



TOWN OF LINCOLN

WATER DEPARTMENT

MIDDLESEX COUNTY

MASSACHUSETTS

TOWN OF LINCOLN
WATER DEPARTMENT
16 Lincoln Road
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Water Commissioners Zoom Meeting

August 19, 2020, 8:00 AM

Virtual Meeting Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Lincoln Board of Water Commissioners was conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible. Specific information and the general guidelines for remote participation by members of the public and/or parties with a right and/or requirement to attend this meeting can be found on the www.lincolntown.org.

Topic: Board of Water Commissioners Zoom Meeting Time: 8:00 am *

Join Zoom Meeting <https://zoom.us/j/93393327939?pwd=dTl6RUVweTFWcVJ4Z0ZYZ2ZTZmVMQT09> Meeting ID: 933 9332 7939 Password: 770882

Dial by your location: 646- 876- 9923

Attendees:

Jim Hutchinson, Chair

Ruth Ann Hendrickson, Commissioner

Michelle Barnes, Commissioner

MaryBeth Wiser, Water Superintendent

Tom Sander, Finance Committee Liaison (until 10:22)

Stacy Osur, Agricultural Committee

David Oliveri, Civico Development

Jennifer Michlick, Madison Management

Gary Tuck, Lincoln Water Treatment Plant Manager

Chair Hutchinson called the meeting to order at 8:02 AM.

1. Appointment St. Anne's Church – water charges dispute

Postponed to next meeting

2. Appointment: David Oliveri, Civico Development to discuss and request waiving the final read fee for the 60 units at Oriole Landing.

When the water meters were installed at Oriole landing, Civico was the owner of record. As the units become occupied, the meters require a final read and transfer to the new occupant. Since the original budget, the fee for this service has increased to \$100 per meter, Civico is asking for reduction in this fee. Civico also expects a standard turnover of about 30% annually, and is seeking a reduction for future transfers as well. The Commissioners decided to delay decision on the second request. The Commissioners agreed to charge the original rate for the first final read transfer on each unit since Civico's business model was predicated on the fee in force at the time.

Motion by Hendrickson: For each unit, charge the original fee per final read for the ownership transfer from Civico to the first resident.

Seconded by: Barnes Roll call vote: Barnes aye; Hendrickson aye; Hutchinson aye.

3. Water Plant Manager – Operations Report to discuss Water Supply and project updates (valve replacement, catwalk, SCADA and membrane replacement)

Mr. Tuck reported that the air control valves have all been replaced and installation of the new filter membranes was completed last Friday. Plant operation is significantly improved; trans-membrane pressure is reduced from typically 1.62 to below 0.2 and he sees no leaks. The number of alarms is also down significantly. Operators now understand that the best practice is to pin filters as needed, not wait until isolation of the unit is required.

The new safety catwalk design proved impractical; now that the filter replacement is complete, the catwalk will be modified, at no cost to the Department, to make the floor panels removable and allow better access to the filter skids from above.

The next project will be the Clean In Place (CIP) system upgrade. The contractor will not be available to start that project until November, but doing the work during a low-usage period will actually be better than the original schedule.

The software upgrade is in process, although it is going slowly thus far due to hold ups getting the new SCADA computer successfully networked using an old networking protocol. The highest priority on the new software work is to limit the alarms that go directly to the Fire Department to three: Fire event, Eye wash event, and Chlorine event. Other software improvements will be addressed in order of priority.

The Commissioners thanked Mr. Tuck for attending the meeting, and Mr. Tuck left after this discussion.

4. Discuss town water accounts that are metered but not billed

The Department provides free water to three different locations: Station Park and two taps at the Lincoln Cemetery. All are metered, but we do not charge for the water. Records show that the combined typical water use from these services would be billed at less than \$250 annually if charged at normal rates.

Motion by Hendrickson to continue current practice. Seconded by Hutchinson.

Roll call vote: Barnes aye; Hendrickson aye; Hutchinson aye.

5. Discuss what Services to offer to the Town at no charge.

Occasionally the Town requests free services from the Department for various municipal projects. A recent request is to significantly upgrade the water service at Station Park to support both the Hydration Station and two sprinklers for the gardens. The suggested project would involve repaving several road cuts which would cost thousands of dollars. The Commissioners felt that projects that benefit the whole town rather than just our customers should, in general, be funded from the Town budget, not from revenues from water customers. The Commissioners suggested that the Garden Club investigate the use of timers, multiple watering zones and install soaker hoses to address the water pressure service issue. Any larger project should go the Town Meeting for funding.

6. Sign contract with Tata and Howard for General Engineering assistance T & H No.6492– vote expected

This contract is to support minor day to day requests for services from T&H. The Water Department will try to use T&H more efficiently and put pressure on T&H to provided free up-front advice for new projects that arise. The money for this contract will come from the \$40,000 currently allocated for outside services support for water billing activities. The amount allocated for this contract is \$5,000.

