

**Town of Richmond  
Water and Sewer Commission Meeting  
Minutes of June 20, 2023**

**Members Present:** Bard Hill, David Sander, Erin Farr, Jay Furr, Morgan Wolaver

**Members Absent:** None

**Staff Present:** Josh Arneson, Town Manager; Duncan Wardwell, Assistant to the Town Manager; Steve Cote, Water Resources

**Others Present:** The meeting was recorded for MMCTV, Denise Barnard, Meg Freebern, Noah Dew (Zenner sales)

**Call to Order:** 5:30 pm

**Welcome:**

Sander: We are meeting on Tuesday, due to Monday being Juneteenth.

**Public Comment:**

Sander: I'd like to read a memo I received from our Town Highway foreman, Pete Gosselin. "The recently completed Bridge Street project could not have been possible without the help of the Water and Sewer Department staff. I really appreciate the timeliness and the efforts made by Steve, Brad and Allen."

**Additions or Deletions to the Agenda:** None

**Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present**

**Consideration of setting an increase to the water and wastewater pay grid**

Arneson: At the end of June, we adjust the pay grade to account for the cost of inflation. Then everybody also gets a step on the grid. The Compensation Study last year, we made some significant changes to the pay. Through that process the Water and Wastewater broke off into their own grid. The New England CPI from last May of 2022 through this May of 2023 is at 2.4%. Last year it was well over 5%, if not close to 8%. One of the guidance pieces from the Compensation Study was to look at what other communities are doing.

Sander: When we set the FY24 budget, we put a 5% increase into the pay grid.

Arneson: It seems to be over 5% with the lowest being 3% in Police for Stowe that also could be tied to a contract. Municipal staff is anywhere between 5% to 8.7% and Utilities between 5 to 7%.

Farr: Is it normal to increase cost of living? I realize we're having massive inflation right now. That feels like almost 10% over 2 years.

Arneson: Prior to the Compensation Study for a number of years the max we would go up would be 1.5%. The Compensation Study was about a year-long process, it was quite a bit of an increase across the board.

Farr: If we increase by 5% like we budgeted for, does that now put us in the eightieth percentile?

Arneson: That's really hard to figure out. The best guidance from the study was to look at what neighborhood municipalities did. Five or more years down the line, we might do another study.

Sander: This data is very raw. We're looking at this year's increase. It is important to consider that we did make a big adjustment last year to get up to market rate.

Arneson: In between steps is 2.25% on our current grid.

Hill: Your starting point is 2.25% increase, which is a little different than inflation. That's meant to encourage or incentivize retention.

Farr: Are we under the wire for this? Can we do a little more research for next meeting?

Arneson: The pay increase usually comes out on the first of July. We could do things retroactively, it's a little bit more of an accounting pain. We plugged in 5% in the budget plus the step increase. We are still competing with staff in Chittenden County so let's use the comparables suggested by the contractor.

Sander: This was also what we got back for responses, after asking multiple Towns.

Hill: The information we can get from the State Department of Labor is really good but it's about a year old. The best available data is our wage study and then we make some educated guesses about where we think other people are going.

Furr: I would tend to be on the higher side, simply because I'm not enjoying being behind the 8 ball on the Police Department. I'd rather err on the side of more than less when it comes to keeping a department fully staffed.

Sander: The staff has made a commitment to us, I feel the Commission needs to make a commitment to them.

Hill: If there's a concern that a 6% increase will lead to a 6% rate increase, it is much less significant. Total costs and rates are not generally tied to wages.

Furr: Our plant is currently in a situation that we would not really wish on anybody and we're asking more of our staff.

Farr: Do we feel comfortable increasing it for what we budgeted for at 5%?

Furr: Or increasing it to 6%, I would support either. As a percentage of the overall cost of running the plan, that's not very much money. We want to make sure that we keep the people we've got.

*Wolaver moved to increase the pay grid by 6%. Furr seconded.  
Roll Call Vote follows discussion.*

Arneson: This would exceed the original budget by 1% of the paygrade.

Farr: For a \$50,000 a year employee, the 5% increase would add \$2,500, the 6% would add \$3,000.

*Roll Call Vote: Furr, Farr, Hill, Sander, Wolaver in favor. Motion approved.*

### **Consideration of approval of vendor for water meters**

Arneson: Reading the packet was helpful but it took us at least 6 hours to go through all of these  
([https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Water\\_Sewer\\_Commission/Meetings/2023/06/3b2\\_Water\\_Meter\\_Bid\\_Summary.pdf](https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Water_Sewer_Commission/Meetings/2023/06/3b2_Water_Meter_Bid_Summary.pdf))

Sander: We have a significant savings with the donated meters.

Arneson: We received bids from 4 different companies. EJP gave us 3 different meters. It is sort of a 2-part system. You've got the meter that records the amount of water. Then you've got this radio transmitter, then gets that data out. You can either read that data by driving by with a handheld device. Or that radio transmitter can be made to upload automatically, like every hour then read it every quarter. You can get more data, more frequently, if need be, as the system or as the customer.

