

Board of Public Works
04/01/21 – Minutes
“Go To Meeting”

Present via remote login:

DPW Board Members: Chair – Tom Nephew, Pat Harrington, Paul Brinkman, George Clark, Lewis Lunn; DPW Director – Ken Kalinowski, W/S Supt Joe Jordan, Selectboard members Tony Beattie and Margaret Scarsdale.

Call to Order at 5:30 p.m.

Chairman Tom Nephew called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m. and announced that it was being recorded and broadcast.

Acceptance of Meeting Minutes:

None available for review/approval.

Abatements:

15-21 Maple Street (office).

Joe Jordan reported that this meter had not been read for several years and the customer then received a bill for 2 years of aggregated consumption. The customer requested that the usage be apportioned over the prior billing periods which resulted in consumption values for each billing period that did not trigger the upper tiers. *Paul Brinkman made a motion to abate the account # 1575 in the amount of \$303.28 for water. Pat Harrington seconded the motion.* A roll call vote was taken:

Paul Brinkman - Aye

Pat Harrington – Aye

George Clark – Aye

Lewis Lunn - Aye

Tom Nephew – Aye

The motion passed unanimously.

17-19 High Street (office)

Joe Jordan stated that this involved a programming error when the meters were swapped out several years ago. The meter info in the billing accounts for two adjacent properties

were mixed and each was receiving the others bill. One account owed money, but this account was vacant and had no usage. It was only discovered when the owner of the vacant property brought it to the staffs' attention. The billing was revised to reflect the rates in effect at the time of the usage. *Paul Brinkman made a motion to abate the account # 908 in the amount of \$481.65 for water. Lewis Lunn seconded the motion.* A roll call vote was taken:

Paul Brinkman - Aye

Pat Harrington – Aye

George Clark – Aye

Lewis Lunn - Aye

Tom Nephew – Aye

The motion passed unanimously.

6C Mason Street (Clark)

Joe Jordan stated that this was a request made by the owner of the mobile home park for a leak under a trailer. George Clark recused himself from the discussion and vote, and presented the issue as described previously. He noted that the trailer was vacant. He stated he had no problem paying for the water, and was only requesting relief from the sewer portion of the bill. Joe noted that the calculations were prepared in accordance with the Boards policy of calculating the excess water usage at the lowest tier, with the sewer usage being reduced by the amount over the 'average' usage as it did not appear to enter the sewer system. Paul asked if this was a master meter reading or if the trailer was individually metered. While it was confirmed that it was a master meter reading for all 78 trailers, the historical usage by all these units appeared to be very consistent. *Paul Brinkman made a motion to abate the account # 1598 in the amount of \$759.09 for water and \$4291.39 for sewer. Pat Harrington seconded the motion.* A roll call vote was taken:

Paul Brinkman - Aye

Pat Harrington – Aye

George Clark - abstain

Lewis Lunn - Aye

Tom Nephew – Aye

The motion passed unanimously.

George Clark reiterated that he was not asking for relief on any of the water usage, just the sewer. Joe stated that the calcs reflected the Board's past practice, but the Board could vote any relief it deemed appropriate. Tom reminded George that the water was in fact being billed, but at the lowest tier. Pat asked the Board if they would theoretically allow 1

abatement for each of the 78 units. Paul said in his opinion there was only 1 meter, so this was the only abatement that should be considered for the property. Pat said that he would like to discuss the Boards "1 & done" policy on abatements. Tom asked George if he would prefer to get relief on the sewer only, and George confirmed that this was his wish. Paul added that his interpretation of the policy is that a customer does not get 1 water and 1 sewer abatement, but rather 1 opportunity/ billing issue for which they may seek relief. Tom stated that this policy issue was a much bigger discussion for another meeting, but wanted to make sure that the Board honored Mr. Clark's intention. *Pat Harrington made a motion to reconsider the prior vote and eliminate all water relief. Lewis Lunn seconded the motion.*

A roll call vote was taken:

Paul Brinkman - Aye
Pat Harrington – Aye
George Clark - abstain
Lewis Lunn - Aye
Tom Nephew – Aye

The motion passed unanimously.

Paul Brinkman then made a motion for the Board to allow Tom Nephew to sign any documents approved by the Board tonight and which may require signing, including abatements and commitments. Lewis Lunn seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken:

Paul Brinkman - Aye
Pat Harrington – Aye
George Clark - Aye
Lewis Lunn - Aye
Tom Nephew – Aye

The motion passed unanimously.

Ken Kalinowski noted that there were still several minutes remaining before the scheduled start of the public water & sewer rate hearing, and that there may be a few quick items that the Board could dispense with in this remaining time.

