

**WATER & SEWER COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES – June 9, 2020**

2 PM – Remote Participation, Town Hall 63 Main Street Northborough MA

MEMBERS PRESENT: John Meader
Bryant Firmin
David Pepe

ALSO PRESENT: Julianne Hirsh, Board of Selectmen (BOS) Liaison
Scott Charpentier, Public Works Director
Tim Davison, Water & Sewer Supervisor
Sarah Jean, Administrative Assistant

Commissioner Meader opened the meeting at 2:06 PM and read the following statement: Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Water & Sewer Commission will be conducted via remote participation. No in-person attendance by members of the public will be permitted.

1. Consideration of minutes from the April 28, 2020 regular meeting

Mr. Meader stated that the approval of the minutes will have to be deferred until the next meeting as Mr. Pepe is not in attendance to consider the meeting minutes at this time.

2. Revised FY'21 Budget Discussion/Endorsement

Mr. Charpentier and the Commission reviewed the memorandum and the budget spreadsheet comparing the original budget and the FY'21 COVID budget.

Mr. Charpentier reports that a vast majority of the budget items are fixed such as payments for services and payments on debt. Labor adjustments are where we can make changes and Mr. Charpentier reports that there are two positions that have been defunded in COVID FY'21 budget. The first position is a part time administrative assistant position which has a 60% / 40% split between the Water and Sewer Enterprise Fund. The current employee will be laid off and the position will remain unfilled for the upcoming year. The second position is the full time Assistant DPW director, Mr. Charpentier is proposing to not fund that position either. The only other change Mr. Charpentier reports is relating to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) assessment. Mr. Charpentier reports that the original budget number was based on an estimate, the actual assessment received in May went down by \$4,200.00.

Mr. Charpentier reports that the goals put forth here are not focused on a single fiscal year as he expects to see a continuation of financial hardships leading in to FY'22. Mr. Charpentier reports that he didn't want to cut to the bone and not be able to adjust next year as necessary. Moving forward, there are services that we are required to maintain

such as exercising valves, maintaining Geographic Information System (GIS) Mapping, leak detection & tank inspections. Items that can be deferred include waiting to purchase grinder cartridges on the sewer side, and hydrant replacement on the water side. This is why the decision has been made to eliminate one unfilled full time position and lay off one part time administrative position. Mr. Charpentier states that we will adjust as necessary.

Mr. Firmin was curious if the Town Administrator has thought about the next fiscal year budget? Mr. Firmin questioned if there was a master plan that could help us? Mr. Charpentier stated that municipal budget impacts are always behind what the economy sees. FY'22 is when the municipalities will be hit as this year has been a struggle for many businesses and residents. Mr. Firmin inquired if we will be really hurting next year? Mr. Charpentier reports that the General Fund approach is similar to the approach that he has taken which is to make adjustments while maintaining services.

Mr. Meader stated that he originally thought making these adjustments was due to increased expenses but is now questioning if it in anticipation of dropping revenues? Mr. Charpentier stated that dropping the Assistant DPW Director position which is funded 50% from the General Fund, will help the municipal budget as well as the enterprise funds. Mr. Charpentier noted that there is very little we can cut out without cutting services. Mr. Meader questioned what the motivation was behind this? Is there an anticipation of dropping revenues? Mr. Charpentier stated that he is not anticipating any negative revenue impacts. Mr. Charpentier reports that the elimination of the part time administrative staff is a means of sharing the burden of loss.

A Motion to endorse the revised FY'21 budget as presented today 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 minutes from the April 28, 2020 regular meeting*

Mr. Pepe joined the meeting remotely at 2:09 PM and Mr. Meader went back to item number 1 to consider the minutes of the April 28, 2020 meeting. Mr. Meader suggested additions be made. Motion by roll call to approve the meeting minutes of the April 28, 2020 regular meeting as amended, Commissioner Firmin "abstaining due to absence", Commissioner Pepe "aye", Commissioner Meader "aye"; the vote by roll call was two votes in favor, with one abstaining due to absence.

4. *Water / Sewer Bill Adjustment – 269 West Main Street*

Mr. Charpentier and the Commission reviewed the information pertaining to a sewer bill adjustment request for account number 4265 located at 269 West Main Street Building #4 due to a leak.

Mr. Charpentier reviewed the request and is recommending approval of a sewer abatement in the amount \$2,623.33 as the water never entered the sewer system. The Commission discussed the information presented.

