

Minutes of the Board of Water/Sewer Commissioners
Wednesday, November 18, 2020
4:00pm Zoom Meeting

Present Commissioners: John Tomasz, Roger Jones, Sandy Friede

Staff:

Director, Anthony Furnari
Business Manager, Julie Spurr Knight
Collection Superintendent, David Shaw
Sewer Chief Operator, Chris Pratt
Assistant Sewer Chief Operator, Jim More
Water Superintendent, Thomas Cusick
Assistant Water Superintendent, Christopher Hood
City Engineer, Jon-Eric White
Water Distribution Manager, Jonathan Carey

1. Mayor Holaday

Not in attendance.

2. Appointments/Customer Issues

None.

3. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Tomasz made a motion to approve the Minutes of the 10/28/20 meeting.

Vote: 3 yes (Tomasz, Jones, Friede)

4. Business Manager's Report

- **53 Warren St.** – The insurance company and I conducted a site visit on Tuesday 11/10. Unit 103 rebuild is complete and the occupant has moved back in. Mold was found in Units 107 & 110. Mold mitigation is scheduled starting Monday November 30th. Contractor deposits were received by MIAA by several unit owners. Commission Friede asked if 53 Warren Street was the insurance company and we are paying a deductible on it. Ms. Knight responded that it is a claim against the City's liability insurance. A valve was turned by a water department employee and it destroyed 4 units and several others. It was an uncapped, cut fire suppression line. Ms. Friede said she knew that but wanted to know how it will affect the budget. Ms. Knight said it would increase next year's liability insurance. Commissioner Jones said it is covered by the City's liability insurance but that means the premiums will go up. Commissioner Friede asked if we have an additional deductible. Ms. Knight stated that there is a \$2500 deductible on each claim but the finance Director informed her that it can be covered by rebates.
- **Water Meter Software Project** – Software is up and running. The staff is being trained on 11/23 and 11/24.
- **Billing Software** – Tyler Technologies experienced a breach in security which resulted in a large lockdown. It will be mid-January before we can access the data we need. The staff has begun training on that software as well.
- **Procurement** – Working on a RFP for Water and Sewer Scada Controls.
- **Procurement Designation** – Business Manager completed three class services and passes all state exams to obtain MCPPO certification. Application was filed on November 11.

- **FY 20 Liens** – The office continues to receive lien payments. The deadline for lien payments was November 15th. The office will continue to accept lien payments up to the day before the transfer to tax lien which occurs mid-December.
- **Rates & Fees** - We have developed a rate committee and have met once. We are meeting Thursday, November 19th with Environmental Partners. I gave a presentation at the Finance Committee meeting today and they are on board with the rate study as well.
- **Consumption Chart** – An updated consumption chart was sent. A month was missed and had to be added in and now it makes much more sense.

Commissioner Friede asked if the rate and fee document being presented is what we went over last month. Ms. Knight responded that those are the fees. The rate study is the water and sewer rate. The rate committee, which consists of all the water and sewer division heads, is looking at short and long term needs. It will inventory all the facilities and infrastructure and it will give a projection of how we can fund the needs and what does the rate need to be to address all the needs of the water and sewer department. Commissioner Friede said the Commission should see that before it gets too far up the ladder. Mr. Furnari said it would always go to the Commission before it goes anywhere else.

