

**WATER & SEWER COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES – MARCH 16, 2021**

3:00 PM – Remote Participation

Chairman’s Introduction to Remote Meeting

Chairman Meader opened the meeting at 3:00 PM and stated that this Open Meeting of the Water and Sewer Commission was being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker’s Executive Order of March 12, 2020, due to the current State of Emergency in the Commonwealth due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 Virus. Chairman Meader added that in order to mitigate the transmission of the COVID-19 Virus, the Town has been advised and directed by the Commonwealth to suspend public gatherings, and as such, the Governor’s Order suspended the requirement of the Open Meeting Law to have all meetings in a publicly accessible physical location. Further, all members of public bodies are allowed and encouraged to participate remotely. Chairman Meader noted that the Order allows public bodies to meet entirely remotely so long as reasonable public access is afforded so that the public can follow along with the deliberations of the meeting. He added that ensuring public access does not ensure public participation unless such participation is required by law. Chairman Meader noted that this meeting will not feature Public Comment. He indicated the various ways that the public may view or participate in this meeting as listed on the posted agenda.

Meeting Business Ground Rules Chairman Meader covered the ground rules for effective and clear conduct of the business. He asked members of the Board to mute their phone or computer when not speaking and to speak clearly and in a way that helps generate accurate meeting minutes. He will go through the items on the agenda. Following the presentation, Board members will be offered an opportunity to speak. Members were asked if they wish to speak, to do so through the Chair, taking care to identify themselves. The Chair introduced each meeting attendee with attendee acknowledging presence verbally.

Chairman Meader confirmed that the following members and persons anticipated on the agenda were remotely present and could be heard.

Water & Sewer Commission:

John Meader, Chairman
Bryant Firmin
David Pepe

Town Staff:

Scott Charpentier, DPW Director
Tim Davison, Water & Sewer Supervisor
Sarah Jean, Administrative Assistant

1. Consideration of minutes from the February 16, 2021 regular meeting

Motion to approve the meeting minutes of the February 16, 2021 regular meeting as amended. Vote was done by roll call Commissioner Firmin “aye”, Commissioner Pepe “aye”, Commissioner Meader “aye;” the vote by roll call was unanimous with three votes in favor.

2. Water / Sewer Capital Improvement Program Summary – Fiscal Year ’22

Mr. Charpentier and the Commission discussed the Capital Improvement Program Summary for Fiscal Year 2022. Mr. Charpentier reports that the 6-year plan has been

presented to the Financial Planning Committee and is supported by that committee. Mr. Charpentier reports that this has also been discussed with the Appropriations Committee, stating that they do not have a supporting role in it but there were no issues or concerns with it. Mr. Charpentier states that it is to be proposed at Town Meeting for the Water and Sewer Enterprise Funds.

DPW: Water & Sewer Enterprise Fund

Mr. Charpentier reports that there are two (2) shared projects between Water and Sewer Enterprise Funds. The most substantial project is the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) project with a proposed budget of \$500,000.00 to be shared between water and sewer. The ratio between the two was accomplished through a category summary of what is being provided for each Division.

Example:

We will be installing a node, or computer base station at the following locations

- Water Garage (shared between both water & sewer)
- Hudson Street Sanitary Sewer Pump Station, West Main Street Sanitary Sewer Pump Station (sewer only)
- Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) valve and meter pit, Assabet tank (water only)

Mr. Charpentier reports that the ratio of this project comes out to 44% Water Enterprise Fund (\$220,000.00) and 56% Sewer Enterprise Fund (\$280,000.00). A borrowing article is proposed at town meeting to fund the project.

Mr. Charpentier reports that this will fully implement SCADA for our water facilities. It is not being proposed for the Edmund Hill water storage tank as it no longer has a viable purpose in town and when it does need repair it is likely to be taken out of service. On the sewer side we will be monitoring some of our larger stations.

Mr. Charpentier reports that there is a third phase of this SCADA program and that will be to incorporate other sewer stations over the coming years through incremental pump station improvements through the operating budget. The cost to install SCADA at a pump station can range between \$25,000.00 – \$60,000.00 depending upon what facilities are there when it comes to computers and controls.

Mr. Charpentier reports that the second project that is being shared between water & sewer is an equipment purchase. This will be for the replacement of the 2003 Kubota tractor that is used for easement maintenance. The total cost of the replacement is estimated to be \$80,000.00. Mr. Charpentier reports that this will be proposed at town meeting under free cash use, so we will be using fund balance. There are more sewer easements than water easements and the proposed ratio is 40% Water Enterprise Fund (\$33,000.00) and 60% Sewer Enterprise Fund (\$48,000.00). Mr. Charpentier is proposing to replace it with a John Deere tractor with a variety of attachments (blower, chipper, brush hog).

