

Minutes of 1/30/24 Sewer Commission meeting– via Zoom (Video Conference)

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

Absent: Member-Mike Mackin

John opened the meeting at 6:01pm. and did a roll call of attendees. The Commission began the meeting by saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENT & ANNOUNCEMENTS - none

CURRENT BUSINESS -

Minutes of 1/9/24-

Motion: Dave M.

Second: Brett R.

To accept the minutes for 1/9/24.

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

Minutes of 7/18/23

Motion: Mike N.

Second: Brett R.

To accept the minutes for 7/18/23.

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

Warrant Articles – Paula noted that the warrant is open until early March and she will be submitting the usual ones but wanted to know if the Commissioners had anything they wanted to add. They can discuss any changes to the regulations or processes at the next couple of meetings. Bill said the presentation to the Finance Committee will be on 3/15. Paula looked at last year's presentation and she would like to make changes, talking more about Capital Planning and their existing operation.

Annual Report- Paula stated that she will mimic reports from past years and asked if there were any highlights the Commissioners would like to add. The report is due in February and John mentioned that Jane had written the report in the past. Paula and Jane will work on it.

APPOINTMENTS – Philip Arcidiacono (Landlord), Chris Garcia (GGD Consulting Engineers) and Al Wernick (Tenant) – 1 Main Street -Philip thanked the Commission for giving them the extension. He reported that in November he hired Rooter Man to do a scope with the camera of the system and gave the footage to Chris Garcia, so he could prepare a report for the Commission. He stated that a neighbor downstream had a backup and the Commission was concerned about grease on their site. The Commission had proposed an exterior grease trap and Philip replied he wanted to get a professional engineer's opinion on whether the interior grease trap is working or not. Chris Garcia reported he went to the site last week and reviewed the interior installation of an existing 3 compartment wash sink as well as 2 hand sinks all connected to an interior interceptor, discharging to the sanitary drain. The interceptor is rated at 25/gal/minute and based on their calculations, the 3 compartment sink requires 19 gal/minute, so the interceptor is adequately sized. The video did show some grease downstream in the cast iron pipe and some evidence also in the sewer line, but in his opinion it did not appear to be an excessive amount. The interceptor was installed in 2016. Chris noted Al Wernick had completed logs going back to 2020, which noted the trap had been serviced and cleaned every 3 months. There wasn't excessive FOG taken out each time and in his opinion the trap is working as it should. Based on the age of the trap and rust on the interior, he recommended the trap be replaced with one of the same size. He also recommended that the owner video inspect downstream every 6 months to insure the trap is operating properly, along with maintaining the trap every 3 months. Dave asked when Al moved into the space and Al replied in 2015, when he started the renovation. Chris added that metal traps can rot out quickly and he recommends they install a new fiberglass one. Dave asked if Chris would recommend installing an external grease trap going into the abandoned septic out back and Chris replied it would take a lot of work to get it back into that area. Dave asked if there are floor drains and Chris no, they are not required. Dave asked Chris if he was comfortable that if a new internal trap is installed, there will be no grease going into the system. Chris stated his recommendation is to install the new internal trap, clean it every 3 or 6 months and video inspect every 6 months.

Brett asked if the camera work was just for that property or did they look at other lines. Chris replied that they did 5 or 6 videos, entering the manhole near Mass Ave and the clean out near the retaining wall and the towards the bank, along with the old septic areas. Chris added that there were no blockages but they saw evidence of grease on the sidewalls. Dave asked if they had cameraed when the incident happened and Paula said unfortunately, they did not. They had 2 people on site, including herself and John and just have a simple statement from the pumper that there were heavy blockages. There was not an official report. Dave noted that there is a problem at 1 Main St. and they just want to fix it. John told Chris the history of the site and noted they cameraed in 2015, which found no grease in the line. A year ago there was a back-up on the street with grease logs in the manhole and did not know where else it could be coming from. Paula added that their technician has noted heavy amounts of grease in the wet well at the Mass 2 pump station. Philip stated the grease trap is old and will be replaced. Additionally, Al can present his 3-month cleanings and they will camera every 6 month, jetting anything they find. Dave stated they are here to help them and thanked him for getting an engineer. Mike N. commented that this was not the first time there was grease there and for first year, he would want to see multiple cameraing to make sure the trap is working. Bill asked Chris for information about his engineering firm. Chris noted they are located in Dartmouth, with 15 employees and his father started the business in 1973. He added that 90% of their business is public bid work in Massachusetts. Chris will send business information and his report. Al said he would like to put in a trap twice the size, so they won't have a problem. Right now they are cleaning grease out weekly and putting it outside in the grease pit. Dave suggested listening to Chris because a bigger trap may create problems and Chris agreed. Paula asked for the camera videos to be forwarded to the Sewer Department.