Motion by Hutchinson to approve T&H contract No.6492. Seconded by Barnes. Roll call vote: Barnes aye Hendrickson aye; Hutchinson aye.

7. Sign contract with Tata and Howard for Engineering Assistance for the design of the coagulation system T & H No. 6543 - vote expected

The total cost appropriated for the coagulation system project is \$330,000. We have spent \$164,700 on the pilot testing, \$24,000 on the residuals handling, and expect \$59,000 for the final design, leaving \$81,700 to fund the construction. We believe this should be sufficient and will press hard during the design process to keep costs down. Superintendent Wisner will include the operators in the discussions during the site visits and will invite Commissioner Hutchinson to attend when design plans are under discussion. It's important to look for cost savings opportunities before the design has been completed.

Motion by Hutchinson to approve T&H contract No.6543. Seconded by Barnes. Roll call vote: Barnes aye; Hendrickson aye; Hutchinson aye.

8. Discuss whether to add watershed/inspector position or press the Police Department to assist with enforcing the rules and regulations.

In many towns, an open drinking water supply would be heavily protected by chain link fence, etc., but Flint's Pond in Lincoln has always been left natural and has many walking trails, managed by the Conservation Commission, in the protected land around the pond. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, people stuck at home have been looking for outdoor spaces in which to walk. We have been seeing more dogs in the water, and people kayaking and even swimming. Should the Water Department do more to protect the water?

Commissioner Barnes talked with Geoff McGean, the town's former Conservation Director and current Executive Director of the LLCT and the RLF, who said that many years ago the LWD and the Conservation Department had a joint ranger program that was financially supported by both Departments. He also said that as a result of the ranger program, the DEP did not impose stricter Flint's Pond and watershed water protection measures on the town. The ranger program was discontinued years ago due to budget constraints. The former Water Department Superintendent had purchased "game cameras" out of his own pocket that would detect people so he could alert the police, but he took those cameras with him when he took another job.

Superintendent Wisner drafted a job description for a new full-time employee who would, among other duties, patrol the pond and well watersheds looking for issues and educating the public. The Commissioners were against adding another full-time employee due to budget constraints, and also pointed out the problem occurs only in the three summer months.

The Department has recently put more signs around the pond to inform the public that it is a public drinking water supply. Commissioner Barnes has been talking to the Lincoln Police about their enforcing the posted rules against dogs, swimming, boating fishing, etc. The Police are willing and mentioned that they also have a few cameras they could deploy. The main entry points for misuse of the pond are at the Pump House and at the deCordova Museum. The police are seeking permission from the Selects to step up enforcement, including towing cars parked in no-parking zones and parking cruisers randomly at the pump house and deCordova. The Commissioners felt that this police activity was likely to reduce the problem.

9. Appoint Alison Boland as the new Administrative Assistant.

Superintendent Wisser reviewed about 40 resumes left from the Town's recent search for administrative help. Two looked very promising and were thoroughly vetted by her and Susan Donaldson, the DPW Administrator. They are recommending the Commissioners appoint Alison Boland, who appears to have strong skills in taking minutes and working with MUNIS plus years of experience in a similar municipal environment. The money in the wages budget can be stretched to cover her salary by borrowing a little from the unfilled operator position. While the contract negotiations are still on-going, agreement is close.

Moved by Hendrickson to appoint Alison Boland to the position of Water Department Administrative Assistant pending completion of the offer letter. Seconded by Hutchinson. Roll call vote: Barnes aye; Hendrickson aye; Hutchinson aye.

10. Water Superintendent Annual Evaluation – vote expected

Following guidelines developed by the Town of Lincoln and the requirements of the Open Meeting Law, Chairman Hutchinson developed a draft performance review for the Superintendent after soliciting input from the other two Commissioners, the Town Administrator Tim Higgins, and the Finance Director Colleen Wilkins. The review commended Superintendent Wisser for her tremendous efforts and very long hours this past year. The Department faced continued turnover of staff in a tight labor market for water operators. Ms. Wisser creatively staffed the department with temporary water operators and part-time help and to keep the treatment plant operating. At the same time, Ms. Wisser patiently worked with the Commission to develop capital and operating budgets that would enable the continued work on necessary maintenance and capital projects needed to replace aging infrastructure to ensure the reliable delivery of safe drinking water and to correct regulatory and safety issues with the physical plant that she identified and begun work on in the prior year. She has demonstrated the ability to keep multiple projects moving simultaneously, and, working closely with Tata & Howard, she has overseen the design, bidding, and construction of critical infrastructure projects, and continues to do so. The Commission greatly values Ms. Wisser's strong initiative, dependability, and loyalty. The Commission also believes that Ms. Wisser brings a thorough understanding of water science and of state regulations pertaining to public water supplies to the Water Department, and is always on top of upcoming town, state, and federal reporting deadlines. It is clear to us that Ms. Wisser is totally committed to ensuring that the water delivered to our customers is safe and meets all regulatory requirements. She also works diligently on efforts designed to protect the health and safety of our employees.