- **Budget Summary** – Ms. Knight shared the Budget Summary with the Commission and reported that the water budget is still in the negative \$192,000. However I did a comparison as to where we were last year at this time and we were in the negative \$672,000. Consumption is up quite a bit. Only one billing period, June through August, had a large dip in consumption. I initially reported that the dip was due to water restrictions but further analysis has noted that the drop is due to businesses, largely restaurants because of the amount of people allowed. Manufacturing was down. That had a major impact on consumption for the business bill run. However, residential consumption is up so that subsidized the drop. I sent the new consumption report by email because the old one was missing a month so the numbers were not accurate. Ms. Knight was sharing the updated report with the Commission. Mr. Cusick stated that he went back to his pumping report to match up with the consumption and it all matches. He went on to say it looks like we are pumping more water this year. The water restriction went into effect in August and we didn't feel anything until September because the September number went down quite a bit. We were tracking about 75-76 million gallons a month from June until August. Come September it dropped down to 62 million which is a lower number than last year. We saw an upward trend the whole summer which should have continued into September but it did not, it went down based on the restriction. Ms. Knight responded that the business sector is largely responsible for the drop. Water restriction plays a piece of it. She went back in the bill runs for the past three quarters when COVID started and it shows a consistent drop in the commercial consumption. This last commercial bill run that went out in October recovered itself. It was pretty flat compared to last year at this time. If we have another shut down we can have a situation with revenue on our hands. Ms. Knight shared the November Comparison chart with the Commission showing 2017 through 2020 revenue versus expense. Blue line is revenue and red line is expense. The chart shows we are in a deficit and we want to close that gap and be in a place where we have a balanced budget. Commissioner Friede asked if there was a graph for the year, a month by month which would be helpful to see. She wants to figure out if November is an anomaly or are we always seeing this gap. Ms. Knight referred to the screen to show the gap in 2017 which showed spending was more than revenue coming in. 2018 was pretty much balanced. Coming into 2019 it showed that spending was more than revenue even though the rate did go up on July 1, 2019. That trend continues on into 2020 although the gap is getting smaller. There is a pressing need for the rate study. Commissioner Rogers stated that what Commissioner Friede was asking for was not just a comparison of November but of the entire year January through December. He said the fiscal year would probably be better. Ms. Knight responded she does have that chart. The reason she showed this chart today is to show the gap and that we don't have a positive cash flow and we haven't in some time and we need to close the gap. Commissioner Friede asked if this was a month gap or a month over month

gap. A yearly month to month will show if it was just specific to November or is it a consistent gap for the year. Ms. Knight stated that was sent in the updated consumption analysis which she brought back up on the screen. Ms. Knight stated that she does multiple charts because she is looking at multiple indicators. The Consumption Linear Regression chart shows an increase in consumption indicated by the black line. She identified on the chart the commercial bill run June through August. You can see a major drop-over 5 million cubic feet. The drop has been consistent in commercial consumption. That is an issue. You can see on the July through August bill run there was a major jump of over 11 million from last year because we had a drought and everyone was at home. Mr. Carey asked how much can be attributed to straightening out the meters. Ms. Knight responded that it is a multi-phased project because they did not want to shock the rate payers with a major jump in their bills all at once. What I and the data technicians from Badger Meter are doing is phasing the project. They did say that the data cleanup could be responsible for a large portion of the uptick in consumption. We are now working on looking at the compound meters and working with Jon Carey and the Office Manager Karen Bush because some of them are very old and we want to make sure they are functioning correctly. I did notice on the commercial bill run that a few of the meters that weren't charging are now charging and that was due to the data clean-up. Commissioner Rogers stated that the September to November consumption from FY19, FY20 and FY21 were consistent, but not in the June through August. It was way down. Ms. Knight stated that time frame was the commercial bill run. The first one ends in July and that is the July bill run. The next one goes out in August. We bill every month because there are three routes and everyone gets billed quarterly. The August one is the commercial bill run. September is our largest residential bill run. October is our second largest residential bill run. November would go back to the commercial bill run. Commissioner Rogers asked if what he is seeing is that maybe things are recovering. Especially with the commercial bill run it's really going with the phases of COVID. Everything was shut down and we lost consumption and they opened things back up and our consumption went back up. That composite tells me it went down and everything is coming back. Whether it's commercial or residential the rates are the same. We don't have a two rate system, correct? Ms. Knight responded by saying the commercial bill run only includes 620 meters whereas our largest residential bill run includes 4,070. So there is a big variance in the amount of customers in that bill run. We are hoping the new badger meter software, which we have up and running and we are testing the bill run on it next week, should increase reporting on consumption quite a bit. The sewer budget also in your packet is doing very well. It has a positive cash flow of \$1.9 million currently. The sewer rate is a lot higher than the water rate which speaks volumes.

Commissioner Rogers said he noticed that there was no debt payment for the sewer and asked why. Ms. Knight responded that a bill hasn't been received and there has been no payment made. The payments are structured by the Treasurer's Office so we just have not received them yet. Commissioner Rogers noted that debt payments have been made on the water budget and at 57% for the year.

Commissioner Friede asked if Roger was wondering when the bills finally come through for the sewer we could be negative there. Commissioner Rogers said that is what he is wondering. Ms. Knight said sewer will not be in the negative and I can confirm that by email with you. There is not \$1.9 million in outstanding sewer debt payments. Commissioner Friede asked Ms. Knight what she thought the outstanding payment is. She responded by saying she would need to look it up and could email the figure. Mr. Cusick said it is showing \$3.1 million to the right. Mr. Rogers said if we were 1/3 of the way we'd be a million. Mr. Cusick said if you half that you are \$300,000 in the good. Ms. Knight said we will not be receiving an invoice for \$3.1 million. Commissioner Rogers said he couldn't recall a payment schedule like this in the past and maybe it is due to COVID.