Motion: Dave M.

Second: Mike N.

To accept engineer's recommendation of replacing the existing grease trap with a new plastic grease trap, every 6 months cameraing is required and a copy of the video must be sent to the Commission for review; property owner and engineer to meet with the Commission in 6 months to provide a status update. In one year, the Commission will evaluate the property to confirm that no blockages or excessive grease have occurred.

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

Dave thanked Philip for getting his crew together with the engineer and Philip thanked the Commission. Paula said she will notify them for the 6 month meeting and they will need a plumbing permit for the new trap. When the plumbing inspector signs off on the permit, a copy should be sent to the office and Paula will schedule the 6 month meeting. Philip noted that Rooter Man did the cameraing. Dave asked when they would install the new grease trap. Al replied once he gets the proper size, he will buy it and get a plumber to install it. John asked Al and Philip to keep Paula informed.

Leominster Intermunicipal Agreement Negotiation – Paula reported that the team met with the representatives from Leominster today. The major changes they were looking for were to have Leominster provide a set amount of regular maintenance and assistance in emergency situations. Unfortunately Leominster is not able to provide that service because their equipment is consistently in use.. Paula noted the majority of the other changes they were amenable to. The only other change they did not agree with was the increase in flow from 500,000 to 800,000 because Lunenburg is not using all the capacity they have now. The average usage now is 214,000 gals/day but there is language in the agreement for future discussion on increased flows. She noted that the rate did come down from the projected \$6.46. Currently the rate is \$5.32 and will go up to \$6.18 for FY25 and \$6.37 for FY26. After FY26, the rate will increase penny for penny. There are no capital infrastructure projects on the horizon and the treatment plant has been updated. Paula stated that they made some recommendations for identifying sources of I/I such as looking at the phasing of the sewer to see where they saw the increase in flow. As a side discussion, they talked about potentially upgrading the sewer line servicing Pioneer Dr. and improvements on Rt 70. That line is currently managed and paid to Leominster but Lunenburg may want to discuss taking it over. Dave noted they talked to Roger Brooks about coming to a meeting and also talking to Wright Pierce. Mike N. noted that Roger said Lunenburg's flow should be about 170,000 – not 215,000- which points to a lot of I/I. He gave a lot of good ideas to start looking for it.

Mike suggested they should meet once a year – they always learn a lot. Paula noted in section 19.2 -debt services, the wording will be that Leominster will provide their forecasted debt service in January and be payable by July 30th. She added that when she gets the wording from Leominster, she will send it to the Commissioners

