

Minutes of the Board of Water/Sewer Commission
Wednesday, May 24, 2023 at 3:45 pm
16C Perry Way, Newburyport, MA 01950

Present Commissioners: Roger Jones, William Creelman, Daniel Simon, Kimberly Emmons, Paul Suozzo, Thomas O'Brien
Staff:

DPS Director, Wayne Amaral

Engineer, Jon-Eric White

Water Superintendent, Tom Cusick

1. Appointments/Customer Inquires

- William Mullen, 7 Broad Street, Newburyport. Mr. Mullen thanked the Board for honoring a previous abatement request and this is also part of the same thing. Mr. Mullen is appealing the \$50 turn on fee. He stated when the emergency happened he was away. Mr. Mullen said the City didn't turn on the water because the faucets might be open in his unit. He's appealing because if we had the water faucets open in our house wouldn't we want to have the water continue dripping. We shouldn't have been charged to have the water turned on and a separate visit. Commissioner Simon said the technician wanted to be sure he didn't flood out your house by turning the water back on. Commissioner Suozzo stated that if a pipe was frozen inside the house the damage would be substantial. He feels the City did the prudent thing. Commissioner Jones said not knowing what was going inside and we couldn't get inside we made that decision not to turn the water on. Commissioner Emmons asked if it was precedent that if an owner is not home do we not turn on water unless we get permission. Ms. Bush said because that event took place on an extremely cold weekend and lots of people had frozen pipes and broken freeze plates it was even more important not to turn on water if the owner was not there to tell us they don't have any frozen pipes, my heat is on. The technician was told the owner was out of town so he didn't know if he had frozen pipes because the freeze plate had cracked. He was just being cautious. Commissioner Simon asked if there is a written document as to what you do or is it up to the decision of the technician. Ms. Bush said it's the decision of the technician. Commissioner Simon said we should think about that. Mr. Amaral said I agree that we should but he thinks the end result might be the same on this but we should give the technician direction. We can do a policy but I think we should make it flexible so he can make that call. He further stated he thinks it was the right decision.

Commissioner Suozzo made a motion to deny this appeal. Commissioner Simon seconded.

Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Simon yes, Emmons no, Suozzo yes, O'Brien, yes

2. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner O'Brien made a motion to approve the minutes. Commissioner Suozzo seconded.

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

3. New Business

- Commissioner Jones asked the Board if they would be willing to move the meeting to 3:45 permanently at Mr. Amaral's request.
- Mr. Cusick stated he asked Mr. Amaral to be these two items on the Agenda to address the water quality issues that have been happening over the years. Some of been aesthetic—taste and odor, some of have

been things happening in the reservoirs—cyanobacteria and most recently it's been PFAS. Doug Gove is accompanying us tonight. Doug is our consultant with AECOM and we've been discussing the water quality issues. In the interest of time and why we want to do this scope of work is to get us in line with some SRF potential funding in the future. Recent developments that have come up is they have issued a new map which looks at environmental justice and Newburyport is now on that map. That means there could potentially be some principal forgiveness in the future if they decide to go down the road of putting an addition on the Treatment Plant that would address a lot of the water quality issues which could be the addition of some water filtration. The work that we are doing here could potentially get reimbursed. Commissioner Simon asked where does the \$80,000 start and stop? Mr. Gove responded that would be the planning phase between now and August. The form for the SRF funding is due on August 11th. This work would create a document, a conceptual layout so when we submit the application for funding there is a document with a layout and an estimate of the cost so when you submit for the construction money there is a basis. Commissioner Simon asked where the \$80,000 is coming from and Mr. Cusick said the operating budget. Commissioner Jones asked if this was on the CIP this year. Mr. Cusick said it was on last year's CIP. We have pared this down. What is on the CIP for this year is final design. This will give us the preliminary engineering we would need to move forward with the final engineering and some of the pilot testing we would need for the GAC. If they decide to move forward with the CIP this will give us more information.

Commissioner Simon made a motion to move forward with the PFAS project. Commissioner Suozzo seconded. Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Simon yes, Emmons yes, Suozzo yes, O'Brien yes

- Indian Hill Transmission Main/Pump Station Project. This scope of work focuses on the existing intake and inspectional work that would give us more information. It is how we move water down the reservoir system and feed the City. It gives us the possibility of utilizing the existing intake for an intake for a pump station in the future. If a new pump station would go in it has not been determined where that location may be. There are challenges for both the east (existing) and west location. Commissioner Simon asked if we did not go with the east location what would happen with it. Mr. Cusick said we would never get rid of it. It would always be a fall back. Commissioner Jones asked if going with the west side would it require any acquisition of land. Mr. Cusick said he didn't think so but we are still looking at all of that. We do believe there would be enough land to put a station there. Commissioner Simon has which one Mr. Cusick thought would be the one. Mr. Cusick said he agrees with the consultants the accessibility from the west side makes it a no brainer. The installation of the intake is something we need to consider. Mr. Amaral said West Newbury has some concerns about the visual appearance of the pump station. Mr. Cusick said we are doing our due diligence to report back to all the stakeholders but it has to be in the best interest of the City. Commissioner Simon asked where the \$73,000 is coming from. Mr. Cusick said we have money in the Watershed line item.

