

Minutes of the Board of Water/Sewer Commission

Wednesday, December 6, 2023 at 4:00 pm

16C Perry Way, Newburyport, MA 01950

Present Commissioners: Roger Jones, William Creelman, Thomas O'Brien, Paul Suozzo, Daniel Simon, Kimberly Emmons, Prospective Commissioner Mark Spencer

Staff:

DPS Director, Wayne Amaral

Thomas Cusick, Water Superintendent, Water Treatment Plant

Business Manager, Thomas Watkins

1. Appointments/Customer Inquires

- Central Congregational Church abatement. The Commissioners stated the leaks that were found when a water technician went to the property to check the meter are the responsibility of the church. A church representative stated the concerns started earlier this year when the March to June bill came at almost 3,000 cubic feet of water. A plumber came in and could not find any leaks. The June to September bill came in and showed water usage 360% increase what was the norm for the prior four years. He stated they had the plumber come back and someone from your office walked through the building and could not find anything that would cause an increase in water usage. Commissioner Simon stated the technician did find leaks. The church representative said the plumber stated the leaks wouldn't have amounted to that much in usage. Mr. Watkins stated toilet leaks do add up to a lot of usage especially since we bill every three months and all those leaks could have been leaking for the entire time. Mr. Amaral said the department can check the meter. Mr. Watkins asked if they performed a dye test in all of the toilets. They did not. Mr. Watkins gave them tablets to test the toilets.
- 13 67th Street abatement. Commission Jones approved abating the sewer portion of the bill.

Commissioner O'Brien made a motion to approve the 13 67th abatement. Commissioner Emmons seconded.

Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Suozzo yes, O'Brien yes, Emmons yes, Simon yes

2. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner O'Brien made a motion to accept the minutes from October 25, 2023. Commissioner Suozzo seconded.

Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Suozzo abstained, O'Brien yes, Simon abstained, Emmons yes

3. Business Managers Report

- Mr. Watkins presented and executive summary report outlining the expenditures and revenues that have come in. He stated he looked back at last years' time frame at this period and bulleted where we are in comparison.
- The delinquent letters were sent out this past October. \$577,482.51 in liens to Newburyport and \$55,732.46 in liens to Town of Newbury. Commissioner Simon asked in the past how much has been recouped and how much has just gone away. Mr. Watkins said we hope to receive it all and he is not sure what the success rate has been in the past. He stated we have received a lot of payments and I hope to have that number for you next month. There were just under 500 letters that went out for Newburyport and about 80 letters for Newbury. Commissioner O'Brien asked if they do not pay the lien does the water get shut off. Mr. Watkins said we do not do that.

- Mr. Watkins referenced the free cash amounts that were certified in October. You can see the amounts have increased in both cases from FY 23.
- Commissioner Simon asked Mr. Watkins if we are on track. Mr. Watkins said he believes we are. The amounts expended for both Water and Sewer contain encumbered funds so those percentages do not reflect what is truly being spent.

Commissioner O'Brien made a motion to accept the Business Manager's report. Commissioner Simon seconded. Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Suozzo yes, O'Brien yes, Simon yes, Emmons yes

4. New Business

- Mr. Amaral told the Commission that Doug Gove would be presenting the capital projects that are being worked on by the department. He thought it would be a good way to refresh everyone's memory and inform the new members. He told the Commission each sheet that Doug will be presenting could be talked about for an hour but we won't do that. In the future we might have to pull these out one by one and go into detail and have a direction from the Board as to how we move forward. You will see a total of \$77 million for all the projects. We don't have that and we would never be able to borrow that amount. We need to get the message out to everybody about what our priorities are and then figure out where we get the funding to fund the priorities that we have. We need the Board to express what the priorities are to City Council and the rate payers.

Doug Gove, Vice President of AECOM presented all of the key water projects through a power point presentation.

- **Amesbury Temporary Emergency Interconnection.** This project is to develop an emergency interconnection with the City of Amesbury via the I-95 Whittier Bridge. Project driver – resiliency and redundancy. Question asked what is the \$750,000 for? It is for the pipe, mobilization and installation. Commissioner Simon asked would we only spend that if we had to lay the pipe quickly, so the funding is just a bank account to keep it ready. Mr. Amaral said there are a lot of questions with this project because of the pipe. Do we buy it and pay to store it properly so we have it for an emergency?
- **Indian Hill Raw Water Line (Phase 1).** The funding is to get water from Indian Hill Reservoir down to Lower Artichoke pump station and ultimately to the water plant. Under a storm event it is possible the Merrimac River would inundate the Lower Artichoke dam. Project driver – resiliency and redundancy. The construction has potential 2025 SRF funding.
- **Indian Hill Raw Water Line (Phase 2).** Design and construct a new pump station at Indian Hill Reservoir and pipeline to Upper Artichoke Reservoir to provide redundancy, reliability and the ability for mixing of the City's three reservoirs. Project driver – resiliency and redundancy. The construction has potential 2025 SRF funding.
- **Lower Artichoke Reservoir Dam Improvements.** Temporary spillway protection (Phase 1) and permanent dam raise (Phase 2) to protect the Lower Artichoke Reservoir from a backwater event during a large coastal storm. Project driver – coastal resiliency. Temporary spillway protection (Phase 1) is funded and near completion.
- **Watershed/Public Water Supply Protection Program.** Ongoing public education and improvements to watershed to protect water supply. Project driver – maintain current function/operation of existing water supply.
- **Water Treatment Plant PFAS Filtration System and Existing Filter Upgrades.** Identify and implement upgrades required to meet regulatory PFAS limits for water supplies. Project driver – pending PFAS regulations, water quality concerns (taste and odor, TOC, algae); filter redundancy.
- **Water Treatment Plant Interior Modifications.** Repurpose space for interior improvements to existing WTP. Project driver – storage tanks are past their useful life and existing WTP lacks adequate operator facilities.