Capital Planning – Paula suggested having a workshop to discuss the budget. She screen-shared her spreadsheets and reviewed figures. Paula met with Robert L. (CTE) to discuss the capital planning worksheet and they are looking at about \$95K-100K each year. The majority of the cost is for upgrading the pumps and generators. These costs need to be incorporated into the budget for the next few years. She explained the worksheet for looking at potential rate increases from the current rate of \$13.66 and how it would affect transfers from Retained Earnings. She also noted that the Green Energies Taskforce is looking at potential projects, with one being grants for sewer pumps. Robert estimated the pumps for Dana Street, Leominster Rd and Mass 1 could be \$40K each. The pumps are very old and showing signs of having issues. New pumps would be more efficient and there is grant money available. Bill said the Green Communities Taskforce met with a representative from Dept. of Energy who told him that they would fund pumps and the drive systems. If it fits, they would apply in April and Paula added that if they could get a grant, it would cut their capital costs and potentially drop the rate increase too. Paula suggested talking about this in the workshop. Dave said to look at what you have – not the ifs and Mike N. stated they still need to do a rate increase. Paula noted that she has changed how they do the budget and read the balances on the funds. She suggested putting money into each account going forward, rather than drawing on it. Dave asked about the I/I fund and Paula replied the funds come from certain connections. She explained the numbers for I/I remediation and noted there is a problem with sump pumps. When they popped the manholes, they saw water going in at a very high rate of velocity, indicative of sump pumps. Robert has been great about identifying I/I sources and where they should focus. Paula got rid of extra line items not needed and explained the Capital Expense figures. John stated when Rob Oliva was there, they gave him \$100K to work on the Maintenance Plan, but he did not spend it all. The Commission discussed funding the Capital Reserve Stabilization Fund and withdrawals. Paula noted the withdrawals need to be done with a vote at Town Meeting. If a pump needs to be replaced, it comes from the Capital maintenance line item, which she is proposing at \$95K. Infrastructure Maintenance for \$47,600 would be for replacing parts. John asked the Commissioners to review the worksheets and have a workshop to discuss it. Paula noted they can put in an article for pulling from the Stabilization Fund and she will talk to the town accountant and town manager. Paula suggested looking at whether they want to pull from Retained Earnings and they need to decide their goal amounts for each fund. The Commission discussed and will have a budget workshop on 2/13 at the DPW at 6pm, in place of the regular meeting.

Business Manager Report –

--Update on System Maintenance & Upgrades- Paula reported they are still waiting for prices on the pumps for Dana St. and Mass 1. She anticipates the cost will be higher than they thought. There was a clog from rags in the pump on Leominster Rd. Foreign objects in the system continues to be a problem.

--Billing/Software Issues- Paula stated the saga still continues! She is hoping the billing issues will be fixed so the bills can go out 2/7. Munis had to create a custom form in order for the numbers to be correct, which is ludicrous. They did a proof and the data was incorrect. Paula sent a list of the missing information, such as the Boston address, sewer rate and interest rate. Munis sent her a sample that had interest on it that should not have been there but she will send data files to work with and hopefully get a correct proof. When a correct proof is received she will run through the billing and training. Paula and John discussed doing a public announcement about the status of the billing issues. She forwarded the draft to the Town Manager and there were some changes. John said he thought Paula's draft was great, but it came back with edits from the Town Manager, which he read out loud. John was concerned about the statement about the impact to property/real estate. The Commission discussed the wording and agreed the announcement should not include verbiage in regard to the property tax impact. Dave recommended that Paula read her original announcement. Paula noted only .6% of bills were incorrect and the majority were correct. Dave stated that Paula has put in 500 plus hours to deal with this issue and he is very upset they are at this point. He thanked Tom Alanzo for stepping in. Brett and Mike N. agreed that the property tax has nothing to do with sewer.

Paula read her original statement about the software upgrade's impact on the billing and the delayed mailing for the February bill. Bill suggested the Town Manager could issue the statement with the property tax information in her name. Paula and Bill will talk to the Town Manager.

--Sewer Business Manager Job Description- Paula, John and Bill attended the last Personnel Committee meeting. The prior score for her position was 495 and after they went through the revised job description, which they accepted with 1 minor modification to the experience level, the score was raised to 655. Paula stated she was happy with the score and the Personnel Committee hope to have something for the May Town Meeting. Dave thanked the Personnel Committee for their help.

PUBLIC COMMENT – none

UPCOMING SCHEDULED SEWER COMMISSION ACTIVITIES:

February 13, 2024 @ 6pm – Budget Workshop, at DPW building.

February 27, 2024 @ 6pm – Regular Meeting, Remote Participation

March 12, 2024 @ 6pm – Regular Meeting, Remote Participation

March 26, 2024 @ 6pm – Regular Meeting, Remote Participation

Motion: Brett R.

Second: Mike N.

To adjourn at 7:53pm.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Jane L. Ranley

Minutes Clerk