We received bids from EJP, Zenner, Ti, and Ferguson. We currently have 99 meters in place that would meet the specifications necessary for any 4 of the companies to put their radio transmitter. The other ~250 meters need to be replaced with new meters. Our first thing was to look at what would the cost of a drive by system. We've got them here ordered from the least expensive to most expensive. We also have an opportunity to get 70 meters from Shelburne and they're the same meters that are already installed, the EJP iPERL meters. Those meters would come to us at no charge. They are about 5 years old, so they've got about 15 years left on the meters. Shelburne was also willing to sell for \$25 the drive-by radio system installed.

Cote: Shelburne has a drive-by system installed. It was an iPERL and it has the transmitters comparable what EJP has for sale. They've gone to a completely new system of Neptune meters which are the ones that Ti sell. All of the iPERL meters have an expiration date on them. They are only good for 20 years, from their manufacturer date. Thirty-six of them are dated to be in less than 10 years. Anything that's 10 years old or older, it's not worth our time to be putting in. The other ones are 5 to 8 years old. Shelburne has the ability to sell us 500 radio reads that go on the iPERL, which would give us a drive-by system. They are willing to sell those for \$25 apiece.

Sander: Why did Champlain Water District and Shelburne not use these meters but use the Neptune meters?

Cote: It was a pure supply chain issue for Shelburne. They could not get iPERL meters at the numbers they were looking to install.

Farr: Is the annual cost per meter?

Arneson: No, that's like a customer service monitoring system.

Cote: We have a meter account book. On each page there's a description of where the meter is. During this process of upgrading, we want to upgrade those pages. I know there's 36 that are 2014, dated, plus the ones on the shelf. That's on the show that didn't get put in should have. We wouldn't have to change all the meters right now. Four or five years we'll start changing and it would be staggered.

Hill: There was the asset management plan and we're pushing the envelope in the Water system. As a database you can look up different things.

Wolaver: How many meters do we have total?

Cote: Total, 346. We physically have 70 that Shelburne gave us.

Wolaver: We'll still need somewhere around 150 more meters needed at some point. Then everything gets a transmitter.

Cote: There are 2 parts to the system. There is the physical meter, then there is the transmitter.

Arneson: That's where you're seeing the \$57,000, which is really a \$40,000 difference between EJP and the Ti meters on the drive by system.

Cote: The Zenner system, I think the Town will be way ahead going forward for several reasons.

Furr: I like the descriptions of what their software can do. It's nice. It's good for detecting leaks. It is too bad that it doesn't have a vacation notification system.

Cote: There are 3 towns in the State of Vermont that are currently using Zenner meters. They have nothing but great things to say about the company. One of the towns is Stowe and they have a high percentage of people who are only there in the winter. They felt that the system was giving them excellent coverage.

*Furr moved to enter into an agreement with Zenner for water meter system replacement and include the use of 70 meters from Shelburne. Hill seconded.*

*Roll Call Vote follows discussion.*

*Roll Call Vote: Furr, Farr, Hill, Sander, Wolaver in favor. Motion approved.*

Farr: The customer portal, that \$2,500 is a one-time fee and the \$346 is the yearly fee?

Dew: Not per customer correct. We only charge for active users so unlike some of the other portal creators they charge per total number of users. We base it annually off of active users.

Wolaver: Is Non-Drive By system Wi-fi?

Dew: We would essentially install a device (a foot by 10 inches), we would mount antenna up on the roof. That device is connected to the Internet via cellular service and all of the transmitters communicate to that device via radio signal. We expect to get anywhere from a quarter to a half mile out of the transmitters. If they're not able to communicate directly to the antenna, every one of them has the ability to communicate with one another as a mesh network.

Barnard: Will the system alert users if there's an issue, a leak, a break, a broken pipe?

Cote: It uploads all of the stuff at like midnight.

Dew: We are monitoring that every hour of every day. If we see 24 consecutive hours, we can flag it to the utility.

Arneson: This system will send our staff an email every morning.

Hill: You need something in the supply line to actually track volume. That's sitting in the supply line. Then that is going up to the transmitter on the side of the house

Farr: If we didn't use those 70 meters and we bought all Zenner, we're only talking about \$8,000 more. I'm just wondering if we're already spending \$100,000 then what's \$8,000 more. We're seeing what's happening with inflation, in 10 or 11 years, are we going to be spending \$100,000 again to replace those 70 meters?

Barnard: What is the warranty on the new meters?

Dew: On the new ultrasonic meter, there's a 10-year warranty on the battery, and that warranty is also prorated for years 11 to 20 for a percentage of this price.

Cote: The Zenner meters appeal to me because we have going forward a battery replacement.

Dew: The batteries are designed to be field replaceable.

Wolaver: If you put the iPERL, then in 10 years they are totally disposable. Now you have to pay to pull that out.

Furr: I am fine amending the motion.