Commission Friede said when she gets her water bill the sewer bill is based on consumption and since we have based the budget on consumption I am struggling as to why water is behind yet sewer is doing okay. I'm

thinking the revenues are proportionally the same. Ms. Knight stated the water and sewer rates are based on the same consumption rate but the water rate is \$5.63 whereas the sewer rate is \$9.55. Commission Friede said as an example if we expect people to use 1 million gallons of water a year and the sewer was somehow proportion to that when water goes down I would expect sewer to go down so that this would all be proportionately all the same. Commissioner Rogers feels the debt service figure isn't linear.

Commissioner Tomasz made a motion to accept the Business Manager's report.

Vote: 3 yes (Tomasz, Jones, Friede)

5. DPS Operations Reports

Jon-Eric noted the following on the Engineering Report;

Water Supply Protection

- We are moving ahead with finalizing the entire report that Tighe & Bond has put together.
- We are increasing our effort to find sources of pollution in the tributaries. We have a meeting tomorrow. Tom Cusick's staff has already done a lot of testing and found some tributaries that are high in phosphorus. Engineering got involved because one of our staff members, Nick Federico, our storm water person is going to help out. We are going to move up stream of the current testing sites to see if we can locate the source of all the pollutants. There are dozens and dozens of properties that are adding to the pollutant load. This will be a long effort over many months and years.
- We are hoping to get in the beginning of the year draft reports for the Commission's review. Commissioner Rogers asked if the phosphorus was from fertilizer. Mr. White responded it's to be determined but it is generally from fertilizer. It's also from agriculture as there is a lot of livestock. There might be some failed septic systems, although that is usually nitrogen.

David Shaw noted the following on the Sewer Collection Report;

Lift station/SLM maintenance/Miscellaneous:

- October flushing 5,850 LF has been cleaned.
- VFDs quotes are in and have been approved.

Plum Island Maintenance:

- Jamie Tuccolo and Mr. Shaw have started a project on Plum Island. We are removing the electronics from the manhole covers and putting them into a dryer environment. The candy canes will be replaced with towers that will house the electronics which will reduce condensation and eliminate a lot of the problems with the alarm system. We will be starting with 100. There was a mailing to residents last week. Commission Rogers asked if there are a total of 600 or so locations. Mr. Shaw said they are starting with 100 to see how efficient they are going to be.

Jim More noted the following on the Wastewater Treatment Facility Report;

Pretreatment:

- Jerry Cronin continues to work on the FOG program/sampling with the modified schedule. This month he is doing permit renewals and inspections. He only has one left for December so he's pretty much done.

Operations:

- Flows continue to be low despite the rain.

- Plant did well throughout the summer.
- Removals have been consistent. I've been here 16 years and the last 6 months have been the most consistent that I've ever seen. The numbers seem to be the same month after month.
- Plant met all permit limits for the past month. Doing our winter work getting things ready. We switched over our last primary tank and did some work on the sweep mechanism on the one that we took down.
- Replaced the diesel fuel tank on one of the trucks.
- Chris Pratt has been doing a lot of work in reviewing the plans and specs for the revetment/rail trail. I think they had their first pre-bid on some of the work. The trail has been open for a month and a half. We've had no odor complaints.

Chris Pratt entered the meeting and updated the Commission

- There was a good turnout for the revetment/rail trail bid. Bids are due today. I got correspondence from Jordie Vining at the end of the day and the low bidder came in about \$100,000 under the engineer projected cost that we had come up with. I'm driving so I don't have the paperwork in front of me. This project will be taking off very quickly and it has to be finished by the end of June to acquire the grants. Commissioner Tomasz asked who the low bidder was. Mr. Pratt said it was a company out of Windham, NH. He believes it is Cairns and they have done a lot of revetment work down in Hull and Cohasset. They seem experienced with a long list of subs which we will be vetting. In the bid documents we did reserve the right to exclude some contractors if the City had a bad experience with them before. Next step is vetting the subs then going through the awarding process.