Paul Brinkman made a motion to approve the March commitments as presented. Pat Harrington seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken:

Paul Brinkman - Aye
Pat Harrington – Aye
George Clark - Aye
Lewis Lunn - Aye
Tom Nephew – Aye

The motion passed unanimously.

Ken then noted that there was also an “after the fact” application for a sewer installers license. The contractor (King) had been recruited by the town thru an expedited procurement process for an emergency repair at Town Hall. Due to the nature of the project and timing of the Board meetings, there was not time to have the installers license issued before starting the work. Ken noted that the company (King) was well known to the town staff and that they had been working at Town Hall under separate bond and insurance coverages. In order to be fair to other contractors working in town, it was felt that King should obtain the proper approvals.

Paul Brinkman made a motion to approve the installers license for King. Lewis Lunn seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken:

Paul Brinkman - Aye
Pat Harrington – Aye
George Clark - Aye
Lewis Lunn - Aye
Tom Nephew – Aye

The motion passed unanimously.

Ken then noted that the next scheduled Board meeting date would be April 22nd, and that Town Meeting had been scheduled for June 12 from 9-1, with a 2nd date scheduled for June 14th.

PUBLIC HEARING – Water & Sewer Rates (6:00)

Tom Nephew read the legal notice and opened the public hearing at 6:00. Joe Jordan reviewed the rate recommendations made to the Board during the working sessions, including the need to raise rates for the new Bemis Well Greensands Facility. He also noted that this was the final increase of what has been a gradual, multi-year approach to meet the new debt service. Joe stated that a 6% increase for water was being requested, and the unit rate (Tier 1) would be ~ \$4.08/ccf which was less than the \$4.50/ccf target originally

estimated 3 years ago. The base charge would remain at \$30/qtr. There was no discussion or questions from the Board. Paul Brinkman noted that the final unit rate was less than originally expected, and that was an acknowledgement of the project management and a benefit to the customers. *Paul Brinkman made a motion to accept the DPW recommendation to increase the water rate by 6%.* Joe Jordan asked that the motion specify that the rate increase coincide with the beginning of the next quarterly billing cycle which was expected to be on or about May 1st. Paul Brinkman modified the motion to *accept the 6% recommendation with no change to the base rate, to be effective May 1st or the beginning of the next billing period that occurs closest to May 1st.* Pat Harrington seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken:

Paul Brinkman - Aye

Pat Harrington – Aye

George Clark - Aye

Lewis Lunn - Aye

Tom Nephew – Aye

The motion passed unanimously.

Pat Harrington then applauded the effort that Joe had put into preparing the rate scenarios as well as the overall management of the Green Sands project.

Joe Jordan then presented the rate scenarios for the Wastewater rates, with a recommendation to raise them 6% as well. He reminded the Board that although there appeared to be a lot of retained earning available to defray a rate increase, those monies would be reduced by approx. \$300k/yr. for the next 3 years while the new debt overlaps with the existing debt for the last plant upgrade. Joe also reminded the Board that with 1 small exception, there had not been a significant sewer rate increase since FY16. Ken asked Joe to clarify whether the potential 4% rate increases in the outyears included the 1% estimated by the staff to be the cost of eliminating the Sewer Maintenance fee, a change that has been regularly requested by the affected customers. Joe confirmed that he was making this recommendation in addition to the 6% rate increase. It is estimated that the Sewer Maintenance fee accounts for approximately \$48k annually. Paul Brinkman stated that he understood the concept, but could also argue the need to keep this fee. Joe noted that the loss of this fee did not have an appreciable impact on rates or revenues in the outyears. Tom Nephew stated that he agreed with Joe's recommendation to remove this fee. *Pat Harrington made a motion to increase the Sewer rates by 6% on or about May 1st, with the rate increase to coincide with the start of the May thru July billing cycle. He also*

made a motion to eliminate the Sewer Maintenance charge currently issued to those customers who have been assessed a betterment fee, but have not yet connected to the sewer system. The charge shall be removed after the issuance of the May 2021 bills, to coincide with the May through July billing cycle. Lewis Lunn seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken:

Paul Brinkman - Aye

Pat Harrington – Aye

George Clark - Aye

Lewis Lunn - Aye

Tom Nephew – Aye

The motion passed unanimously.

Tom Nephew then closed the public hearing for water and sewer rates at 6:21.