*Farr amended the motion to enter into an agreement with Zenner for water meter system replacement as listed in option #2 in Non-Drive By System. Hill seconded. Roll Call Vote: Furr, Farr, Hill, Sander, Wolaver in favor. Motion approved.*

## **Review of list of water and wastewater items to be repaired or replaced**

Arneson: We had a really productive couple of weeks in Water and Wastewater ([https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Water\\_Sewer\\_Commission/Meetings/2023/06/3c\\_Water\\_and\\_Wastewater\\_Items\\_to\\_be\\_Repaired\\_or\\_Replaced\\_6-15-23.pdf](https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Water_Sewer_Commission/Meetings/2023/06/3c_Water_and_Wastewater_Items_to_be_Repaired_or_Replaced_6-15-23.pdf)). I will read over the green highlighted items.

## **Update on options for septage meter purchase**

Arneson: We've had a breakdown of a lot of things that came up in the last 2 weeks. That one remains a work in progress, but not for lack of trying.

Cote: If we can get our tanks cleaned out, they have a set of sensors in them, and we could know more accurately how much we're putting in every day. We currently don't because there's so many solids in them. My thought is that the meter will be included in the upgrade.

## **Review of monthly water testing data for May**

Hill: I think it would be ideal when we share this with the public to show also what the target range is.

Arneson: It is in the guide.

Sander: And that if something is out, you can have it turned to red or green, or highlighted at a different background.

Arneson: Aside from 2 days on fluoride, everything was in the acceptable range. We have had a lot of conversations about chlorine lately. It is strongly suggested by the State to keep it at 0.8 at the entry point.

Cote: After the last meeting, we really looked at it and decided to cut it back. We're back down to this morning 1.1 to 1.3 going into the system. We were as high as 1.4 at the beginning of the month.

## **Update on "10% in Vermont" program**

Arneson: Duncan determined there was a good amount of information we didn't have to apply for any one of these pieces. We only had a week and a half to put that together.

Farr: We would have been asking for money for the meters that we didn't know. Hopefully, we can apply in the fall. There was information that we had to put together about what we wanted. It didn't make sense to ask for the information required about the town and its systems, because we didn't have our portion.

Barnard: Can you apply for the grant after we have already done a purchase order for the meters?

Arneson: I'll have to find out what the grant rules are.

Farr: At this point we just we didn't meet the qualifications even to ask.

Arneson: There's a few different pieces to it. There's financial information that would have to provide historical budgets. Then there's technical information someone from the Commission or staff would have to be able to provide.

Farr: We need to assemble a grant team.

### **Discussion of water tank efflorescence**

Arneson: This was brought up in 2020 about the efflorescence or the white streaks running down the side of the tank. Don Morin was a Commissioner at the time and he brought it up. The engineer that helped build and design it did an inspection and came back with the report saying that some of that is normal and the cost to repair it would not be worth it.

Sander: Don's an engineer. His concern is the rebar in the tank is not epoxy coated. He's theorizing correctly that water going through the concrete is oxidizing the rebar. If the rebar swells it'll cause a failure. The engineer that designed the tank said they don't use epoxy coated rebar in water tanks. There is a difference of opinion on where we are and how we continue.

Hill: You might look for a third opinion.

Wolaver: I would think that there would be studies or failures on record that have been presented.

Hill: My question is if that's something we put to an independent engineer.

### **Update on State inspection of Wastewater Treatment Facility**

Arneson: The State came last week. They will issue a full report here in a few weeks. They found a few items they wanted to see corrected mostly around paperwork and a yearly test that we're going back and forth with the lab on getting them to do it correctly. They were fairly impressed with the amount of recent repairs. They enjoyed seeing the aeration tank completely drained. They're also pleased to know that replacement of the influent pumps is a priority. We'll have a chance to review that report in the future.

### **Update on gateway sewer expansion**

Arneson: Our next milestone on this is the scoping of the line up at the school. We've got an agreement signed that will put any additional costs to the scoping to the Reaps. There's no cost to the task, but if there's a contingency that would be the Reaps bill. If the scoping goes well, they're actually lined up to do a pressure test in the line that same day.

### **Approval of Minutes, Warrants and Purchase Orders**

**Minutes:**

*Wolaver moved to approve the Minutes of 6/5/23 meeting as presented. Furr seconded.  
Roll Call Vote: Farr, Furr, Hill, Sander, Wolaver in favor. Motion approved.*

**Purchase Orders:** None

**Warrants:**

*Furr moved to approve the warrants of 6/20/23 as presented. Farr seconded.  
Roll Call Vote: Farr, Furr, Hill, Sander, Wolaver in favor. Motion approved.*

**Discuss Items for Next Agenda**

- \*Tank Mixer Bids
- \*Treatment Plant Updates
- \*10% in Vermont Updates
- \*Open House at Water & Wastewater Plant

**Adjournment**

*Furr moved to adjourn. Wolaver seconded.  
Roll Call Vote: Farr, Furr, Hill, Sander, Wolaver in favor. Motion approved.*

Meeting adjourned at: 6:53 pm

**Chat file from Zoom:** None