

Minutes of 2/27/24 Sewer Commission meeting– via Zoom (Video Conference)

Attendees: Chair- John Reynolds, Vice-Chair- Brett Ramsden, Clerk- Mike Nault, Members: Dave MacDonald and Mike Mackin, DPW Director- Bill Bernard, Business Manager-Paula Bertram, Minutes Clerk- Jane Ranley

John opened the meeting at 6:02pm. and did a roll call of attendees. The Commission began the meeting by saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENT- Brett congratulated Dave on his retirement from the Salvation Army and thanked him for his many years of service.

ANNOUNCEMENTS - none

CURRENT BUSINESS -

Minutes of 1/30/24 Meeting and 2/13/24 Workshop

Motion: Mike N.

Second: Brett R.

To accept the minutes of the 1/30/24 meeting.

Roll Call Vote: Mike M.-aye, Mike N.-aye, Brett-aye, and John-aye.

Motion: Brett R.

Second: Mike M.

To accept the minutes of the 2/13/24 meeting.

Roll Call Vote: Mike M.-aye, Brett-aye, Mike N.-aye, and John-aye.

Leominster Intermunicipal Agreement Negotiations Update – Paula reported that she forwarded it to Heather for approval and said the Select Board will discuss it at their 3/5/24 meeting. Paula noted that Heather asked for copies of the old agreement, the new agreement, and a list of the changes, which she provided.

Warrant Articles for Town Meeting – Paula stated these are the standard articles as follows:

1. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate or transfer from available funds, a sum of money to operate the Sewer Enterprise Fund for FY24; or take any action relative thereto.
2. To see if the Town will vote to transfer from available funds \$35,000 into the Sewer Capital Reserve Stabilization Fund; or take any action relative thereto.
3. To see if the Town will vote to transfer from available funds the sum of \$1,500 into the OPEB Sewer Trust Fund; or take any action relative thereto.

Motion: Mike M.

Second: Mike N.

To adopt the warrant articles as written. Roll Call Vote: Mike M.-aye, Brett-aye, Mike N.-aye, and John-aye.

Regulation Changes Appendix G, Sewer Connection Charge Policy- John stated that the policy change is a result of the new IMA agreement and they will need to conduct a public hearing on it. Paula suggested a hearing at one of the March meetings and noted that it needed to be posted before the end of the fiscal year (June 30th). The Commission discussed a date and agreed to holding the hearing on 3/26/24.

Repairs at Mass 1 Pump Station- Paula and Bill met with Scott (Pride Environmental) and Robert Lilley (CTE) at the Mass 1 station. Pride Environmental is being subcontracted by CTE. She noted that they had constructed the platform in the wet well and the work would be starting tonight at 9pm. Wind River Environmental will be pumping the force main first. Robert Lilley and Rob Walsh (DPW) will be on site for the entire 8-10 hour project. A reverse 911 call went out to all those effected by the repair and advised them to use minimal water. The cost of the repair will be about \$40K which will take most of the Capital. In addition to the repair, there were numerous other issues found. The 2 suction lines are severely corroded and will need to be replaced. If one of those failed, it would cause the system to fail. The wall and the force main have deteriorated and the main has rusted, requiring replacement. In order to repair that, they will need to excavate and the entire main will be exposed. They will be putting together an estimate for the repairs. They are recommending removing the carbtrol and enlarging the vent to allow the system to breathe to prevent corrosion. The wet wells will need to be cleaned annually. Robert reported that the Dana St station is in a similar situation, so there are some major repairs coming up. Brett asked about exposure of force main and Paula clarified it will be from the station to the wet well. Bill added that he also put a message on Facebook about the work and noted Pride Environmental was confident it could be done in about 8 hours. Paula screen-shared pictures and a video of the pipe they are working on tonight, showing water leaking out. She also shared pictures of the suction lines needing replacement and pictures of the corrosion on the pipes. Robert noted there had been some spot welding done many years ago to try to repair it. Paula stated tonight's work entails cutting the pipe, replacing it and fixing the coupling. John said poor venting contributed to this. Bill noted the stations are almost 20 years old and they recommended letting it breathe to slow the corrosion down. Paula said that when she gets the estimates on the other work to be done, she will share it with the

