



OFFICE OF THE
WATER DEPARTMENT
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Water Commission Minutes
Tuesday, August 21, 2018

Approved: 9/4/18

Chairman Karl Huber called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm

Members present: John O'Brien, Scott Wilkins

Meeting held: At the Dunstable Town Hall, 511 Main Street, lower level

In attendance: Mark Haddad, Interim Town Administrator, Tom Orcutt, Groton Water & Sewer Superintendent; James Cray, Richard Protasowicki, Wright Pierce; Leah Basbanes, James Tully, Board of Selectmen; Bob Nelson, Harold Simmons, Advisory Board

Reviewed & Signed:

- Monthly bills
- Monthly payroll

Dunstable Water Operations, Inter-Municipal Agreement & FY19 Budget

Mr. Huber started off by catching those present up on where things stand. The town for a long time had a system in place that worked, but DEP determined that it was not at the appropriate level of licensing and required the town to hire a licensed water operator outside of the department. In the meantime an inter-municipal agreement was pursued with the Town of Pepperell. Unfortunately, Pepperell has lost one of its operators and the town's prior private contractor, White Water, is no longer available. So for the time being the town remains in transition trying to figure out what the next steps are. Mr. Haddad asked some questions relating to DEP and how comfortable DEP would be with the Town of Groton stepping in to help. Mr. Huber elaborated on the discussions he's had with DEP regarding the matter and went over the work the department has been doing to address short term concerns as well as looking to the future. Currently the department runs two different wells that run independently of each other. Some upgrades should be done to Well No. 1, discussion involved what the costs and design work would be. The electrical as it exists should be fine as it is and DEP, White Water, and Wright Pierce all agree that this should remain as is. DEP wants to ensure that day to day operations are handled by licensed operators, and that the required fixes continue to be done. That work focuses on replacement of the hydropneumatic tanks. Mr. Haddad inquired as to the funding. Mr. Huber explained that the department is seeking SRF funding through DEP. He then spoke about some pipe replacement which would be part of the project as well.

Mr. Orcutt had some questions about what improvements were being sought by Pepperell. Mr. Huber responded by explaining what Pepperell wanted to see done, and how to wrap it up into the program. Mr. Orcutt had some concerns about SRF noting it would lock the town into a 20-year period noting that going out to bond could provide a longer time span. This prompted some discussion of the advantages of both programs with Mr. Huber noted that SRF is administered by DEP, and they're well aware of the town's need. This prompted some discussion of the annual budget, which as of FY19 is \$128,400. The needed fixes, unfortunately, exceed that budget. This prompted Mr. Haddad to ask some questions about the Water Departments budget and how it operates as an Enterprise Fund. Mr. Huber elaborated on where the budget stands, how much is collected from rate payers, and noted the Commission is acting prudently in spending funds currently considering the situation. DEP's ACOP requires a standard operating document, an emergency management document, and resolution to the required fixes. Mr. Huber then noted what has been

done up to date such as the VFD. White Water is doing as much as it can, mostly providing documentation. Pepperell is willing to help with the station checks and other required operating for the time being during the transition. Mr. Orcutt asked about the long term staffing plan. Mr. Huber responded that the Water Department is still in the process of bringing back its clerical support and is without a Water Supervisor. Mr. Orcutt asked if the department can afford a Water Supervisor who is a licensed operator. Mr. Huber responded that with the constraints the department has, the answer is no not on their own, which is why an inter-municipal agreement with another Water Department makes sense. Mr. Orcutt asked what the minimum staffing requirement from DEP was.

Mr. O'Brien responded it was initially 4 hours a day, but DEP has agreed to lower it to 2 hours a day assuming the operator is in a neighboring town. Mr. Haddad returned discussion of the budget. The budget was previously about \$62,000 collected from rate payers with operating budget closer to \$80,000. The initial agreement with Pepperell was for \$60,000 a year in assessment or about \$5,000 a month. The rates were raised and the projected FY19 budget should be closer to the \$120,000 mark. Mr. O'Brien reported that wages for clerical going forward will be \$15,500. He then noted the various other sums allotted in the budget according to the Town Accountant. Mr. Haddad then inquired as to the cost for the infrastructure project. Mr. O'Brien reported it's about \$2.4 million. Mr. Huber noted the rate increases are mostly just to cover the current needs for operations and immediate fixes. Mr. Nelson noted that once the affordable housing project goes through the Water Departments customer base should increase by about 25 percent. And it was the hope of the Advisory Board that rate payers would help shoulder a part of the cost of the project. Mr. Cray gave some information on the overall project number and where things stand for going out to bid on the project for construction. Mr. Haddad suggested that Groton's Water Department determine if it can help Dunstable in place of Pepperell. This included arranging meetings between the two departments to visit the various water sites. Discussion then shifted to rate payers and where bills are currently. Obviously the bills will go down over the fall and winter as rate payer's use less for watering lawns and other uses. There was a question as to how many connections there are on the system. Mr. Huber reported a 102, with about 96 of them as residential. Mr. Orcutt had some questions about the systems pressure and what alarm systems are in place.

