with Leominster they make sure there are no looming large Capital projects coming forward in the next 10 years. If there are, that will change their approach to the budget.

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

Sewer Business Manager Job Description- Paula said Bill talked to Julie and she said the Personnel Committee will be reviewing the revised job description at the 1/17 meeting. Paula hoped they will vote on it also. Some Commissioners will attend and Paula will post the agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENT – Dave urged people in the Water District to attend the Water District meeting on 1/10 to vote on articles. Paula asked to start working on the budget at the first February meeting. Paula and Bill will go through the numbers prior to the meeting.

UPCOMING SCHEDULED SEWER COMMISSION ACTIVITIES:

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

February 13, 2024 @ 6pm – Regular Meeting, Remote Participation
February 27, 2024 @ 6pm - Regular Meeting, Remote Participation
March 12, 2024 @ 6pm - Regular Meeting, Remote Participation

Motion: Mike M.

Second: Brett R.

To adjourn at 7:35pm

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

Respectfully submitted,

Jane L. Ranley
Minutes Clerk