Commission and is hoping it can be put off until July 1. She will meet with the town accountant to see where they have any wiggle room. Besides these repairs that could be more than \$40K, they are looking at the same thing at the Dana St. station and this does not take into account the other planned repairs. The Dana St. pumps are giving them a lot of trouble and they were planning on replacing them, but that money is being used to do the Mass 1 repair. John noted that they have to plan carefully because they can't just take money from Retained Earnings. Paula added that the town accountant confirmed they cannot take money from Retained Earnings or a Stabilization Fund unless it is allocated at a Town Meeting. She noted that if there is any money left over at the end of the fiscal year, they can encumber it without the Town Meeting. Paula stated they are budgeting \$100K for capital but asked if that was enough. Brett suggested doubling it and Paula replied that could cause a substantial rate increase. Brett questioned what they may run into at the other pump stations. He asked if there might be any insurance to use and John replied that he did not know but it probably would be considered wear and tear. Brett questioned why they are paying insurance if it does not cover underground. Paula said she and Bill will talk to the Town Manager. She added that one option would be to consider putting another \$100K from Retained Earnings into Capital, which would not impact the rate. John agreed, saying the system is deteriorating faster than they expected and the pumps are running 50% more than 2020. Mike M. asked if the Capital money would include engineering to test the health of the system and Paula replied it does not. She stated that they were going to take \$182K from Retained Earnings but will now take \$282K. They could take more and if they don't use it all, they can return it. Mike M. asked if they had a 5 year maintenance plan and Paula replied they had worked on one based on recommendations from CTE but found out they had not done wet well cleaning for many years. It was during the wet well cleaning that they discovered all the issues. She cannot put the figures in until she gets quotes and they may want to put a bigger buffer in. John noted the capital plan has been for the moving parts but now they are looking at pipes and connections. Brett asked how many wet wells were cleaned and Paula replied 7 out of 10, which includes the 3 big ones. Bill stated the 3 other stations do not see a lot of flow and Robert said they did not need to be done right now. The Commission discussed numbers for Capital and agreed to add \$200K to Capital.

Motion: Mike M.

Second: Brett R.

To move \$200K into Capital.

Discussion: Paula asked if the Commission wanted to take half the money from the Capital Reserve Stabilization Fund and the half from Retained Earnings or all from Retained Earnings. The Commission discussed and agreed to take only from Retained Earnings.

Roll Call Vote: Mike N.-aye, Mike M.-aye, Brett-aye

Budget & Rate Increase Discussion- John stated they had voted on a 16% rate increase. The Commission discussed the rate increase and agreed it was a solid number, but they will need to look at the rate again next year.

(Dave M. joined the meeting). John filled Dave in on the repairs and Bill explained the additional damage found on the pipes when setting up for the repair. Paula noted the work is being done through CTE, but if they have to do substantial repairs, they may have to go out for bid. John added that Dana St station is in the same situation and the charcoal system will need to be redone at all 3 larger stations. Dave questioned if the problems are due to the stations being 20 years old or because of excessive use during Covid. John replied that besides their age, the flow to Leominster increased 50% more than 2020 and it has not dropped since then. Brett noted the issue with the pipes is from the age. John stated they just voted to add another \$200K to capital. Dave agreed but questioned whether it was enough and suggested \$250K. Paula noted that CTE and Pride Environmental are working on figures and she should have them for the 3/12 meeting. The Commission discussed and agreed to vote to increase Capital to \$250K.

Motion: Mike M.

Second: Mike N.

To reconsider the vote of moving \$200K to Capital.