Jonathan Carey noted the following on the Water Construction Division report;

- Finished flushing program. Plum Island and the Plum Island Turnpike are complete. Chris Hood and Tom Cusick will report on the TTHM testing that was done afterwards.
- Doing some hydrant cut in's for more inspections on the High Road area which I touched on last month.
- Repaired a broken hydrant on Ferry Road.
- Implemented the New Trench Excavation and Safety SOP that the Commission accepted last month.
- Performing taps for contractors.
- Assisted with the main relocation at Perkins Way.
- Paving on half of the digs and breaks has been completed as of today. Going to get back to that either tomorrow or the day after once the weather warms up.
- Carl Sopper has been in for leak detection. He has completed his survey on half of the City. There were six leaks detected. All except for one have been repaired and remedied. He will be back out on Friday to look more closely on that one before we start doing any digs.
- On a new business topic, I spoke with Tom Cusick and Tony Furnari regarding a well situation in the Boyd Drive area where there is an irrigation well being cut and capped. I just had a new inspection for a domestic well. I will be working with Frank Giacalone from the Board of Health and getting a concise list of wells for Newburyport as well as Newbury and put together well oversight. Mainly this falls under the jurisdiction of the Health Department but we need to have some input with inspections, cutting and capping if people are putting in domestic wells. I will be looking for a legal opinion but also the Board's input regarding how they want to approach anything in Zones 1 and 2 regarding well acceptance in the City. I will have that for next month's meeting.
- I have been looking for some direction regarding Rules and Regulations of the Water Department found on the Z-Drive. This document is listed as a draft. I would like to ask the Board if we could accept what we have as a working document for me to go off of. Moving forward I'd like to form a committee or subcommittee so we have a solidified Rules and Regulations to work from when I'm speaking with homeowners and contractors. We had one come up today where a water line was installed with a fire suppression capped off of it which goes against the Rules and Regulations based on what I have and my experience. It's listed as a draft document so I

would like to have some validity behind it. Commissioner Friede asked if people are putting in wells are they getting charged for the usage of the sewerage. Mr. Carey responded that the person he's referring to is on Boyd Drive at the top of the hill and he does have a water meter. The reason this came to my attention is that he was looking for a rebate on his water charge. He has a water meter installed and is being charged both water and sewer and since February of 2020 he's been on well water. His water service has been cut and capped in the home. I told him it depends on what the Board wishes to do regarding the cut and cap of the Evergreen project/Body Drive irrigation well. Should we move forward and allow him to keep his domestic and irrigation well for his own service he would need to cut and cap his water service from the City at the main. That would be his cost. I don't want to get into a situation where people are choosing to move to a private well for domestic water and think should their well water source dry they will automatically get back on City water. From my experience if that should happen then they would have to pay for a new service as if they were not on City water prior. We also need to watch out for the cross connections which I'm working with Frank on. Not so much on the Newburyport side but I'm going to do inspections on all of the listed wells we have but I also want to check on any registered wells in Newbury where we provide water to make sure there is no cross connection. If someone does have a well they are not able to throw a check valve and choose to alternate between well water and City water. Commissioner Rogers asked if it could back feed into our system and that is what you are trying to prevent. Mr. Carey said yes. By Massachusetts law you are not allowed to be connected to well water and City water at the same time on the same system. In the case of Boyd Drive it still needs to be severed at the main and I informed the homeowner of that. This well was approved prior to me. I'm looking for legal opinion and the Board's as to whether we can restrict someone from drilling a well when the City provides water when it falls within the aquifer of the wells that the City is drawing from. Mr. Carey verified that it is Zone 2. Commissioner Friede asked how that individual who has disconnected his City water get bills for sewer. Mr. Carey said he still has a meter and that's how it came to light. There is a meter on his well. He's been billed for water since February and he's looking for a refund on the money he has paid pumping his own water but not for the sewer. Mr. Carey is looking for guidance especially if there is an uptick in wells. I reached out to a colleague who is head of the Board of Health in Topsfield and she told me to check out the Town of Ipswich. They have a comprehensive well policy and I've been reviewing it. I think we want to put together something that regulates wells. Commissioner Tomasz stated he has no problem if he is disconnected from our system then he would have to pay a new connection fee. He does have an issue that his well is in our Zone. The draft Rules and Regs that you have you should get it to a level that you are satisfied with and the Board can review and get it approved and make it part of our ongoing policies. Commissioner Rogers agreed. Mr. Carey stated that Mr. Furnari and had a conversation and they are going to work on it over the winter months when things slow down. He will also work with Mr. Cusick. Mr. Carey wanted to know how Commissioner Tomasz wanted to proceed with the owner because the Health Department regulates wells and from his assessment they have just been collecting their \$25 fee, making sure that whoever is drilling the well has a certified well driller in the State of Massachusetts and that the well is registered with the Massachusetts DEP. There have not been any inspections up until this point. The owner told Mr. Carey he spent \$25,000 on his system and the permit that he has was signed by my predecessor and the head of the Board of Health. The owner stated that if the City comes back to him saying he can't have his well he is going to want to get reimbursed by the City for the money he spent on the well. Commissioner Tomasz said he is concerned about that and whether someone can drill a well that could affect the City's well. Mr. Carey asked the homeowner why he drilled a well and the owner stated he did not like that the City added fluoride to the system. Mr. Carey stated he would like something in place to respond to situations like this and it doesn't become a case by case situation. Commissioner Rogers offered to help Mr. Carey work on the Rules and Regulations. Mr. Carey stated the Acts of 1908 gave the City water rights in West Newbury. Maybe a conversation with Mike Cote to see what wells he has surrounding our water rights there.