- **Replace Water Main from WTP to Hoyts Lane/Pine Hills.** Replace 100-year-old water main that provides water supply to neighborhoods of Hoyts Lane, Pine Hill Road, and Spring Lane. Project drive – state of good repair.
- **Plum island Chlorine Booster Station Updates.** Updates required to accommodate fire flows in the service area. Updates include reconfiguration of the piping plan and chemical feed systems and updates to the SCADA system. Project driver – improve system hydraulics.
- **Water Main Replacement Program.** Annual water main replacement program in coordination with the City's pavement replacement program (assume half mile of replacement per year). Project driver – state of good repair. The City has a capital improvement plan for the distribution system. There are different ways to look at prioritizing the pipelines and the capital improvement plan did identify priority projects.
- **Water Meter Replacement.** Existing water meter infrastructure is outdated and nearing the end of service life. Plan to replace with Advanced metering Infrastructure to improve accuracy of billing and reduced levels of unaccounted-for-water. The total cost listed below will be shared 50/50 with the Sewer Division. Project drive – state of good repair.

Commissioner Emmons left the meeting at 5:15 pm.

The remaining slides showed the ranking of the projects by priority and the next steps. Mr. Amaral said the proposed ranking was done by the DPS Director, WTO Superintendent and Doug Gove. He said the ranking should be done by the Commission. A discussion took place on how to fund and when will cash be freed up relative to existing debt service.

Mr. Amaral said what is missing on the capital program is vehicles and equipment and we are preparing that separately. It is the trucks and the generators and we will bring that to you in the future. It will be \$500,000-\$700,000 that we will be asking for.

RFQ for OPM Services. Mr. Watkins stated it is still be worked on and the scope of services was included in the packets. Commissioner Simon asked that the OPM Agreement specify what the responding company will be responsible for. Mr. Amaral stated a scope of work will be drawn up for every project and will be well defined. He wants to have a contract presented to the Board for signature at the next meeting.

Commissioner O'Brien made a motion to authorize \$100,000, \$70,000 for water and \$30,000 for sewer. Commissioner Suozzo seconded.

Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Suozzo yes, O'Brien yes, Simon, yes

Commissioner Simon left the meeting at 5:30 pm.

Authorization to Sign Contracts.

- **Hancock Associates: On-Call Engineering Services.** Mr. Watkins stated the hourly rate schedule is attached to the contract.

Commissioner Suozzo made a motion to approve the Hancock Associates contract. Commissioner O'Brien seconded.

Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Suozzo yes, O'Brien yes

- **Environmental Partners: Engineering Services Relative to the Water Meter/AMI Program.** Mr. Watkins stated the City already has an on-call agreement with them but that agreement is only good for projects up to \$25,000. This contract is for \$169,300. Environmental Partners did come back with a few proposed changes to the City's template which has been sent to the City's legal counsel for their opinion. Mr. Watkins is looking for authorization to sign the contract in the event that legal counsel says we can accept the changes which are in your packet or if they say no we go back to Environmental Partners and they say they accept our template as is. Commissioner O'Brien wanted to know what the problem would be to wait for their response. Mr. Watkins said it would be another month to bring the contract before the Commission and the department wants to get the project going.

Commissioner Suozzo made a motion to approve the contract with stipulations. Commissioner O'Brien seconded. Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Suozzo yes, O'Brien no

- **Pump Station Maintenance & Repair Services:** Vendor TBD. Mr. Watkins stated the bids are due next week. Weston & Sampson is on call for us now and their current contract expires December 31st. Mr. Watkins will do a one-month extension to get through January. Mr. Amaral explained to the Board they are only authorizing the contract. The funding has already been approved. Mr. Watkins is looking to get approval on authorization for the contract to get signed for the low bidder that comes in. The value is roughly \$50,000. Mr. Watkins stated that amount is what we usually spend with Weston & Sampson on any given year. This will be moved to the January meeting.

Abatement Policy – moved to January meeting.

5. Old Business

None.

6. Confirm Next Meeting: January 24, 2024 at 4:00 pm

Commissioner Suozzo informed the Board about a course, Protecting and Managing Water Resources that meets Friday mornings 8:00-9:00 am in February, March and April. He stated he would look into cost.

7. Warrant and Contract Signing

Commissioner Creelman made a motion to approve the warrants as presented. Commissioner Suozzo seconded. Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Suozzo yes, O'Brien yes

8. Adjournment

Adjourned 5:44 pm.

Commissioner Suozzo made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner O'Brien seconded. Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Suozzo yes, O'Brien yes

Respectfully Submitted By: Karen Bush

