



TOWN OF LINCOLN

WATER DEPARTMENT

MIDDLESEX COUNTY
MASSACHUSETTS

TOWN OF LINCOLN
WATER DEPARTMENT
16 Lincoln Road
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Phone: 781-259-2669

Water Commissioners Meeting

March 3, 2020, 8:00 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
MaryBeth Wisner, Water Superintendent
Monica Kacprzyk, Administrative Assistant

Chairman Hendrickson called the meeting to order at 8:04 AM.

1. Approve the minutes of February 4, 2020 meeting – vote expected

The Water Commission reviewed and approved the minutes for the February 4, 2020 meeting. Motion made by Commissioner Barnes, seconded by Commissioner Glass. Approved unanimously.

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

The Water Commission reviewed and approved the minutes for the January 21, 2020 meeting. Motion made by Chairman Hendrickson, seconded by Commissioner Barnes. Approved unanimously.

3. Appointment: Michael Dolan to discuss department phone system and radio communication upgrade projects

The Water Commission tabled the appointment with Michael Dolan for the March 10, 2020 meeting.

4. Appoint Joseph Grande as the Water Operator – vote expected

Superintendent Wisner commented that Mr. Grande's references came back positive and she recommends appointing him. Commissioner Glass made a motion to appoint Joseph Grande as the Water Operator. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Barnes. Approved unanimously.

5. Discuss Annual Consumer Confidence Report – vote expected

Mr. Hutchinson commented that the new water rates and information on multi-unit dwellings are not included in the draft report. He recommended inserting at least one sentence about the rate changes. Commissioner Barnes added that in the table on page 2, "per water meter" should be changed to "per dwelling," and the document should include language for water end-users that are not aware of the upcoming rate changes. Superintendent Wisner agreed to make the suggested

changes, and she noted the unaccounted water section needed additional review. She explained that unaccounted water calculations were developed by MassDEP and UAW calculations are based on fire protection and training, hydrant/water main flushing, flow testing, bleeders/blow-offs, and more. The UAW calculation for 2019 was 24.4%, which is a slight improvement from the previous year due to significant water system repairs. Mr. Hutchinson asked for a presentation on the categories that are factored into the UAW percentage. Ms. Wisner agreed to present and noted that it is very difficult to achieve 0% UAW. She continued that Lincoln has an older water system and has a lot of non-metered service pipes that are 300 feet or longer so there is no way of knowing if there's a leak. Ms. Wisner added that current regulations require any new service over 100 feet to have a meter pit, but it would be expensive to install meter pits for all residences that don't currently meet that requirement. Commissioner Glass asked if there's a threshold of renovation that would warrant water service repair to meet current standards. Superintendent Wisner and Mr. Hutchinson agreed that typical house renovations would not warrant requiring a water service renovation, but if the homeowner wanted to make any changes to their water service, the town would require them to meet standards.

Superintendent Wisner agreed to incorporate all the suggested edits and provide a revised draft at the next meeting. The Water Commission tabled the approval of Annual Consumer Confidence Report for the March 10, 2020 meeting.

6. Discuss draft response letter to Vincent Mula regarding his appeal for the abatement request – vote expected

The Water Commission reviewed and approved the draft response letter to Vincent Mula. Motion made by Commissioner Glass, seconded by Chairman Hendrickson. Approved unanimously.

7. Discuss the Water Superintendent stipend - vote expected

Superintendent Wisner provided an update regarding the on-call situation at the Water Department. She explained that Gary Tuck plans to take call on March 16 but this is not definite. Ms. Wisner said that she is on call for three out of the four weeks in March. Mr. Higgins urged Ms. Wisner to speak with Gary Tuck about his responsibility to take call and decide on a definitive date. Commissioner Glass asked from a budget perspective if there should be a cut-off date for the Superintendent taking call. Mr. Higgins responded that the stipend is budget neutral as it comes out of the overtime line item. Ms. Wisner said it is likely that she will need to be included in the on-call rotation until at least May 1, 2020. The Water Commission reviewed and approved a \$5,250 stipend for Superintendent Wisner's on-call time in March. Motion made by Commissioner Glass, seconded by Commissioner Barnes. Approved unanimously. The Water Commission will discuss the April stipend at the next meeting.

