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**Water Commission Minutes**  
**Tuesday, September 4, 2018**

**Approved: 09/26/18**

Chairman Karl Huber called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm

Members present: John O'Brien, Scott Wilkins

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

In attendance: Tom Orcutt, Groton Water & Sewer Superintendent; Harold Simmons, Advisory Board; Brian Rich, Fire Chief; Alan Chaney, Conservation Commission; Leah Basbanes, Board of Selectmen

**Reviewed & Signed:**

- Monthly bills
- Monthly payroll

**Review & Discuss Dunstable Water Dept. Operation with Groton Water Dept.**

Mr. Orcutt started off by thanking the Commission for arranging a site visit to various Water Department facilities. Mr. Huber thanked Mr. Orcutt for coming out in the first place as the site visits were productive. Mr. Orcutt then spoke about his discussions with his Water Commission. Groton's nervousness is not knowing what the endgame is and what the financial commitment is to do the needed projects. Without appropriation at Annual Town Meeting for the infrastructure project, Groton's Water Dept. has grave concerns. If Groton is in, it is in. Without the staff being willing to take things on, the department is left reluctant. Groton's Water Commissioners are also reluctant to take on more work given the pending retirement of a long time employee. Mr. Huber enquired as to how long it would be until that employee retires. Mr. Orcutt responded he retires June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Mr. Orcutt noted that staffing is also one of DEP's concerns. Mr. O'Brien asked hypothetically if Dunstable were to pay an assessment to help pay for additional staffing, whether Groton would be willing to consider it. Mr. Orcutt outlined some of the concerns and challenges with doing that stating there are a lot of moving parts. The biggest besides staffing is what Dunstable is willing to do for its infrastructure project. Mr. Huber responded that the problem is that the Water Department doesn't know what the town meeting will do. DEP has been willing to amend the ACOP, to move back the time tables, but that doesn't guarantee anything yet.

Mr. O'Brien noted that this is a lot of ping pong back and forth and a chicken and an egg situation. Mr. Orcutt, unfortunately, had to report that his Water Commission has multiple levels of concerns and which all make them reluctant. Mr. Huber stated that their concerns are understandable. Obviously, there are nuances that have to be considered. Some things can be a work in progress, but there need to be a clear commitments. The Commission can't say for certain that it can get the project passed. That said DEP will ensure that the problem is solved even if it requires them to act and send a bill to the town. Mr. Orcutt noted that he would like to avoid what occurred in Pepperell. He didn't want to lead Dunstable on or give the wrong impression. The Commission valued Mr. Orcutt's honesty and forthrightness. This prompted discussion of what the next steps are and how to deal with the situation. Mr. Orcutt explained that some of the layers involve what happens at 11 pm when something goes wrong. There is a lot of commitment that has to be pledged. And that compounds other problems and limits responses. The unknowns, the resource allocations all conspire against. Mr. Huber noted that the red flags are going to be problems going forward. If something fails, the department will have to respond.

Mr. Wilkins asked Mr. Orcutt if from a catastrophic failure scenario, there are any band aids that could be applied. Mr. Orcutt responded that he doesn't know enough about Dunstable's system to answer that. He suggested that this could be bounced off the town's water engineers. DEP will approve a failsafe system once it is in, but they won't design it the town has to take care of these kinds of contingencies. There should definitely be some kind of plan. Mr. Simmons inquired about the plan that he understood to already be in place. Mr. Huber responded that the town does have an emergency response plan. That plan, unfortunately, requires bringing in equipment from out of state. It has to be shown in a document to DEP as part of the ACOP. Still the department would like to find local solutions if possible. The town is under the watchful eye of DEP, and this is a big issue. White Water and Pepperell have been helping keep the system running. But without an inter-municipal agreement, things remain uncertain. If Groton cannot help Dunstable has no choice but to continue looking for help. That means sitting down with Tyngsborough and any other party. Mr. Orcutt asked about other private operators like White Water. Mr. Huber outlined what the department has done on that front. The problem is costs and available resources. Pepperell has lost staffing and is worried about having the resources to help, so is Groton. The department is hitting a red zone and there are legitimate concerns. Mr. Simmons had some questions about private operators including those that cross state lines. Privatization may still be an option. Nonetheless it still comes down to resources.

Mr. O'Brien, conceding Groton is unwilling, asked if Groton is likely to get additional staffing without Dunstable contributing. Mr. Orcutt felt it unlikely that Groton would be likely to do so. Still, he intends to ask. Mr. O'Brien again stressed that if Dunstable can help pay for more staff in Groton the two towns can help each other. Mr. Huber suggested that it is a good showing of seriousness if what is being spent is to support staff. Mr. Wilkins noted that a shortage of operators is the problem. Mr. O'Brien asked if it would be cheaper to pay for staffing at Groton than hiring a private operator. Mr. Orcutt noted it could, hypothetically, be possible. But there are still challenges, like the costs of benefits. One way or the other, Dunstable has to pay for an operator either in house, private, or through another town. There is no point in chasing something that ultimately cannot happen, at some point in time, the town has to make a commitment. If the town cannot meet its responsibilities to the system DEP will step in. The system cannot be sustained as is. Especially since the Flint, MI crisis. The Dunstable Water Department will continue on as best it can, but there has to be an end game. Mr. Wilkins suggested that for the next meeting the Commission should schedule to talk to private operators and begin to price out those options. In the meantime, the Commission asked Mr. Orcutt if he would be willing to continue to help in any way he can and asked if there is any circumstance where Groton would be willing to change its mind. Mr. Orcutt stated he was open to dialogue, but again stressed Groton's concerns and reservations. Mr. Huber noted that Pepperell has said much the same. Chief Rich reminded all the staffing issues are not new, Pepperell has had them for years and so has Groton. In the meantime, White Water and Pepperell continue to help.

