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WATER DEPARTMENT
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Water Commission Minutes
Thursday, December 6, 2018

Approved: 12/27/18

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: Deb Trumbull, Heather Montalvo, Julie Buzzotta, SWSS; Harold Simmons, Advisory Board

Reviewed & Signed:

- Monthly bills
- Monthly payroll

New Rate Schedule

Mr. Huber explained that the Water Commission rates which were raised did not work out as they were supposed to. The Water Commission had intended to about double rates when they were adjusted in April. But it appears due to a mathematical error made by the former Town Administrator that was not caught by the Commission, the revenue that is coming in is not sufficient to fund the Water Departments budget. The Town Accounts projections are that the under current rates the department will fall short. If a hearing is scheduled as soon as possible, it would be possible to ameliorate the situation some. But there will likely still need to be a need for help at the Annual Town Meeting via the use of Free Cash. Mr. Wilkins asked if the department had compared itself to other towns in the region. Mr. Huber responded that there were some comparisons. Mr. O'Brien asked if we know out of the 104 users on the system who uses the most. Mr. Voelker reported that he is unaware of that specific information, but certainly Ms. Bresnick can report back for the next meeting. Mr. Huber stated that a hearing will have to be scheduled as soon as possible. Mr. Voelker reported on multiple dates, such as December 26th or January 2nd. Mr. Huber noted that the Town Accountant has already worked out the rates and how they should be changed. It was determined the hearing should be held on January 2nd, 2019.

Update on Meeting with DEP, Immediate Priorities Requiring Attention, & Resolution

Mr. Huber reported on the meeting that was held with DEP and a number of parties including SWSS and Wright Pierce personnel. Mr. Huber stated that there was some tension with DEP as there is a lot that is due on December 14th. The most prominent of which is the Emergency Plan that DEP requires in place in case the system fails prior to the Water Infrastructure Project. DEP was very concerned with the original plan that was filed since it required bringing in tanks and water from out of state. Thanks to SWSS, the plan is getting updated and the contingency will be support with water and equipment coming from Dalton Water which means it comes from in state. Other items include the engineering design work which needs to be submitted to DEP for approval, as well as redundancy plans and a schedule to get all wells online as soon as possible. DEP is looking for plans that recognize a good portion of the possibilities for anything that might go wrong as the infrastructure project proceeds. Mr. Huber outlined some of the fixes that have been done to date, as

well as some failings in getting some things done. Both wells need to be brought online. There have been some issues with pumps and the VFD. Ms. Trumbull noted that SWSS may be able to bring in a person who can help figure out how to solve the issues. This person is an expert who can find the simplest solution. Ms. Montalvo noted that DEP has made it clear that they are getting to the penalty phase, so action needs to be taken immediately. Mr. Huber elaborated that there was no clear thinking on this given the fact that there have been so many cooks in the kitchen in the past few months. Between White Water, Pepperell, and now SWSS, there are a lot of opinions.

The Commission felt confident that what SWSS is recommending is the best path forward at this point. Ms. Trumbull elaborated on some examples of what other towns have done and made the point that when you go with the cheapest option, you often get what you pay for. So, it is often best to find an expert who knows how to make it all gel together and fix things. Mr. Huber then asked if realistically a plan can be given to DEP by this expert in time for December 14th. Ms. Trumbull felt confident that her guy can do it. We need a plan and a schedule to satisfy DEP. The most pressing issue is getting all the wells online and working fully. That coupled with the Emergency Plan should go a long way towards assuaging DEP. Ms. Montalvo then turned discussion to where the Dalton equipment and tankers would go as well as where they would buy the water. This prompted discussion about whether the town has emergency hookups to any neighboring towns. Mr. O'Brien responded that sadly there are no such hookups for the system. As for buying water it may be best to talk to either Tyngsborough or Pepperell. Discussion then turned back to sites. There are three options, by the Town Hall, by the Post Office on the MUD, or on private property connected to the Dunstable General Store. The issue with private property would be related to needing written approval from the owners, plus any liability issues with insurance.

Ms. Trumbull then turned discussion back to the location for the equipment and tankers for the Emergency Plan. The Commission favored Town Hall. Discussion then shifted back to the wells. Ms. Trumbull felt that once we have a plan in place we can proceed with relevant testing and other measures. Mr. Simmons asked about the costs of this well work. Ms. Trumbull wasn't certain, but again stressed quality work over lowest cost. Mr. Simmons suggested there has to be a bottom to this, so what has to be done has to be done. Ms. Trumbull then asked about some reports and the work that has to be done. Mr. Huber promised that anything the department can provide, just let us know. Ms. Bresnick is available to help with administrative tasks. Ms. Trumbull was appreciative and outlined what SWSS does in other towns for these kinds of reports. Ms. Montalvo stated she would reach out to Ms. Bresnick for what she needs. Mr. O'Brien then took a moment to ask whether the town could sell water to any neighbors. Mr. Huber stated that the department has proposed it in the past, but the town was opposed. Now it's likely too late as the towns interested have developed their own systems. Ms. Trumbull responded that with tankers and private companies that buy for pools and otherwise that the town could still realistically sell water. Mr. Huber noted some of the challenges with that, but it may be possible. Mr. Wilkins agreed noting that some of the hydrants would be challenging for that need.

