



TOWN OF LINCOLN

WATER DEPARTMENT

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MIDDLESEX COUNTY
MASSACHUSETTS

Water Commissioners Meeting

February 4, 2020, 9:00 AM
Town Hall, Donaldson Room, 16 Lincoln Road

Attendees:

Ruth Ann Hendrickson, Chairman
Jennifer Glass, Commissioner
Michelle Barnes, Commissioner
Tim Higgins, Town Administrator
Colleen Wilkins, Finance Director
Jim Hutchinson, FinCom
Tom Sander, FinCom
MaryBeth Wisner, Water Superintendent
Monica Kacprzyk, Administrative Assistant

Peter Lowry, Manager at Codman Farm
Alice Waugh, Lincoln Squirrel
Nasrin Abedian, Resident
Behrouz Abedian, Resident

Chairman Hendrickson called the meeting to order at 9:05 AM.

1. Appointment: Vincent Mula, 7 Forester Rd to discuss high water bill – vote expected

Mr. Mula was not present at the meeting, so the Water Board did not discuss the abatement appeal for 7 Forester Rd.

2. Appointment: Nasrin & Behrouz Abedian, 16 Acorn Lane, request to appeal denied abatement request – vote expected

Mrs. Abedian made an opening statement regarding her abatement appeal. The Abedians were unaware of a leak until they received their high water bill for FY20 Q1. Mrs. Abedian stated that according to her calculations, the suspected leak would have been 191,000 gallons over the span of two weeks while she and her husband were away in California. However, there was no indication of a leak and no sign of damage to the inside or outside of the house. They didn't provide any proof of repair because it was not relevant to their circumstances -- the leak was no longer active upon their return from California, and a data log report on November 7, 2019 confirmed that there were no leaks detected.

Mrs. Abedian suspected a meter malfunction since there was no evidence of a leak on the property and Mr. Abedian added that household water meters are prone to errors at high flow rates. Mrs. Abedian asked if the town has any way of tracking leaks of this size and Superintendent Wisner responded that the town does not have the technology to track leaks in real-time across the entire network of water meters. She added that there is no way to read the water meter until it is interrogated. Lastly, Mr. Hutchinson noted that there is a gap in the town's abatement policy for cases like this in which there is no need for repair.

Commissioner Glass made a motion to approve the abatement request for 16 Acorn Lane and abate their FY20 Q1 bill to Tier 1. The motion was seconded by Chairman Hendrickson. Voted: all in favor. Mrs. Abedian requested a refund (vs. a water bill credit).

Mr. Higgins stated that the decisions at the Water Board meetings should set precedent for any future abatement cases under review by Superintendent Wisner. He added that Ms. Wisner has permission to extend the same courtesy to others without a formal abatement appeal at a Water Board meeting. The group agreed to review the abatement policy alongside the other rules and regulations at a future meeting.

3. Discuss how the Board can accommodate customers who can't attend meetings during working hours – vote expected

Chairman Hendrickson prompted the group to consider how the Board can accommodate customers who can't attend meetings during working hours. She added that the group could either meet earlier in the morning or later in the day. Mr. Hutchinson recommended meeting earlier in the morning at 8am. The group agreed to meet at 8am after the February 25, 2020 public hearing.

4. Discuss draft Annual Consumer Confidence Report – vote expected

Superintendent Wisner requested edits on the Annual Consumer Confidence Report. She added that this is a time-sensitive topic since the report URL needs to be included on the water bills in the next billing cycle.

The following edits to the report were suggested:

- Chairman Hendrickson pointed out that the graph on pg. 6 should list TTHM with a yes under the violation column.
- Commissioner Barnes pointed out that the last sentence in the *Introduction* paragraph says that the LWD “meets or exceeds established water-quality standards” but she asked whether that is accurate considering the TTHM violation.
- Commissioner Barnes mentioned that the whole document needs to be edited with correct dates.
- Commissioner Barnes pointed out that the meeting time in *How Can I Learn More?* needed to be changed to 8am.
- Chairman Hendrickson offered to check on the validity of the first sentence on pg. 4.
- Mr. Hutchinson pointed out that the Water Conservation section on pg. 3 mentioned results from 2018 but it should be updated to include information from 2019.

Mr. Sander recommended creating a placeholder URL on the website until the report is ready to be shared. Superintendent Wisner agreed to make a URL placeholder, and she agreed to review the draft and incorporate the suggested edits. The group decided to continue discussions on the Annual Consumer confidence report at the next meeting.