Mr. Cray noted the pressure is good being around 60. Mr. Huber then spoke about the alarms and outlined how they are managed. Mr. Orcutt stated that his staff is apprehensive, and originally Groton's determination was a no. But it really depends on the town's needs and its plan. Mr. Huber explained that the department is looking to have a team and to rely on a contractor. The department just can't afford to have an operator on staff. This prompted discussion of the various options and what companies are willing to provide those services if no inter-municipal agreement can be obtained. Mr. Huber suggested Mr. Orcutt talk to White Water and Pepperell to fully grasp the situation, what the system needs, and what the primary concerns are. Mr. Orcutt noted that the primary concern for Groton is the pH issue and the KOH valve. Controlling the chemical situation is important. Of paramount importance is this water project. Mr. Huber outlined what the department has done on all of those fronts. Mr. Orcutt was then willing to take a look at the system and talk to all the parties currently involved prior to any further determinations being made. Mr. Haddad noted that Groton's Water Commission will need to sign off on any decision. Mr. Orcutt then followed up by talking about some staffing needs his department has. Taking on Dunstable would likely require hiring another employee. That isn't currently in the budget. So that would have to be addressed. Mr. Orcutt elaborated on the various challenges for Groton in potentially taking on Dunstable's system. Mr. Huber expressed understanding of this noting that this is a manpower issue for both towns, aside from the needed repairs. Mr. Haddad suggested that what needs to happen is both departments need to determine if a level of comfort can be achieved. Mr. Orcutt asked what would happen if the voters say no to the infrastructure project. Mr. Huber responded that DEP has hinted that they will step in at that point. It is unclear what any other alternative would be. It is pretty obvious that DEP will act. The town is on their radar and like it or not, the water system is a public utility. Mr. Orcutt agreed to meet again in two weeks to see where things are then.

Infrastructure Project Update

Mr. Nelson noted some things that Pepperell really appeared to have some good information and suggested that we still incorporate most of their suggestions and recommendations regardless of whether or not the two towns end up entering into an inter-municipal agreement. Mr. Huber agreed elaborating on what the department has on hand and what is being done to address for the recommendations. There were then some questions for the engineers. Mr. Cray reported on where things stand both with the engineering, which is at 60 percent, and where things stand with the SRF application. He made some recommendations about what should be included and what shouldn't be with an emphasis on having some room to ensure there are enough funds for the work. This prompted some discussion of how to break the project down into phases that can be done. Mr. Cray explained how the SRF application works and went over some outstanding items. This included providing the Commission with a narrative on the SRF application. He asked that if the Commission has any comments they should be provided as soon as possible. What they included was the work that was discussed at Well No. 1, the new water tank, replacing some of the valves and fixing the KOH valve and fixing the pH problem, some work to Well No. 2, and the access road to the well sites. Mr. Huber noted that some of these items are being included for the sake of the funding.

Mr. O'Brien asked if asking for more hurts or helps the town. Mr. Cray's colleague noted that it won't hurt. Mr. Huber stated that the most important thing is to address the immediate problems, and fix things so that the water operators are comfortable going forward and the system works with integrity and provides a quality service. Mr. Cray then went over some of the numbers not included in this as the scope of work at the well stations had to be kept within a workable range. There was then some discussion about whether a formal submission to DEP should be done to request a formal amendment to the ACOP. Obviously the delays need to be addressed with an amendment to the ACOP. DEP has been part of this and has indicated verbally willingness in the past to amend the ACOP. Mr. Cray suggested a new timeline that should be recommended. If everything goes according to plan, the numbers will be ready for town meeting in the spring and ideally ground breaking in late summer of 2019. Mr. O'Brien had some questions as to how highly ranked the towns project would be for SRF funding. Mr. Cray explained that the town would rank pretty high considering the entity doing the ranking is the entity that wants the project done, DEP. Mr. Huber asked how far off things are. Mr. Cray stated that what is in the plan is what has been discussed with all parties to date.

Authorization of Accounts Payable & Payroll

Mr. Huber reported on the bills he's signed. This included signing the usual National Grid bills, and water operator bills.

Minutes

The Commission considered its minutes from August 6th, 2018. Seeing no necessary changes or modifications, the Commission proceeded with adopting them.

A motion was made by Mr. Huber to adopt the minutes of August 6th, 2018. The motion was seconded by Mr. O'Brien and passed by majority vote.

Additional Topics Discussed Not Noted on the Agenda

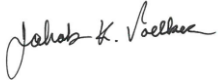
No additional topics not anticipated at least 48 hours in advance, and therefore not listed on the agenda, were discussed.

Next Meeting

Next Meeting will be on September 4th, 2018 at 5:00 pm unless otherwise scheduled.

A motion to adjourn at 7:00 pm was made by Mr. O'Brien and seconded by Mr. Huber. The motion passed without objection.

Respectfully submitted by

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jakob K. Voelker".

Jakob K. Voelker
Administrative Assistant
Dunstable Water Department