Commissioner O'Brien made a motion to move forward with the PFAS project. Commissioner Emmons seconded. Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Simon yes, Emmons yes, Suozzo yes, O'Brien yes

- DPS Director Contract Authorization Threshold. Mr. Amaral said he called Ethan and asked what he is authorized to sign outside of this Board and can I get a copy of the policy. Ethan said there was no policy. Mr. Amaral sent a proposal and it was fine tuned with Ethan and the Mayor. Up to \$25,000 the DPS Director would have authorization to sign. Anything between \$25,000 to \$75,000 would have the Director's signature and the Board's signature and anything over \$75,000 would have signatures from the Water and Sewer Commission, the Finance Director and the Mayor who would be acting as my

signatory. Mr. Amaral said he would write the policy out for the next meeting. Mr. Amaral said he does not know if legally we need everyone's signature on a contract. You could authorize the Chair to sign a contract on your behalf after a vote has been confirmed.

Commissioner Emmons made a motion to give authority to the Chair to sign a contract on behalf of the Board on a confirmed vote. Commissioner Simon seconded.

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

- Mr. Amaral addressed the Board on who he feels should attend the meetings. He would like to have the Office Manager, the Business Manager and himself attend. If we have a presentation he would have that staff person attend or if the Board would like to see a staff person at a meeting we will ask him to attend that meeting. Mr. Amaral said he would like the staff to prepare a short report on what is new or what the status of projects they are working on to present to the Commission each month.
- Proposed Water and Sewer Rates. The Board had a difficult time understanding the presentation of the proposed rates prepared by Ethan Manning, the Finance Director. They requested Mr. Amaral set up a meeting so he can go through the presentation with them. Commissioner Simon asked what is the Board's job with regard to the rates. Mr. Amaral said he questioned also what the Board's authorization is. He said he was told the Board made a recommendation last year and it was changed. Commissioner Suozzo was concerned that inflation is very high and water is very valuable. Whatever the rate increase is you should deduct 6, 7% inflation because that's what it is now until Jerome Powell can get inflation back down to 2%. Commissioner Emmons asked Commissioner Suozzo if he was suggesting that we follow the inflation rate every time we set rates. Commissioner Suozzo said if you deduct inflation from the rate increase we are only upping the rates two or three percent. We are providing them with a super quality product. No vote was taken because of lack of information. Mr. Amaral will request a meeting with Ethan Manning.
- Commissioner Simon brought before the Board the idea of communicating to the public what the Department is working on. Commissioner Emmons said she feels nobody reads the CCR report and the Mayor has a daily feed. We should do something but it needs to be short. Commissioner Simon said no one knows what Mr. Cusick is working on. All they know is their rates are going up. He said if we post a message someone has to field the calls. Commissioner Suozzo stated that we are better off in control of our own water rates and supply than being tied to MWRA. Commissioner Simon asked Mr. Amaral how we start this communication. He suggested placing it as an agenda item before City Council every six months. Present it as a water report from the water department but someone has to be there to answer questions they may have. Commissioner Simon said we've been talking about this for the last six months. I propose the we as council come up with a short presentation and go to City Council to present it. Commissioner Suozzo said he would go before City Council. Commissioner Jones felt that everyone should be present. Commissioner Simon said the next meeting agenda should have putting the presentation for City Council on it. Mr. Amaral said the Commission should ask for 15 minutes of the Mayor's time to present it to him first. Commissioner Simon suggested Commissioner Jones go with Mr. Amaral to meet with the Mayor. Mr. White suggested inviting the Daily News if they go before the City Council.

4. Business Managers Report

- Mr. Amaral feels the current budget handed out for water and sewer is in good shape. The transfer into chemicals had not hit the budget yet but was approved. Mr. Amaral reported interviews for the Business will be conducted on Tuesday and Wednesday of next week.

5. Confirm Next Meeting: June 28, 2023 at 3:45 pm

6. Warrant and Contract Signing

7. Adjournment

- Adjourned 5:30 pm.

Respectfully Submitted By: Karen Bush

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