8. Discuss LWD Rules and Regulations – vote expected

Commissioner Glass asked if the sections are numbered in a legal way or if they can be reorganized. Ms. Glass added that from the perspective of a homeowner, the most relevant information is hard to find or towards the end of the document. Chairman Hendrickson responded that this document is mostly used by contractors. Ms. Wisner added that she did do a reorganization of the document in the past year so it would flow better, but she is open to suggestions if the Water Commission wants to move sections around. Ms. Barnes recommended comparing our document with the documents of other small towns. She added that on page 31, the section on fire suppression lines should be edited to say, "The service is solely to provide water for indoor fire suppression will be charged as follows."

Next Mr. Hutchinson asked about section 20.7 miscellaneous water charges. He recommended that all fee changes should be in line with the cost for us to provide the service. Superintendent Wisner recommended increasing the meter opt-out fee from \$15 to \$25 per billing cycle. The Water Commission approved the rate increase. Commissioner Barnes asked if we should be incentivizing people away from the meter-opt program. Ms. Wisner responded that customers choose this option for reasons of security and impact of radio waves on health, so we should not deter them from using this option. Ms. Wisner also recommended increasing the real estate transfer fees due to the time it takes to process the requests. Commissioner Glass and Mr. Hutchinson recommended increasing the fee from \$25 to \$100. The Water Commission approved the fee increase. Next Ms. Wisner pointed out that the department does not have a missed appointment fee and they experience missed appointments a few times per month. The Water Commission approved increasing the missed

appointment fee from \$0 to \$50. Ms. Wisner also noted that there are customers that request many repeat appointments for the same issue. She recommended increasing the repeat appointment fee from \$0 to \$40 to deter customers from scheduling numerous visits for no valid reason. Mr. Hutchinson recommended making the fee effective on the third subsequent visit for the same issue. The Water Commission approved a \$50 fee for the third subsequent visit for the same issue. Lastly, Ms. Wisner recommended charging customers that request a data logger for potential leaks. Ms. Wisner recommended increasing the fee from \$0 to \$40. The Water Commission approved a \$50 fee for customers that specifically request a data logger.

Ms. Barnes noted that on page 32 under the section 20.4 base charge, the base charge per unit is the same for all meter sizes. Ms. Barnes said that this is not the case in other towns, and she suggested increasing the base charge based on meter size in the future. Next Ms. Wisner recommended charging a hydrant maintenance fee because it is a large expense for the maintenance budget. She added that the town has about 400 hydrants and hydrant maintenance may improve the town's overall rating and lower the town's insurance costs. Mrs. Wilkins said that we would need to look at all direct and indirect costs of hydrant maintenance and a broader analysis is needed before making any decisions. Mr. Hutchinson added that we have a full budget for FY21 and recommended considering the hydrant maintenance program for FY22.

Next Superintendent Wisner shared that there is no policy for appeals beyond abatements. Ms. Barnes recommended tabling this topic to the next meeting. Next Chairman Hendrickson pointed out the first two sentences of section 6 and the Water Commission agreed that the language was clear that the town's ownership ends at the shut-off valve. Chairman Hendrickson directed the group to look at page 23 regarding abatements. She said that the last line of section B was added for clarity on the ineligibility of irrigation users to receive abatements because there is only one tier. Commissioner Glass asked about what happens if residents in multi-unit dwellings request abatements and Mrs. Hendrickson responded that users are capped at the first tier so they would also be ineligible. Mr. Hutchinson recommended changing the language of that section to include anyone that's at a fixed tier rate, not just the irrigation users. Next Mr. Hutchinson started the discussion around the one-time lifetime abatement policy. Ms. Barnes asked how many repeat abatement applicants Ms. Wisner encounters per year, and Ms. Wisner approximated about 4-5 per year. Mr. Hutchinson recommended a 10-year vs. lifetime policy and the Water Commission approved changing the policy to one abatement per 10 years per customer.