The Commissioners identified three areas for improvement:

- Budget management – Ms. Wisser must make every effort to stay within the operating budget. The Commission requests monthly updates of budget status and early warning of unexpected expenses.
- Personnel management - The Superintendent must continue to make it a priority to cultivate harmonious, productive and mutually supportive working relationships with her staff. Stability in department staffing is a top priority.
- Communications - On project proposals in particular, the source of funds for the project and status of that funding must be clearly stated and tracked as the project proceeds. New proposals require in depth justification based on data and priority. Also, care must be given to distinguish between initiatives mandated by regulations versus those that are recommended for other reasons.

Goals and objectives for next year:

The major goals for next year include staying within the budget, developing a base budget, preferred budget, and a capital plan in time for review by the Finance Committee and the Capital Planning Committee, continuing to guide and monitor the multiple projects in process, and meeting all local, state, and federal requirements.

Commissioners agreed to remove the requirement for weekly turn around for meeting minutes as that is more appropriate as a goal for the department administrative assistant.

Commissioner Hendrickson asked to add a commendation for the reduction in UAW. For years Lincoln has had a UAW at or above 25%. Superintendent Wisser's diligence in tracking water use has reduced that to 17%, a major reduction.

Superintendent Wisser thanked the Commission for the detailed performance review. She looks forward to working with the Commissioners to meet the goals for next year. She also is excited to seeing the fruition of the many operational and capital projects launched in the last two years.

Moved by Hendrickson to approve Superintendent Wisser's Performance review as amended. Seconded by Hutchinson. Roll call vote: Barnes aye; Hendrickson aye; Hutchinson Aye.

11. Drought update – vote expected

Superintendent Wisser informed the Commission that, as of August 13th, significant drought conditions have been declared across Massachusetts. Due to above normal temperatures throughout July and early August and more than three months of below normal rainfall, Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Kathleen Theoharides declared a Level 2 – Significant Drought in all seven regions of the Commonwealth – the Western, Connecticut River Valley, Central, Northeast, Southeast, Cape Cod, and Islands regions, as outlined in the Massachusetts Drought Management Plan.

Hendrickson noted that the Massachusetts Drought Management Plan specifies, in Table 10, that Level 2 specifies hand watering only, but Superintendent Wisser asserted that the official email allowed non-essential watering once a week. State drought mandates supersede Lincoln's own drought plan mandates. Chairman Hutchinson made the request that in our communications we should be clear to use the word "level" when referring to the state's guidance and "stage" when referring to the LWD's.

Commissioner Hendrickson will publicize the state mandates via Lincoln Talk and the Lincoln Squirrel and Wisser will place the updated sandwich boards around town. The Commissioners are also able to use Reverse-911 to inform townspeople of important notices, but this announcement was deemed of insufficient urgency to warrant that. Wisser suggested that the Department purchase an electronic signboard to enhance notification capabilities; she was invited to put it in the new budget for later discussion.

Motion by Hutchinson to approve the proposed drought restriction documents as amended (change date to August 13 and correct drought chart to properly label the 2020 water level line). Seconded by Barnes. Roll call vote: Barnes aye; Hendrickson aye; Hutchinson aye.

12. Discuss water use restrictions for agriculture use

The current Lincoln Drought Management Plan contains mandated restrictions for non-essential outdoor watering during various stages for drought. It fails to define what is considered "essential" outdoor watering. The Commissioners believe that water used to support commercial farming activities is "essential". Commercial farming activities include not only those farms that have successfully applied for Agricultural rates but also those farms that meet the definition of conducting commercial agriculture as delineated in the Town of Lincoln Agriculture and Right to Farm By-laws and related Massachusetts General Laws, in particular that the operation have at least \$1,000/year in gross sales and occur on a lot of at least 80,000 square feet.

The Commissioners reviewed changes to several documents to encode this concept into our regulations. Suggested changes should be sent to Hendrickson.

Moved by Hutchinson that Hendrickson be authorized to finalize and release the revised documents. Seconded by Barnes. Roll call vote: Barnes aye; Hendrickson aye; Hutchinson aye.

13. Approve the minutes of June 23, 2020 – vote expected

14. Approve the minutes of July 7, 2020 – vote expected

Items 13 and 14 were discussed and voted together. Draft minutes had been circulated for review and all comments incorporated.

Moved by Hutchinson that the minutes of both June 23, 2020 and July 7, 2020, be approved as written. Seconded by Hendrickson. Roll call vote: Barnes aye; Hendrickson aye; Hutchinson Aye.

15. Other Business

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:12 AM.

Moved to adjourn by Hutchinson; Seconded by Hendrickson. Roll call vote: Barnes aye; Hendrickson aye; Hutchinson Aye.

The next meeting of the Water Commissioners is scheduled for Wednesday September 2 at 8 AM. via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth Ann Hendrickson, Water Commissioner