Water/Sewer

- **Bemis Treatment Facility.** Joe Jordan informed the Board that the project was approaching the end, with the 40-hour test scheduled next week. The SCADA work at the plant was also nearing completion, with the expectation that we hoped to be able to start the plant by the end of April. Ken added that it would be appropriate to schedule some kind of public event to present the facility to the towns people and other officials. Joe also called out special recognition to Adam Dufour for his efforts to work thru all the final details. Ken also noted Dan Mattus' assistance and Joe extended the thanks to the entire water crew. Tom liked the idea of having a ceremony. Ken added that the Covid restrictions would add a layer of difficulty to schedule any sizeable public event. Joe stated that it was something that might be better to hold later in the summer when vaccinations are more widespread.
- **Dick Timpani retirement.** Joe noted that Dick Timpani had recently retired from the Water Dept after 22 years with the town.
- **Resident Request - Long Term Resilient Water Resource.** Ken announced that Selectboard member Tony Beattie had requested to speak to the Board about his concerns with long term resiliency as regards the water system. What followed was a Q&A session between Mr. Beattie and the staff.
- **How many homes and commercial businesses can our water supply support?** *Based on current consumption rates, the Town currently has approx. 200k gpd of capacity before reaching the DEP permitted withdrawal limits. How this is consumed will depend on the size, number and particular type of development, ie, residential, commercial/industrial, agricultural, expansion of current uses, etc.... Joe Jordan*

explained the nuances of the DEP permit limits vs what safe and prudent operation of the system actually dictates.

- *Do the MA Climate Change predictions influence our water use plan? We operate the water system based on approvals and guidance as provided from the Mass DEP, who in turn manage watersheds (as opposed to geo-political delineation). It is assumed that DEP takes their cues from other agencies that incorporate climate change as part of their guidance.*
- *Can we limit water use from private well owners? Pepperell DPW/ Water has no authority over private wells. This is always a point of contention when outdoor watering bans are implemented on public water customers. Some communities have attempted to legislate this authority, but it typically fails a vote at town meeting. Tom stated that the town could take a proactive step to educate residents on the value of voluntarily complying with these bans.*
- *Do we collaborate with towns that share our aquifer? Water Management Permits are issued thru MA DEP, and they adopted a 'watershed' based approach many years ago. Interstate cooperation and regulation is also very difficult to achieve with regards to these issues. This being said, the collective impacts on any given watershed are analyzed by DEP and this is taken into consideration when issuing new or revised withdrawal permits. This should not be confused with Emergency Interconnect Agreements such as we have with Townsend. Gerald Cooper (PCM staff/resident) suggested that PCM could assist with producing a video message about private wells impacting the aquifers. He also offered PCM coverage of any festivities at the Bemis Well filtration plant.*
- *Does lowering our aquifers effect surface water ecologies? Pepperell does not have any surface water supplies for the municipal water system. There may be some sort of connection between surface and ground water supplies, but when groundwater wells are developed, the testing focuses on local drawdown impacts on the aquifer. To the best of my knowledge, surface water levels are not monitored as they are usually far more impacted by precipitation and evaporation than by a tenuous relationship to the aquifer.*
- *Are we anticipating using water tank storage to stretch our water supply? The town currently utilizes several manmade reservoirs for water storage and distribution. The use of these facilities is primarily to allow for meeting peak demands and pressure while allowing refill pumping to occur off-hours when energy is cheaper. It should be noted that the tanks can be oversized (a common issue with tanks designed 40+ years ago) and this can lead to issues with the 'age' of the water as regards residual chlorine, etc... Current tank design tends to lead to more efficient sizing and operation. The Townsend St tank is getting close to needing a major overhaul, but this ~\$1M project is not currently in the capital plan. Replacing this standpipe tank with an*

elevated tank would likely add another \$500k to the cost, but could add 50-60 years of service life.

- *Do we have programs to encourage water conservation measures? The town has the tiered rate system, mandatory odd/even, occasional full outdoor bans, leak detection, etc... The building / plumbing code also helped with the mandate of low flow fixtures, and it is entirely conceivable that the technology will continue to evolve. Mike Thoreson of Trout Unlimited (TU) spoke of their interest in water conservation and education.*
- *What is the status of the Pepperell PFAS count and contingency plans? PFAS is a family of constituents that are contained in countless items such as Teflon, Gore-Tex, firefighting foam and many other products. MADEP recently (Oct 2020) introduced the PFAS drinking water standard of 20 PPT (parts per trillion). This is a very conservative limit as compared to the EPA at 70 PPT. We have begun to test our drinking water sources for PFAS and it has been noted in the Nashua and Jersey Wells. To date, the levels noted are below the MA safe drinking water standards, and well below the EPA levels. We will continue to monitor these sources and if /when they exceed the MADEP guidelines, we will work with MADEP and the town governance to develop an action plan. Gerald Cooper then inquired about the possibility of storing 'surplus' raw water at the well sites and then treating/chlorinating it and distributing it to the system/tanks from that point. Ken added the potential of chloramines as well as the cost of constructing such tankage for securing only a few days capacity. Returning to the PFAS question, the levels can fluctuate and the source can be difficult to determine. Reverse engineering may help to narrow down the type of material from which the contaminants originated.*
- *Can sewer treatment plant water be redirected to recharge our aquifer as opposed to discharge into the river? Aside from the cost considerations of constructing a 1-way outbound distribution pipe network, there are other considerations such as mass water balance calculations, flooding, etc..; however, given the future value of water, it may be viable to consider this approach at some point.*
- *Can we recover treatment plant compost to apply to municipal soils to enhance water conservation? The town discontinued composting at the WWTF several years ago due to cost limitations, i.e., it was a money losing proposition to manufacture the compost, and it also diverted significant man-hours of labor from performing necessary (and increasing) preventative maintenance as well as other permit requirements such as CMOM. Again, while possible, the costs of labor, materials and would need to be considered as well as securing a consistent end-user to consume the production. There are also seasonal limitations as well as space constraints at the WWTF.*
- *Do we anticipate replacing old water lines and relative capital planning needs? The Pepperell water system dates back to 1909 and it is in relatively good shape overall.*