Infrastructure Project Updates & Daily Operations

Mr. Wilkins again renewed questions about what the department does if the town doesn't approve the infrastructure project. There are still a lot of questions in Tyngsborough over whether they really can proceed with their plans of drilling more wells, and they could be interested in either buying water from Dunstable or perhaps even purchasing the towns system. Mr. O'Brien noted that in past discussions informally, it was clear that they would want to own the system and take control of it. Mr. Wilkins asked if there is some way to seek out that alternative in the possible event that the voters say no to funding the infrastructure project. Mr. Wilkins felt that Tyngsborough could be interested, should things on their end remain fluid. Mr. Huber stated that anything inter-municipal like that would require a meeting that includes the Board of Selectmen. No matter what is done the wells will require modifications, changes, and repairs. Mr. Simmons noted that the clock is ticking and the town has

already paid for engineering. The Annual Town Meeting in May will come quickly and there have to be plans. Eye brows have been raised at Advisory Board already regarding Water Department's budget problems. All the ducks need to be brought into a row and soon. A lot of things are waiting. Affordable Housing is waiting and so is Highway. Everything is contingent on a solution. Mr. Huber responded that the problems faced have to be resolved by the town no matter what. Mr. Simmons agreed, but stated we have to make decisions on direction and proceed quickly as the voters must be educated if there is any hope of community buy in. Mr. O'Brien suggested he would reach out, assuming the rest of the Commission had no objections, to approaching Tyngsborough to see if they are still interested. Both Mr. Wilkins and Mr. Huber were okay with that. Mr. Wilkins than asked about the borings and whether any ledge was found. Mr. Huber responded there was no ledge, so for that portion of the matter, things can move forward.

This prompted some discussion of Roads Commissions concerns about how the borings were done. Mr. Wilkins then brought discussion back to the education piece. Mr. Simmons voiced the opinion that while much of the necessary information may be available online or elsewhere, most people don't know to look. Some way of informing the public has to be found as it was when the Town Hall renovation was done. Mr. Huber asked about Capital Planning and whether they could be of help. Mr. Voelker noted that the Capital Planning Committees job is to vet department needs and provide that information to Advisory Board for decision making in relation to the budget. Mr. Simmons generally agreed noting that they put together a plan and a report for the Annual Town Report, and what goes on the plan cannot always be funded. Mr. O'Brien noted that the infrastructure project has failed before voters more than once. The issue is that the town cannot refuse to do this as the Commonwealth will force the matter. That could be catastrophic to the town financially. Mr. Huber felt that a lot of this can be helped by getting information out, and having DEP come to the Annual Town Meeting. It must be made clear that this project has to happen, and if it doesn't DEP will fine the town and force a resolution that may be far more expensive than what is being proposed. Mr. Simmons than turned discussion to the issue of operations and the budget. He cautioned the department not to spend money it doesn't have. So, in light of the budget, the department must be careful. Mr. Huber responded that unfortunately, some of the expenses being faced have to be done as DEP is requiring them. Like this well issue that DEP wants resolved. Discussion on this topic ended there.

Raco Alarm Systems Issues

Mr. Huber gave an update. There have been issues with the communication of the system. The system has been troubleshooted but to no avail. The circuit board has been pulled and sent to Raco to check. The board thankfully was under warranty and as it turns out it was a bad board. So, a new board is being sent. DEP had concerns, but the board thankfully made it quickly and the new circuit board has been installed by SWSS already. Raco will repair the old board for free and send it in as a backup. The department will pay for the new circuit board and this will help ensure that this kind of problem won't persist.

Water RFP

Mr. Huber reported that the Water RFP has been sent out to several parties, including SWSS and is due on December 7th, 2018. Mr. Voelker reported that three entities including SWSS have requested the RFP. Mr. Simmons than asked what the process will be. Mr. Huber outlined it a bit along with Mr. Voelker who gave some background on who the procurement process works.

Outstanding Customer Bill Discussion

A bill was provided to the homeowners at 92 Pleasant Street 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. They are asking for relief from the bill which is close to \$10,000. There was discussion of whether the department can afford to forgive any of the bill or if the Commission even has the authority too. Mr. Wilkins noted that given the budget situation, the department cannot afford to forgive it. Mr. O'Brien had concerns noting that if the house isn't sold, the town doesn't have many collection options outside of some kind of tax title action. Mr. Huber noted in the past these kinds of situations have been resolved with payment plans. Mr. Simmons noted that things are at a drastic point budget wise. Bill forgiveness is not an option.

Authorization of Accounts Payable & Payroll

Mr. Huber then went over the bills noting those of particular interest such as the National Grid bill, the recent purchase of envelopes for mailings, the Raco circuit board and battery, the latest SWSS bill, a True North bill, and the final White Water bill. The Commission finished up the topic by authorizing the signing of payroll.

Minutes

The Commission considered the minutes from October 29th, 2018. Seeing no reason not to approve them the Commission proceeded with doing so.

A motion was made by Mr. O'Brien to approve the minutes of October 29th, 2018 as written. The motion was seconded by Mr. Wilkins and passed without objection.

Additional Topics Discussed Not Noted on the Agenda

Next Meeting/Regular Meetings

The Commission resolved that it needs to get back on a regular cadence of meetings. It was determined the Commission would meet on December 26th, 2018 to conduct regular business. The rate hearing will be January 2nd, 2019.

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. O'Brien at 7:35 pm. The motion was seconded by Mr. Wilkins and passed without objection.