

**Minutes of the Board of Water/Sewer Commission**  
**Wednesday, November 16, 2022 - 4:00 pm**  
**16C Perry Way, Newburyport, MA 01950**

**Present Commissioners:** Roger Jones, William Creelman, Daniel Simon, Owen Smith

**Staff:**

Deputy Director, Jamie Tuccolo

Business Manager, Julie Spurr Knight

**1. Appointments/Customer Inquires**

- Susan Diamantopoulos of 69 Turkey Hill Road, Newburyport appeared and explained the reason for her abatement appeal was she felt she should be able to get an abatement for the difference between the tanker filling her pool and the additional water needed to fill her 19,000-gallon pool. Ms. Diamantopoulos presented a letter from the pool company stating the pool holds 19,000 gallons and they used approximately 17,000 of tanker water. The Board said it was hard to determine just how much of that 2,000 gallons of usage went to topping off the pool. After a quick calculation it was determined the difference was 267 cubic feet and the result of that would be a \$26.24 credit to her September bill. Commissioner Jones informed Ms. Diamantopoulos that if she chose to accept this credit it would be the only abatement she could receive in a 10-year period. Ms. Diamantopoulos did not feel the calculation was fair but accepted the credit.

*Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve the abatement and give a credit based on 267 cubic feet.*

*Commissioner Simon seconded.*

*Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Smith yes, Simon yes*

- Kenneth Dunbar, did not show.
- Ed Nystrom, 35 Pine Hill Road, Newburyport appeared to appeal the Board's abatement decision. He stated he knew there was a leak but did not know the extent of it until the bill came. At that point he realized it was significant. Commissioner Simon said he does not feel the rate payers should subsidize this abatement. Commissioner Smith stated it is the homeowner's responsibility to make sure their plumbing is in good order. Commissioner Creelman felt the City should not be paying for leaking toilets. Mr. Nystrom felt the abatement policy was intended for just this type of issue.

*Commissioner Smith made a motion to deny the abatement. Commissioner Creelman seconded.*

*Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Smith yes, Simon yes*

- Tony Rossi, 9 Doyle Drive, Newburyport. This abatement had been tabled from the February 2022 meeting. Ms. Knight explained that it was an irrigation issue which the Commission gave the customer the opportunity to fix by April of 2022. Mr. Rossi said he bought the property in 2020. He put sod in and installed irrigation by another subcontractor, which he hired, not the builder. He said he spent \$1,200 to fix the irrigation issue. Commissioner Smith said he feels it is a contractor issue. Commissioner Jones asked if he went back to the contractor. Mr. Rossi said he feels the contractor will blame someone else.

*Commissioner Creelman made a motion to abate only the sewer in accordance with the formula. Commissioner Simon seconded.*

*Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Smith yes, Simon yes*

- Ms. Knight informed the Board lien letters were sent out and three residents came back requesting hardship. Ms. Knight had each customer fill out an application and worked with each to set up a payment plan. She is asking the Board to approve the requests. Commissioner Jones said it was no problem and Commissioner Smith feels it is better to get paid late than not at all.

*Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve the three applications. Commissioner Simon seconded.*

*Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Smith yes, Simon yes*

## **2. Approval of Minutes**

Commissioner Smith noted that former Commissioner, Sandy Friede was listed under the Business Manager's Report on the October minutes. That reference has been removed. Also noted in the minutes was Commissioner Smith leaving the meeting at 5:20 pm.

*Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Commissioner Creelman seconded.*

*Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Smith yes, Simon yes*

## **3. Business Managers Report**

- Liens letters for both Newburyport and Newbury have been issued. Any outstanding amounts prior to June 30, 2022 will need to be paid by the deadline or the amount will be transferred to their 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter taxes. Ms. Knight said there were some heavy users that owe large amounts such as Anna Jacques who owes \$92,000. She has been phone calling these customers directly.
- **Consumption:** The consumption report was presented to the Board which showed an increase in consumption for most months.
- **Budget:** Both water and sewer were 36% expended. Water had a total revenue of \$2.2 million. Percentage used for the water Supplies line (54%) is typical in January as expenses exceed revenue at this point in the budget with a lot of that being chemicals. Debt service is fixed. The line item Other Charges and Expenses is high because it is a one time, up front insurance payment and is the same for sewer. Sewer has a total revenue of \$2.8 million. Commissioner Smith asked if there would be an overage for the year or will the category level off. Ms. Knight said chemicals are skyrocketing but the department uses the state bid list. Ms. Knight showed a chart for FY22 and FY21 Expense and Revenue Comparison. Commissioner Simon asked if Ms. Knight could predict the future/trend lines. Ms. Knight said she was concerned about energy and supplies. In January she takes a good look and on March 1<sup>st</sup> she will look to see if portions of the budget need to be frozen.

*Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve the Business Manager's report. Commissioner Simon seconded.*

*Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Smith yes, Simon yes*

#### 4. Old Business

- **Debt Service:** As requested at the last meeting, Ms. Knight supplied the Board with the long-term Water and Sewer outstanding debt as of June 30, 2022. Commissioner Jones said it was good information to have.
- **Water Connection Fees:** Ms. Knight referred the Board to the memo included in their packet from Jon Carey, Water Distribution Superintendent requesting the Board re-evaluate the fee structure for various services outlined in the memo. Ms. Knight said the rationale was to cover costs associated with those services. She explained if the Board were to adjust the fees it would next go to the Utility Commission for approval then on to City Council.

*Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve Mr. Carey's recommendations. Commissioner Creelman seconded.*

*Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Smith yes, Simon yes*

- **Bill Presentment:** Ms. Knight presented the Board with current bill format and highlighted areas of importance and areas that were changed/cleaned up for easier clarification. Commissioner Simon requested the Abatement Requests read, "Abatements can be found on the City's website." Ms. Knight said rather than have usage in units, as requested, she feels the customer will understand cubic feet better. Ms. Knight said a few of the requests that were made would need to be run by the biller who prints the bills to see whether those areas can be modified. She will ask.
- **West Newbury Letter:** Ms. Knight asked the Board to address the West Newbury request. Commissioner Jones felt that the Board approved it last year and it should be approved again. He said if Ms. Knight can get the letter together he will sign it.

*Commissioner Simon made a motion to approve the West Newbury request. Commissioner Creelman seconded.*

*Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Smith yes, Simon yes*

- **Update on Water Resources and Restrictions:** Mr. Tuccolo reported that the City is still in the ban. Tom Cusick the Water Treatment Operations Superintendent feels we should take it down and Mr. Tuccolo agrees. He stated that because we are going into winter nobody is watering their lawns.

*Commissioner Simon made a motion remove the water restriction for the winter. Commissioner Creelman seconded.*

*Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Smith yes, Simon yes*

- **Abatement Policy:** Commissioner Simon presented a draft Water and Sewer Abatement Application. He will send it to all parties in a form that can be edited.

Commissioner Smith left the meeting at 5:40 pm.

#### 5. New Business

- **Public Communication:** Commissioner Simon asked how the department was currently getting information out to the public. Ms. Knight said in the past the department had included the Mayor's

message in the quarterly bills to the public. If a customer is signed up for e-bills they would not receive anything that is included with the paper quarterly bills. Currently the department has the ability to do reverse notification for those that sign up through Water Smart and also the City's website is a good source of information and they are able to sign up for news and notices through there as well. The department also uses Facebook and Twitter to communicate. Commission Simon suggested a letter from Tom Cusick outlining all the upcoming projects and also updates on the current projects. Every customer in the City is mailed the Annual Water Quality Report.

**6. Confirm Next Meeting:** January 18, 2023 at 3:30 pm.

**7. Warrant and Contract Signing**

*Commissioner Jones made a motion to sign the warrants. Commissioner Simon seconded.  
Vote: Creelman yes, Jones yes, Simon yes.*

**8. Adjournment**

Commission Jones adjourned the meeting at 6:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted By: Karen Bush