

Minutes of 2/24/26 Sewer Commission meeting-- via Zoom (Video Conference)

Attendees: Chair- Brett Ramsden, Vice-Chair- Scott Dall, Clerk- Dan Proctor, DPW Director- Bill Bernard, Sewer Business Manager- Andrew Valliere, Minutes Clerk- Jane Ranley

Guest: Allan (Chip) Wilson

Absent: Arthur Katis

Brett opened the meeting at 6:10 pm. 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 2/12/26

Motion: Scott D.

Second: Dan P.

To accept the minutes of 2/12/26.

Roll Call Vote: Dan-aye, Scott-aye and Brett-aye.

---Allan (Chip) Wilson was introduced as a potential Commission member. Chip asked for a run-down of typical Sewer Commission business. Brett summarized that the Commission discusses rates, needed repairs to the system, and addresses connections to Leominster and Fitchburg, where the waste goes. They also handle special requests regarding potential connections, budget work, and run it as a business, putting their customers first. Scott noted Chip has experience in the industry, similar to Dan. He added that they look out for not only the users, but for the town. They have guidance from Bill and Andrew, along with the Town Counsel. Bill stated it is a 5-person board, with 3 as a quorum, but have only 4 now. Chip noted he was looking to get involved with something and since he has experience in water and sewer, he felt this would be a good fit. Dan added that he is still learning about the issues concerning the Sewer system and often asks Bill and Andrew questions. Chip stated he is willing to join the board. Bill noted he would set up a short joint meeting with the Select Board for an interview and a vote to appoint Chip.

---DPW Director/Sewer Business Manager Updates--

--User Rates FY27/ Sewer Budget FY27 – Bill and Andrew put together a budget for the next year, based on averages from the last 3 years. They put in \$200K for the Capital Plan for a few big repairs. They originally estimated Revenues at \$1.2 million but when they did all the calculations, there would be a deficit of about \$200,000. The balance in Retained earnings has been going down, and betterment income is lower, due to so many being paid off. To avoid taking any money out of Retained Earnings, they would need to do a rate increase to balance the budget. Andrew ran several scenarios and they are suggesting a small increase on the minimum charge from \$133 to \$139. The regular users would have a 16% increase - \$15.85 to \$18.38 – which would give a surplus of \$26K. Dan asked where the income from tie-ins go in the budget and Andrew replied into Retained Earnings, with I&I fees. Scott pointed out that income will increase if a lot of ADUs connect. Bill stated that the sewer budget is independent from the town budget and is a self-funding enterprise fund. He added that they need to pay for any services from the town, such as paying bills. Bill noted they will be presenting the budget to the Finance Committee on 3/12 and the Commission will need to vote to accept it prior to that date. Scott suggested doing the vote since all agreed with the numbers, along with the rate increase. Bill noted that Fitchburg and Leominster have gone up on their rates, so the Commission needs to go up in order to keep even.

Motion: Scott D.

Second: Dan P.

To accept the budget proposal for FY27.

Roll Call Vote: Scott-aye, Dan-aye and Brett-aye.

--Delinquency Rate FY26 - Andrew explained the figures on the delinquency rate form, noting that the rate is not as bad as last year. Dan asked if anyone complains about the Munis online bill paying system and Andrew replied he has needed to help some customers with navigating the system. Scott suggested the easiest way is to create an account and click the link from the drop-down to “pay my bill,” –rather than paying as a guest.

--Sewer/Stormwater-- Bill reported the Stormwater Task Force has been working to establish a Stormwater Utility. To cover overhead, single family dwellings would be charged \$100/year and businesses will have a higher rate. The Stormwater Utility would need to hire someone to do the billing but Bill suggested having Andrew do the once per

year bills. Stormwater would pay a portion of his salary with a grade increase, which would help Sewer. Bill pointed out Stormwater is separate from the Sewer system—it is the drainage system in town. EPA issues the town a MS4 permit which allows them to discharge into lakes and streams. Bill noted this money would set up a dedicated fund for addressing stormwater issues. Right now, the permit states they need to sweep all the roads twice/year and clean the catch basins annually. Future permits will require adding rain gardens, infiltration trenches and retention ponds on town properties. Bill noted there will be on the ballot for the May Town Meeting to just set up the Stormwater Utility. There will be a public information Zoom meeting on March 5th which will be recorded. Dan pointed out that home owners will pay about \$100 but the bigger issue will be for commercial business owners that will pay a lot . He added that businesses built in the last 29 years have already paid to install stormwater systems to town and state specs. Bill noted eventually there will be credits issued for those with stormwater BMP's in place. The Select Board suggested having a joint Sewer & Stormwater Commission and the Commissioners agreed.

---**Other discussions:** Brett asked Chip what he thought about the meeting and he replied it was pretty much what he expected. Brett asked about the Sewer Connection Charge Policy draft that Andrew sent out. Andrew said they could not discuss it as it was not on the agenda but asked the Commissioners to let him know if they have any edits. Then they will discuss the policy at the meeting on 3/10. He will need to submit by the policy article by 3/14 for the Town Meeting.

---**Future Agenda Items-** Sewer/Stormwater discussion, Sewer Connection Charge Policy, the Stormwater fee billing

PUBLIC COMMENT – none

UPCOMING SCHEDULED SEWER COMMISSION ACTIVITIES:

March 10, 2026 @ 6pm – Regular (Hybrid) Meeting @DPW

March 31, 2026 @ 6pm – (Zoom) Meeting

April 14, 2026 @ 6pm – Regular (Hybrid) Meeting @DPW

April 28, 2026 @ 6pm – (Zoom) Meeting

Motion: Scott D.

To adjourn at 7:10pm.

Second: Dan P.

Roll Call Vote: Dan-aye, Scott-aye and Brett-aye.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane L. Ranley

Minutes Clerk