Tom Cusick noted the following on the Water Treatment Plant Facilities Report;

Reservoirs/GW sources:

- Reservoir levels/drought advisory has been lowered to a level 1 for our region. Reservoirs are starting to return and were looking for some rain/snow to fill things back up.
- Doing a lot of work in the tributaries. We are finding more hot spots. I will update the Commission once the information is gathered. It is getting worse. It is impacting Indian Hill Reservoir now where we had a Cyanobacteria Bloom. I am going to put this high on the list to begin talks with West Newbury about protections which needs to be a joint effort.
- Irrigation well at Evergreen. When the project was put in there was a gentleman's agreement that the irrigation well on site for the golf course could be used as a temporary well to assist in erosion control of the common areas. Chip Hall reached out to me during the water restriction and told me he shut the well off. There is a gentleman's agreement to discontinue this well in Zone 2 and it is a process that the City is going to do. Mr. Cusick will get him a cost to do that. The Mayor has said she wants the well discontinued. Mr. Cusick stated he wanted to reach out to the Commission to bring you up to date and have you decide whether you want to talk to Mr. Hall at the next meeting or whether you want me to deal with it outside of the meeting. Commissioner Tomasz said Mr. Cusick could deal with it.

WTP Operations:

- Plant is running well. Staff has been keeping up with regular maintenance.
- Managing the sludge residuals.
- Issue with one of the sedimentation basins.
- Monthly tank inspections.
- Water storage tanks were cleaned by Underwater Solutions. A lot of sediment was found in the main tanks that service the City. That work was done prior to the THM sampling and part of the flushing program to get everything in good working order.
- THM sampling came back and we are not out of compliance. We are still seeing some high levels. We will continue the efforts with the flushing program and try to expand on that. We will be bringing in a consultant to make that process more efficient. CIP approval was granted to put in tank mixers and we will be discussing that with our consultant and will put together a plan to get that out for three quotes. We are looking at a mechanical or non-mechanical type mixing system. The non-mechanical mixing system would be a duct fill. The other would be a motor driven system to be able to try and mitigate the THMs that are associated with the water in the tank.
- City carpenter replaced the roof on the Indian Hill valve house and installed a new door. The building is secure and cleaned up from the graffiti. There is also a security fence around the building. Brush was cut back on the roadway, the access road to the upper dam and access berm to the lower dam.
- Removals are good and consistency at the plant is great. Staff is doing a great job. Our sources are impacted negatively, severely so that is a high priority. It is a decade long process to clean things up. If we don't work on it now it will drag out even more and that definitely impacts disinfection by-products and what we can provide to our customers. There is not much more we can do at the plant with what we have right now. We can discuss some options going forward, discuss the conditions of the reservoirs and plan for the spring. We will be putting together the first of the year an informational meeting for everyone to discuss the health of the system and what needs to be done to fix it.

*Commissioner Tomasz made a motion to accept the DPS Operation Reports as presented.
Vote: 3 yes (Tomasz, Jones, Friede)*

6. Old/New Business

- None.

7. Warrant Signing

*Commissioner Tomasz made a motion to accept 6 warrants as presented.
Vote: 3 yes (Tomasz, Jones, Friede)*

8. Next Meeting

Next meeting scheduled for Wednesday, December 16, 2020 at 4:00 pm.

9. Adjournment

*Commissioner Tomasz made a motion to adjourn the meeting.
Vote: 3 yes (Tomasz, Jones, Friede)*

Respectfully Submitted By: Karen Bush