5. Discuss Agricultural Rate Application Form – vote expected

The Water Board reviewed the draft agricultural rate application form. Mr. Hutchinson and Commissioner Glass recommended adding in a section for applicants to describe the general purpose of the farm. Superintendent Wisner added that meters should be separate for residential houses and agricultural use. Mr. Sander recommended adding a line in the application to make customers aware that they may not use their agricultural meter for their residential house, and that it is the customer's responsibility to add new meters if needed. The group decided to continue discussions on the Agricultural Rate Application Form at the next meeting.

6. Prepare for the Public Rate Hearing - vote expected

Commissioner Barnes shared her updated water rate analysis. She presented a hybrid model that included a fixed charge increase of \$50/billing quarter and variable rate increases of 30%, 36%, 40%, and 44%. She also projected the income from end-users in multi-unit dwellings based on two unit/meter averages: 8 units/meter and 3.4 units/meter. The first average was based on meter data from the Water Department and dwelling data from the Town of Lincoln. The second

average was more conservative and calculated by Mr. Sander based solely on Water Department data. The variable rate increase percentages were calculated based on the goal of reaching \$150,000 and \$200,000 in retained earnings for each unit/meter average. It was noted that some multi-unit dwellings may be missing from the list, including Lincoln Woods, which would increase the projected revenue. Commissioner Barnes also incorporated fixed costs in her comparison of current water rates in Lincoln and nearby towns.

Commissioner Hendrickson asked how we would approach affordable housing units, such as nursing homes and hospice care units. She also asked about the average household size in Lincoln and if that could be used as a standard for comparison between units/dwelling and households. Mr. Higgins offered to find that information and update the group. Mr. Sander commented that for someone living in a multi-unit dwelling, the rate increase will seem much higher than a typical homeowner. Mr. Hutchinson agreed but said it would be too complex to do multiple phases of the rate increase for just multi-unit dwellings.

Mr. Hutchinson advised choosing a scenario with at least \$150,000 in retained earnings according to NEWWA recommendations. Chairman Hendrickson proposed a 30% variable rate increase with an annual fixed rate of \$200 and Tier 1 rates for all customers in multi-unit dwellings. Ms. Kacprzyk asked if there was a plan to confirm the number of meters and units per dwelling in the town. The group decided that a realistic time frame to confirm the number of units and meters was by September 2020.

7. Staffing Plan Update

Superintendent Wisner announced that the town offered the Water Operator position to Stephen Olsen for a \$36.15/hour, which was a higher rate than what was advertised. Ms. Wisner added that she's interviewing two other candidates in the coming week. Mr. Hutchinson commented that if the Water Department is attracting candidates for the open positions, then the advertised hourly rate increase is working, and the town does not need to be as accommodating in rate negotiations. Mr. Higgins said he appreciates the Board's approval of higher rates and any rate negotiations are always done with Ms. Wisner's approval. Mrs. Wilkins commented that if new staff members are hired at a higher rate, then funds could be taken from the overtime line item with the assumption that overtime would be lower with increased staffing. Mrs. Wilkins added that she needs to do another budget evaluation with Superintendent Wisner and project funding to June 2020. The group decided to continue discussions on the staffing plan at the next meeting.

8. Appoint Stephen Olsen as Water Operator – vote expected

Commissioner Glass made a motion to appoint Stephen Olsen as the Water Operator. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Barnes. Voted: all in favor.

9. Other Business

• Apology letter to Dr. Kanner and other customers who were charged incorrect rates for summer usage

The Water Board agreed to send an apology letter to Dr. Kanner for not notifying him that his billing error had been corrected before his attendance at the January 7th meeting. The Water Board also agreed to send apology letters to all agricultural users that were incorrectly charged during the first quarter of FY20 and were charged above Tier 1 rates. Chairman Hendrickson volunteered to edit her draft letters and send them to Superintendent Wisner. Ms. Wisner agreed to mail the letters and abatements to the affected water customers after all FY20 Q1 abatements were complete.

• Approve the minutes of January 7, 2020 meeting – vote expected

The Water Board reviewed and approved the minutes as amended for the January 7, 2020 meeting. Motion made by Commissioner Glass, seconded by Commissioner Barnes. Approved unanimously.

• Approve the minutes of the January 21, 2020 meeting – vote expected

The Water Board tabled the January 21, 2020 meeting minutes review and approval for the next meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:34 AM. Motion made by Commissioner Barnes, seconded by Chairman Hendrickson. Approved unanimously. The next meeting of the Water Commissioners is scheduled for Tuesday, February 25, 2020 at 9:00 AM in the Donaldson Room at Town Hall, 16 Lincoln Road.

Respectfully submitted,

Monica Kacprzyk, Administrative Assistant