Roll Call Vote: Mike N.-aye, Mike M.-aye, Brett-aye, Dave-aye, and John-aye.

Motion: Dave M.

Second: Brett R.

To increase the money to Capital to \$250K to support the pump stations' needs.

(John lost signal and Brett took over the meeting)

Roll Call Vote: Mike M.-aye, Mike N.-aye, Dave-aye, and John-aye.

Business Manager Report –

--Update on System Maintenance & Upgrades – Paula noted she is still waiting for quotes for the other repairs at Mass 1. They installed a new control panel at West St. on 2/12 and there was FOG again at Leominster Rd, caused by rags. There was a pump failure at Dana St. and Robert was able to get it back online but those pumps will need replacing in the near future. Brett asked if they have backup pumps and Bill replied they have 3 smaller ones but not a big one for Dana. (John was back online.) Dave asked if the Dana St. pump had a long lead time and Paula replied yes. She is having a real hard time getting quotes and Robert said they can be

upwards of \$40K each. Paula and Bill will look at possible prices online. West St had a low level float stuck, which Robert repaired. They have ordered a dialer for Mass 1 which will be about \$3K. The generator repairs are underway for \$5K. Paula is working on the Invitation for Bid for the manholes and they received \$100K of ARPA money for that work. The Wright Pierce report of 2016 identified 30 manholes with I/I. The DPW staff went out and looked in the manholes, to confirm those repairs are needed. The \$100K will cover the repair of those 30 manholes but unfortunately they will still have 145 more to repair. Paula has proposed budgeting \$50K for manhole repairs, which will address 20-30/year. They are prioritizing the manholes with I/I per the Wright Pierce report. Based on the numbers in 2016, if they address those manholes, it will reduce I/I by 225,000 gals/day, which will reduce their costs as well. Bill reported there was a big sink hole on Fairview next to a sewer manhole, with water sucking out the fines. When that is fixed, it will help with I/I.

--Sewer Business Manager Job Rating- Paula noted she was happy when they met with the Personnel Committee and they came up with a rating of 655. On 2/12, the Personnel Committee reviewed it and reduced it to 605 and to grade 9. Paula and Bill did not agree with that. The Committee is working on a salary grid and it doesn't look like they will change any grades or move anybody but may do 3% across the board. Paula has sent memos to the Selectmen and noted that it is very disheartening that they made an agreement but changed it without notifying them. This was also done to the Public Safety coordinator and the chief was disappointed that changes have been made without input from department heads. Dave noted this would have to go to town meeting. Paula stated the downgrading was inappropriate and she is very unhappy with the process. She added that during the meeting the HR director said they believed some scores should be lowered and she gave her reasons. Bill said he gave his reasons for the higher score and they said ok, but then they were blindsided by the change. The Commission discussed the process for job rating and the responsibilities of Paula's job. Bill noted that at the meeting, part of the discussion was the job description, which they wrote to match what is needed now and they agreed. John stated they need to keep an eye on it. Paula noted they are meeting 3/11 and 3/13. They need to finalize it and present to finance committee and Select Board. Mike M. suggested expressing their views at the next personnel meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT – Dave said he retired from going nationwide with Salvation Army disaster services and will still work locally. He thanked everyone and his heart goes out to those who served and were served. He emphasized that they need to look at improving their own community.

UPCOMING SCHEDULED SEWER COMMISSION ACTIVITIES:

March 12, 2024 @ 6pm – Regular Meeting, Remote Participation

March 26, 2024 @ 6pm – Public Hearing and Regular Meeting, Remote Participation

April 9, 2024 @ 6pm – Regular Meeting, Remote Participation

April 30, 2024 @ 6pm – Regular Meeting, Remote Participation

Motion: Dave

To adjourn at 7:18pm.

Second: Mike M.

Roll Call Vote: Mike M.-aye, Mike N.-aye, Brett-aye, Dave-aye, and John-aye.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane L. Ranley

Minutes Clerk