We review and evaluate the water infrastructure as often as possible. This is primarily done by inspecting the ‘coupons’ obtained when large water taps are performed. We also monitor water main breaks and analyze them to see if there is a pattern or other causal relationship. The water budget has an annual allotment of \$100k for ‘small capital’, but any significant water main replacement program would entail a much larger expenditure and likely necessitate a borrowing.

- *Is there a long-term prediction on water rates? As noted in the rate hearing, rates will likely continue to increase over time to cover the costs of meeting the ever-increasing regulatory requirements, capital needs, and general inflationary considerations.*
- *Can we recover our historical high clean water quality? Ken stated that he was not sure we had lost water quality, and in fact, may actually have better water quality now based on the regulations and the technology/ability to test for constituents unknown and undetectable 100 years ago.*

Tom Nephew thanked Mr. Beattie for his interest and ended the discussion.

DPW

- **Misc. updates.**

- Derek Flanders has joined the Hwy Dept as a truck driver / laborer.
- Roadside mowing has begun, and we hope to get caught up with 2 machines out on the road this year.
- The bituminous concrete bid will be out shortly with bids due at the end of April.
- Deduct meter sales moratorium. Ken noted that with the mild winter and dry spring, and the fact that western MA is already in a mild drought, it might be wise to extend the current moratorium on the sales of deduct water meters (set to expire May 1st) which are typically used in conjunction with irrigation systems, as this would help to curb the water demand for lawn irrigation systems. He added that the Board may also wish to consider an outside water ban given that Bemis has been offline for 18 months, and the Jersey and Nashua wells have been running essentially non-stop and could use some rest based on ground water levels and recovery rates. Nashua well was also exhibiting elevated Fe and Mn, and given that the town just spent \$8M on Bemis to remove these elements, it would be counterproductive to just re-introduce them from another source. Paul Brinkman stated it would basically be stupid to sell new deduct meters just to tell people that they can't use them if we have a full ban. Tom inquired about the impacts of an odd/even ban vs a full ban. (NOTE: Lewis Lunn excused himself at this point in the meeting). Ken

stated that the odd/even ban is mandatory from DEP, but people take it less seriously and enforcement is tougher. The mandatory ban doubles the number of people by virtue that it applies to everyone, every day. It is taken far more seriously by residents and is easier to detect and enforce. A full ban also imparts a level of severity that seems to resonate with the customers and compliance appears to be better. Pat added that a full ban would be the prudent thing to do. George Clark asked about people filling pools. Ken noted that most people with new pools will call a pool company, and seasonal 'top offs' don't appear to have much impact as the melting snows and spring rains tend to fill the pools without a large need for adding water. *Paul Brinkman made a motion prohibit the sales of deduct meters through calendar year 2021. Pat Harrington seconded the motion.*

A roll call vote was taken:

Paul Brinkman - Aye

Pat Harrington – Aye

George Clark - Aye

Tom Nephew – Aye

The motion passed unanimously.

Pat Harrington made a motion to institute a mandatory outside water ban, effective May 1st, running indefinitely. Paul Brinkman seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken:

Paul Brinkman - Aye

Pat Harrington – Aye

George Clark - Aye

Tom Nephew – Aye

The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioners Comments:

- None

Adjournment:

Paul Brinkman made a motion to adjourn. Pat Harrington seconded the motion. The following roll call vote was taken:

Paul Brinkman – Aye

Pat Harrington – Aye
George Clark - Aye
Tom Nephew – Aye

The motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 7:47.

Respectfully submitted,
Kenneth Kalinowski, PE
Director of Public Works