Mr. Pepe questioned why we didn't pick up the leak with our new meter? Mr. Charpentier wasn't sure why we didn't get a leak alert. Mr. Charpentier stated that we do monitor the systems and get a lot of notifications, that are not really leaks. Mr. Charpentier reports that we as a Town and a responsible water customer monitor our accounts through Beacon. This customer was not monitoring his accounts and was sent the information for EyeOnWater login information (<https://eyeonwater.com/signup>).

The Quarter 4 water/sewer bill was reviewed and based on past precedence, a motion to approve the request for a sewer abatement of \$2,623.33 as this is an exceptional case that was not caused by customer action or choice. Motion 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.

5. COVID-19 Department Update

Mr. Charpentier and the Commission discussed the Department of Public Works response to COVID-19. Mr. Charpentier stated that we are back at 100% staff reporting. Mr. Charpentier stated that it was a struggle with 50% staff reporting especially for the water/sewer side being a department of four. We are maintaining staff segregation as we have now established the Hudson Street Pump Station as a second place of operations. Mr. Charpentier reports that two staff members are solely working out of the Hudson Street Pump Station and two staff members are working out of the water garage. Interactions are done with safe social distancing and masks are being worn at all times when crews are working together. Mr. Charpentier stated that it was a need for the water/sewer division to have a second place of operations, we've been trying to do this for some time. It required us to bring in a new internet line but there is now full redundancy between the Hudson Street Pump Station and the Water Garage. This will aid us in the future Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) project, to have a second location setup and established. Mr. Charpentier stated that operations have slowed; the valve exercise is still happening, just slower now. Directional flushing will be starting in the next couple of weeks. Mr. Charpentier reports that there was bit of a hiccup this year with Inflow & Infiltration (I & I) as we were scheduled for inflow inspections but as we were not going in homes we had to reconfigure the work plan for the coming year and have made this another infiltration year. Mr. Charpentier noted that when COVID-19 is over we can reinstate in the inflow program.

Mr. Davison reports that everything is going fine now being back to full staff.

Mr. Pepe inquired if there would be any additional flushing this year due to business being shut down? Mr. Charpentier reports that he issued an advisory RE: the need to flush the lines, that advisory can be found on the COVID-19 website. No calls, concerns, or complaints have been received as of yet.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Mr. Charpentier informed the commissioners that they are still working on the logistics for Town Meeting which has been rescheduled to Monday, June 22, 2020 at 7PM.

There are critical projects on the agenda with the first one being approval of the Water Garage. Mr. Charpentier states that it is his intention to still work with the Assabet students. The consultants are working diligently to put together a bid package in hopes to put it on the street shortly after approval at town meeting. Mr. Charpentier states that it is a time critical schedule; with hopes to bid the project in July, award the project in August, and have construction done in November/December. The intent is to have a shell to work inside of after the holidays when the kids return to school. Mr. Charpentier stated that if we don't have a town meeting until the fall we would lose this schedule.

The second project is the water storage tank and while this project is not time critical, the approval of funding it is. We are in the process of submitting an application to the State Revolving Fund (SRF) to fund the tank. The Federal Government has been known to issue money through existing mechanisms. Mr. Charpentier stated that it is a way to get a lot of money in a lot of hands quickly through a structured program. Mr. Charpentier states that funding of this project needs to be approved at town meeting in order to be on the approved list. Mr. Firmin asked that the importance of the SRF project be emphasized, even though the project itself may wait the funding needs to be approved.

Mrs. Hirsh asked if Town meeting is pushed off because of health concerns could the projects that are very timely be approved in the 1/12th budget. Mr. Charpentier indicated that no, they could not be approved in the 1/12th budget. The 1/12th budget can only approve the payments of existing projects. Mrs. Hirsh also asked Mr. Charpentier if he would be willing to remind people about the water monitoring system that is in place. Mr. Charpentier agreed to share his opinion/thoughts on the water monitoring system if she was to bring it up in her report.

Next Meeting: The next regular meeting will be scheduled as the need arises.

Adjourn: Motion to adjourn at 2:42 PM; Motion 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
Administrative Assistant
Department of Public Works

Documents used during meeting:

1. June 9, 2020 Meeting Agenda
2. April 28, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes
3. Memo RE: 2021 Budget / COVID-19 Changes
4. Memo RE: Sewer Abatement – Account 4265 / 269 West Main Street Building #4