### **Infrastructure Project Update**

Mr. Simmons asked some questions about the project including the hydropneumatic tanks and asked the Commission how confident it felt in putting the project before voters. He felt that no matter what this is going to be tough sell. This prompted some discussion of how to sell the project to the voters and whether the fire suppression argument should be used or not. Mr. Huber noted that fire suppression was used and the voters still were unconvinced. Discussion then shifted to what Wright Pierce could do, including alternative designs for the voters to consider and assist in pricing out. Ms. Basbanes asked some questions about the MUD and requirements for sprinklers for any affordable housing structures built there. Chief Rich responded by outlining how different designs to the system could affect things and the sprinkler systems that would have to be used.

### **FY19 Budget**

There isn't anything clearly in place right now, but between the Town Accountant, Ms. Bresnick, and Ms. Mann, there should be shortly. This relates to the manner by which the department's budget was done as part of the Annual Town Meeting and the towns operating budget.

## **Dunstable Water Dept. Clerical Support**

Mr. Voelker briefly reported on where things stand. Susan Bresnick, the Water Dept.'s new clerical support, has started this week. She will be shared between Water, Assessors, and the Accountant. Ms. Bresnick will assist the Commission going forward with the posting of its agenda, help with the tracking of the department's budget and processing of department bills as well as conducting the billing of rate payers. Mr. Voelker will continue to record the Commissions minutes and will assist Ms. Bresnick wherever necessary. In the meantime, the Commissions former secretary, Cheryl Mann, is training Ms. Bresnick on all aspects of the position. Mr. Huber suggested getting a list of contacts to Ms. Bresnick so that in the event of any situations she'll know who to contact. To that end, Mr. Huber agreed to supply this information.

## **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 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018. Seeing no necessary changes or modifications, the Commission proceeded with adopting them.

A motion was made by Mr. Wilkins to adopt the minutes of August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018. The motion was seconded by Mr. O'Brien and passed by majority vote.

## **Additional Topics Discussed Not Noted on the Agenda**

### **92 Pleasant Street**

A bill was provided to the homeowners for water usage after a pipe burst this past winter while the house was unoccupied. The situation was not discovered until late March. The owners have sent a letter to the Commission requesting the bill be relieved or forgiven in whole or in part given its sum and certain family circumstances relating to why the house was unoccupied. It is still unclear how much of the bill was related to services from White Water that cannot be adjusted and what might otherwise be due to the Water Department for supplying the water that might be forgivable. Now that the department has clerical support again it should be possible to ascertain.

### **Lead & Copper Testing**

Mr. Huber noted that 20 residencies have been identified for this as required by DEP. White Water is working on the letter that will need to be sent out to rate payers. DEP will have to then approve these residencies. Homeowners will need to understand what the testing means and what they'll be agreeing to. There will also need to be contingencies in the case of homeowners refusing to be test sites.

### **KOH**

There remains an issue with the chemical supplier. White Water is looking at an opportunity or alternative answer to this, which might result in using a different supplier.

### **VFD & Upgrades**

Mr. Wilkins suggested further action should be taken to address things. The VFD is operational, but further changes should be made to improve efficiencies and improve infrastructure layout. This relates back to the KOH valve and the persistent pH problem as well.

### **Inter-Municipal Agreement**

Mr. Huber reported on discussions with Counsel regarding the agreement. The work now is to have a rough draft together that can be changed or modified depending on whether or not the department can come to an agreement with either Pepperell or Groton or any other town. Mr. Wilkins suggested that if the department reaches out to Tyngsborough it may be wise to pursue any sale of water.

### **Water System Outage**

Chief Rich noted that a few weeks back there was a situation that occurred where the system went temporarily dry right about the time the Fire Department emptied, cleaned and then refilled its tanker. Mr. Voelker reported that it was a perfect storm according to Pepperell's water operator. A pH alarm went off which caused a pump to shut off right at the same time the Fire Department started filling its tanker, which is what resulted in the loss of water to the system. The situation has since been resolved.

### **Affordable Housing**

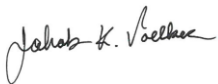
Mr. Wilkins had a question as to where things stand with the Affordable Housing Committee and their work and whether the project on the MUD could go forward regardless of the project. Mr. Voelker reported that the Board of Health has already concluded that they will need to tie into the water system and cannot use private wells instead. This means that the affordable housing project cannot go forward without the water infrastructure project being done.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at 6:00 pm unless otherwise scheduled. The Commission noted it likely will have to continue meeting more than once a month for the time being.

A motion to adjourn at 6:20 pm was made by Mr. Wilkins and seconded by Mr. O'Brien. The motion passed without objection.

Respectfully submitted by



Jakob K. Voelker  
Administrative Assistant  
Dunstable Water Department