

**WATER & SEWER COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES – AUGUST 17, 2020**

5:30 PM – Remote Participation

MEMBERS PRESENT: John Meader
Bryant Firmin
David Pepe

ALSO PRESENT: Scott Charpentier, Public Works Director
Tim Davison, Water & Sewer Supervisor
Dave Fox, Raftelis Financial
David Parenti, Northborough Fire Chief
Sarah Jean, Administrative Assistant
Julianne Hirsh, Board of Selectmen Liaison

Commissioner Meader opened the meeting at 5:30 PM.

1. Consideration of minutes from the July 22, 2020 regular meeting

Motion to approve the meeting minutes of the July 22, 2020 regular meeting as amended. 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.

2. Public Hearing to consider a Water / Sewer Rate Adjustment

At 5:34 PM Chairman Meader opened the public hearing to consider water and sewer rate adjustments. Mr. Meader discussed the Public Hearing process.

Mr. Charpentier gave a brief summary of the water and sewer rate study process and schedule. Noted that if the new rate structure is adopted by the Commission tonight, the rate payers will be notified by postcard mail indicating the rate changes to take effect with usage beginning on October 6, 2020 and will be seen in the 3rd quarter bills that will be dated February 1, 2021 & due on March 1, 2021.

Mr. Fox from Raftelis Financial gave a brief overview of the annual rate study process. Mr. Fox described how they typically look at a 5 year window of the financial forecast of both the water and sewer funds, taking into consideration historical actuals as well as upcoming budget and financial trends. Specifically looking at operating expenses, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) assessments, existing debt service schedules and financing of capital improvement plans.

Putting together a financial forecast of all those different revenue requirements and all the different costs to determine what rate adjustments are necessary to support the financial plan to pay for costs and maintain financial liability.

The recommendation for FY'21 is a 4% increase on the water volumetric charges, no increase to the fixed water service base charge, a 5% increase on the sewer volumetric charges, along with a significant reduction in the flat rate sewer service charge.

To put things in perspective Mr. Fox indicated that the amounts a typical customer currently pays is about \$208.00 combined per quarter. With the rate increase the typical customers bill will go up to \$217.00 per quarter. This is a 4.4% increase in the total bill, to break it down further it will be approximately \$9.00 increase per quarter, or \$3.00 per month, .10 cents additional per day for a good, clean safe water and sewer service.

Mr. Fox stated that water and sewer rates have increased 5.5 % – 6.5 % nationally for the last 15 years or so. The recommendation tonight is well below that national average, in his eyes it is a very reasonable rate increase and right in line with where we thought we would be last year.

No questions or further comments were voiced from the Commissioners at this time. No one from the public was in attendance at the public hearing tonight.

Ms. Hirsh thought the presentations were really clear and understandable.

Motion by roll call to close the public hearing at 5:45 pm Commissioner Firmin “aye”, Commissioner Pepe “aye”, Commissioner Meader “aye;” the vote by roll call was unanimous with three votes in favor.

3. *Vote on Water & Sewer Rate Adjustment*

Motion to adopt the water and sewer rates as presented to the Commission tonight at the public hearing. The new water & sewer volumetric rates will be effective on the third quarter bills dated February 1, 2021 are as follows:

Water volumetric rates are increasing by 4%

Water		
Usage/quarter	Current Rate (per 1,000 cf)	New Rate (per 1,000 cf)
0 - 2,000 cf	\$47.15	\$49.04
2,001 - 6,000	\$56.51	\$58.77
Over 6,000 cf	\$69.64	\$72.43

Sewer volumetric rates are increasing by 5%

Sewer		
Usage/quarter	Current Rate (per 1,000 cf)	New Rate (per 1,000 cf)
0 - 2,000 cf	\$113.40	\$119.07
2,001 - 6,000	\$117.77	\$123.66
Over 6,000 cf	\$123.03	\$129.18

Flat sewer charge reduction from \$340.20 to \$220.00

Sewer Only Accounts		
Service Type	Current Rate (per quarter)	New Rate (per quarter)
Flat Sewer	\$340.20	\$220.00

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.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Mr. Charpentier and the Commission thanked Mr. Fox for his time.

Mr. Charpentier informed the Commission that he has received the draft National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit for sanitary sewer discharge from Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The public comment period is currently open and closes on August 28, 2020. Weston & Sampson is reviewing the draft permit and comparing it to the previous one. They will be compiling a list of comments to send back to the EPA. Mr. Charpentier will send the comments to the commissioners individually for review once he has them. Mr. Charpentier indicated that some of the changes relate to Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) testing. Mr. Charpentier stated that there was not a lot of detail provided, also indicated that the thresholds for testing have changed, some dates have changed, along with changes to the reporting requirements. Mr. Charpentier indicated that the EPA is picking up heavily on operation and maintenance (O&M) written plans and reporting.

Mr. Charpentier states that the water/sewer building is currently out for bid. Sub-bids for electrical coming in this week with general bids due the first week of September. Mr. Charpentier has reached out to Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School (AVRTS) – it is expected that this time next year students can be engaged in the outfitting of the building. Noting that the schedule has changed a bit due to the pandemic; construction will now be done in the Spring, allowing time to secure the necessary permits over the summer, with it ready for the students to work on in the fall.

Water storage tank cannot be work on in the high demand season. It is expected that we will bid it out in the winter, noting that there is a long lead time on mixing system. This will allow time to procure the mixing system, have it on site and be ready to go. Mr. Charpentier noted that the schedule was not too negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Inflow & Infiltration (I & I) is still ongoing this year with investigation.

Tim Davison reports that they are currently working on valve turning and are in the second area, section b. All gates have been exercised and leaks that were found have been repaired.

Mr. Charpentier reports that there is no new movement with the City of Marlborough. Mr. Charpentier stated that the Public Works Commissioner John Ghiloni retired from the City. Mr. Charpentier states that he has reached out to the new person in that position, in hopes to come together on a letter but he hasn't heard back as of yet.

Julianne Hirsh inquired at to if the town was looking at or currently under a water restriction due to the drought? Mr. Charpentier responded that we are listed as a level 2 – significant drought, a water restriction is not required by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) at this time.

Annual reminder that per the regulations there are no irrigation systems connected to the municipal drinking water supply allowed. There are two reasons for this; 1) substantial cross connection hazard and 2) from a conservation action to reduce water consumption.

The Commission would like to acknowledge Fire Chief David Parenti for his assistance with hosting tonight's webinar.

Next Meeting: The next regular meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, September 15, 2020 at 2PM.

Adjourn: Motion to adjourn at 5:57 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

Documents used during meeting:

1. August 17, 2020 Meeting Agenda
2. July 22, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes
3. Final FY 2021 Water and Sewer Rate Study report dated July 31, 2020 from Raftelis Financial Consultants