Superintendent Wisner agreed to incorporate all the suggested edits and provide a revised draft at the next meeting. The Water Commission tabled the finalization of the LWD Rules and Regulations for the March 10, 2020 meeting.

9. Discuss the presentations for the Fin Comm and the Annual Town Meeting

Chairman Hendrickson presented her Fin Comm and Annual Town Meeting draft presentation. She started by describing our current water system and why the Water Department is more of a manufacturing business than a services business. Mr. Hutchinson commented that we should better portray why we want higher fixed revenue and only share details as it relates to fixed and variable costs. Mrs. Hendrickson continued to talk about the department's financial structure in which the Water Department is an enterprise fund, but the town's finances back up the Enterprise Fund in case of default. Then, she compared the status of the water system in November 2019 to the current status and highlighted the shortcomings and improvements. Mr. Hutchinson noted that the current status slide had all qualitative statements and he recommended adding in more quantitative statements. Ms. Barnes recommended changing "short term capital investments" to "immediate capital investments."

Next Mrs. Hendrickson showed a table and graph of the operating budget growth by fiscal year and described the budget growth drivers. On the budget growth drivers slide, she noted that the items listed – personnel services, engineering/outside services, and debt service/OPEB/contingency – have caused significant growth to the budget. Ms. Barnes recommended linking the personnel services cost increase to issues we've had to address to meet regulatory requirements. Mr. Hutchinson recommended eliminating OPEB and separating the costs of debt service and contingency. Lastly, he recommended adding in a line item for all other costs that were not included in the table. Ms. Barnes recommended adding in a column for percent increases and better distinguishing the percent of total FY21 budget line.

Then Mrs. Hendrickson highlighted the need for \$500,000 in retained earnings, and both Ms. Barnes and Mr. Hutchinson recommended including the financial performance ratios set forth by NEWWA in the presentation. Mrs. Wilkins noted

that she has a different amount for retained earnings in her records and she will send it to Mrs. Hendrickson. Mrs. Wilkins also recommended excluding the bond rating discussion at town meeting because it's too complex. Next Mrs. Hendrickson shared that she's still waiting for Ryan Neyland from Tata & Howard to send the updated projects list so she can include a simplified version in her slides. Then Mrs. Hendrickson shared the goals of the rate increase and Mr. Hutchinson recommended simplifying her bulleted list. Mrs. Hendrickson showed a rates and revenue table and Mr. Hutchinson recommended merging the number of meters and number of units rows into one line labeled "units charged." Lastly, Ms. Barnes and Mr. Hutchinson recommended including the debt service and operating ratios in the table.

Next Mrs. Hendrickson shared a table comparing the rates in Lincoln to other surrounding towns. Commissioner Glass wanted to know which towns were part of MWRA. Mr. Hutchinson recommended removing the asterisks to distinguish population size because the population is not equivalent to the number of water users in Lincoln. He added that the takeaway of the slide is that Lincoln has one of the most expensive water rates in the state. Then Mrs. Hendrickson shared the warrant request with descriptions of the projects that need appropriated funding and long-term planning projects. Commissioner Glass recommended taking out the slide with long-term planning projects and simply state that we will continue to look at long-term solutions for the department. Lastly, Mrs. Hendrickson presented challenges of the department and the group recommended simplifying the scope of the conversation to target getting approval for the warrant articles. Mrs. Glass recommended focusing on the most important bullets: we have certain standards for budgeting, we are raising rates in April 2020, we are working on authorized projects, we are asking for additional funding for the said projects, and we will continue to work on long-term planning.

Mrs. Hendrickson agreed to revise her slides and send an updated copy to the group by next Tuesday. The Water Commission tabled the finalization of presentation for the March 10, 2020 meeting.

10. Other business

None.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:39 AM. Motion made by Commissioner Barnes, seconded by Commissioner Glass. Approved unanimously. The next meeting of the Water Commissioners is scheduled for Tuesday, March 10, 2020 at 8:00 AM in the Donaldson Room at Town Hall, 16 Lincoln Road.

Respectfully submitted,

Monica Kacprzyk, Administrative Assistant