DPW: Water Enterprise Fund

Mr. Charpentier discussed the third project and stated that this is a stand-alone project on the water side. Mr. Charpentier states that we spoke about this at our last meeting and that is the dam removal. Mr. Charpentier reports that we recently submitted a grant application to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to fund 75% of the design and permitting costs associated with the removal of the Northborough Reservoir Dam. The estimated cost of the design and permitting is \$200,000.00. The article to be presented at town meeting requests authorization to borrow or use \$50,000.00 out of free cash to support the local match. If approved, it is contingent upon a grant award.

It was agreed that in anticipation of town meeting where the commission has in the past endorsed town meeting articles, this will satisfy that previous history. Motion to support the FY'22 Capital Improvement Plan as presented. Vote was done by roll call Commissioner Firmin "aye", Commissioner Pepe "aye", Commissioner Meader "aye;" the vote by roll call was unanimous with three votes in favor.

3. Consideration of the proposed FY2022 Water / Sewer Operating Budgets

Mr. Charpentier reports that the Water Enterprise Fund budget increase of roughly \$360,000.00 seen in the FY'22 budget is due to labor increases that we are contractually obligated to meet and is substantially driven by Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) assessment. The MWRA assessment of \$345,000.00 is based on our overall percentage of use. Mr. Charpentier stated that the MWRA customers who use a lot of water in business and commercial facilities saw a substantial reduction in use in 2020 due to the pandemic. Bedroom communities like Northborough, had their usage increase. Mr. Charpentier spoke to the importance of maintaining a healthy fund balance and not have the rate payers bear a substantial increase. Mr. Charpentier stated that he has kept everything he could level funded. It will be proposed at Town Meeting to allocate a little over \$300,000.00 towards the enterprise fund to stabilize rate increases. We are also proposing a typical rate increase, somewhere in the 5 – 6% range for next fiscal year. The actual rate increase will be identified more clearly through a rate study in July and August.

Objective is to stabilize the rates; the use of free cash will reduce the fund balance to 11%. This fund balance will be replenished when the FY'21 final budgets are certified. Due to the increase of water usage, the expectation is that we will be revenue positive and early projections are that we will be able to put \$200,000.00 back into the fund balance. Mr. Charpentier also reports that a \$2,500.00 increase has been put into the budget for equipment replacement. Mr. Charpentier states that every year we must replace something and it's hard to project what piece of equipment needs to be replaced, that way if something breaks, we will have resources to replace it.

Mr. Charpentier reports that the proposed Sewer Enterprise Fund budget increase of \$77,000.00 is due to contractually required wage increases, increases in the cost of utilities, debt, and the City of Marlborough assessment. Mr. Charpentier states that the debt for the water meter program is currently shifting from water to sewer. Those meters are a shared piece of infrastructure and are used by the sewer division for billing purposes. Mr. Charpentier reports that the Town of Northborough is still in litigation with the City of Marlborough. Since we have not settled with the City of Marlborough, we are projecting a 5% increase to the Marlborough assessment which accounts for \$39,000.00. Mr.

Charpentier gave a quick summary on Marlborough: stating that the last time we fully settled with the City of Marlborough was FY'14 in accordance with the old Intermunicipal Agreement (IMA) our shared use cost was \$456,000.00. For FY'22 the proposed Marlborough charge is \$813,000.00.

Mr. Meader stated that this was for informational purposes only, no formal motion is associated with it.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Mr. Charpentier updated the Commission on the Assabet Hill water storage tank project. Mr. Charpentier reports that there was a bid opening last week, there was one bidder DN Tanks (formerly known as Natgun), the company who originally built the tank. They were the low bidder and the bid came in within budget. Mr. Charpentier reports that we have roughly \$687,000.00 available for construction and the bid came in at \$672,000.00 and he is anticipating a quick award.

Opportunities regarding a valued engineering piece for the building was identified by the bidder after the bid opening that we would like to discuss further.

Next Meeting: The next regular meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, April 20, 2021 at 3PM.

Adjourn: Motion to adjourn at 3:37 PM; Vote was done by roll call Commissioner Firmin "aye", Commissioner Pepe "aye", Commissioner Meader "aye;" the vote by roll call was unanimous with three votes in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Jean

Documents used during meeting:

1. March 16, 2021 Meeting Agenda
2. February 16, 2021 Regular Meeting Minutes
3. Water / Sewer FY'22 Capital Improvement Program Summary
4. Water / Sewer Enterprise Fund FY'22 Proposed Budget