

Special Meeting
Water Commission Minutes
8/30/2021

Members Present in person:

Members by Zoom: Bard Hill, Fran Huntoon, David Sander, June Heston

Absent: none

Staff Present in person: Josh Arneson, Town Manager

Staff Present by Zoom: Kendall Chamberlain, Water & Sewer Superintendent

Others Present in person: the meeting was recorded for MMCTV Channel 15

Others Present by Zoom: Rod West

Called to Order: 6:00 PM

1. Welcome by David

Public Comment-

Rod West felt the Commission should be solely focused on expansion of the district and to worry about funding and other things come afterwards. He said as Water Sewer Commissioners he felt they had a fiduciary responsibility to existing users that have been suffering under high rates since the cheese plant shut down. Rod thought the only way to stabilize and normalize the rates was to expand the number of customers and that there was only one way to go and that was to head out to the trailer park and that getting to the gateway would not make a big enough difference in the rates. He went on to say that the preliminary engineer report was a great document to show if the expansion went out to the trailer park there would be a 40% reduction to the existing customers. He went on to say that there was a public health service that would take place with the expansion since it was well known that there are bad soils in the gateway, and that there were other benefits in that there was a need for affordable housing that could be solved if there were areas that could sustain higher density. Additionally, he felt that the expansion would expand the grand list and help with the cost of property taxes. Despite the last conversation with Peter Brown, Rod West felt the expansion would be a win for trailer park and for any property owner serviced. He thought that the vote should just be had and not worry about it beforehand. He suggested that as soon as possible the vote be put to the current and potential users all the way to the Gov. Peck town line saying that it did not have to mean that lines would be run all the way but that the potential would be there. The more customers, the better, was the way Water Sewer Commissioners should be looking at the expansion to have the best chance at ARPA money and stabilizing the rates. Rod West felt that decreasing the rate by only 30% would help when Kendall retired. He thought the employees worked more for Kendall than for the wages the Town paid compared to their peers at other systems. He did not want to end up with no employees and that working toward having pay increases was important. He suggested a change to the agenda where the Commission would head to a vote as quickly as possible.

2. Additions or Deletions to the Agenda - None

3. Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present

a. Review of items related to the Gateway Sewer Expansion Project

1) Review of project costs, bond payback, and user rates for the following scenarios:

- i. Construction of Phase I**
- ii. Construction of Phase I and II**
- iii. Construction of Phase I, II, and III**

Josh reported:

- that at the last meeting there was a desire to look at the numbers as outlined above.
- that for Phase 1 (one) to Willis Farm Rd the total bond payback and rates were provided and is available online.
- that the methodology of the creation of documents was described with supporting documents being available in the Selectboard packets
- that the outcome was a 3% decrease in flow rates and an increase in fixed rates. He said that in this scenario the increase in commercial and government users does not increase enough to make a reduction.
- that when adding Phase 2 (two) rates dropped as well as with Phase 3 (three) and again the increase to commercial and government users was seen in the rates.
- that all three Phases together brought overall decreases of about 40%

Discussion included:

- that June appreciated having the information broken out feeling that it was unacceptable to have just Phase 1 added on due to the financial burden placed on the new users. She went on to say that Rod West was right about the Commission having a financial responsibility and that it would not be right to put an expansion project in place without discussing how it would all be paid for so in that respect she disagreed with Rod West. June wanted to know if there was a way to incentivize Phase 3 (three).
- that Bard agreed with June in that what it costs matters. In terms of the individual phases, he did not immediately dismiss just Phase 1 (one) and for the business owners in Phase 1 (one) there were alternatives. He went on to say that similarly in the remaining phases the businesses are looking at alternative methods that are costly and have ongoing unknown costs where the expansion costs are known. He thought it was important to know what the costs are but was not ready to make a judgement call. June responded that her comments were directed toward the residential users, not commercial. Kendall said that the cost to expand to the mobile home park is free to the users because the owner of the park, Mr. Brown, has said several times he would not raise the rates to the users in the park. Bard added that the users could vote to approve, the line would be run out, the mobile home park owner would have to connect to the line. Kendall replied that he would. Bard noted that path was an unfriendly path.

2) Review of cost comparisons of water and wastewater meters

Josh reported:

- that the document was updated from last week's meeting and is available in the documents in the meeting for review.
- that other than the narrative, the costs remained the same.

Discussion included:

- that Bard questioned the Town's ability to require wastewater customers to have a meter on a private water supply, Josh replied that in order to do that it would be added to the Agreement signed when the user hooks up according to the Town attorney. Josh added that

at the last meeting Kendall noted that it would be an equitable way of charging customers uniformly throughout the system. Bard asked if was possible that a potential user could decide they did not want the system or a water meter. Josh replied that when the live goes past a property they are required to hook on. Bard said that the agreement would be different from other users, Josh replied that it would but that other users are charged for wastewater by their use of water so it would be an equitable way of doing it. David asked if we have any users that have sewer and not water, Kendall replied that currently we do not. He thought customers should be given the choice of which meter they wanted to install. Josh asked Kendall if given an option would the Town need to have a multiplier to add to the wastewater rate to be equitable with users that have bills that are determined by the amount of water that is used. Kendall replied that would be correct saying that from what he has seen that rate is typically 30% higher than the water only rate and should be another motivator to not go with a wastewater meter.

3) Review of estimated costs for properties to connect to the system

Josh reported:

- that this was another updated document from last week and was available online.
- that a table was provided with estimated hook-up fees
- that future-users should get estimates from a contractor, these were only estimates

Discussion included:

- that Bard reiterated that these were estimates only and real costs could be different and were not absolutes or a guarantee of costs. Josh noted there was a disclaimer provided that said that.

4) Discussion of deadline for properties to connect to system once constructed

Josh reported:

- that customers would have 90 days to hook on and when the Cochran Rd extension was done the Commission gave seven (7) years for users to hook on, however from the time the time the line was available the fixed rate fees were paid. Kendall noted that if there was a failed system, that was inspected by the Town engineer, then a user would be compelled to hook on sooner.

Discussion included:

- that Bard asked if it mean that the Town engineer would inspect properties once the system was in place, Kendall replied that was correct for Cochran Rd for anyone that wanted to take advantage of the extended time. David asked if there should be a definition of a failed system. Fran replied that there are regulations for failed systems that included septage water being visible on the ground. Bard said there would need to be obvious failure and that from a public health stand there is a standard and there would need to be some appeal process if there were a disagreement with the Town engineer's determination. Kendall agreed.

5) Review of project planning timeline

Josh reported:

- that the next step on the timeline was to set up a meeting with all the users
- that the dates were a bit off on the timeline

Discussion included:

- that June said there were 9 residences outside the mobile home park and was concerned about the financial burden being placed on users, before having a meeting she wanted to see if there was a way to do interest free loans or was there funds available somewhere that could help individuals with the over \$10,000 cost of hooking into the new system. Josh replied that some options were looked at with the bond bank adding that we were denied the NRBC grant but became eligible for another through the process that has similar guidelines that we are still waiting for, that would be for Phase 1 (one) with acceptance or denial being known in September. Josh added that there has been discussion about using septage funds also. June asked if that scenario came up where people said they could not afford it. Kendall said that in the first 90 days 5 of 7 users hooked up with the rest waiting the full 7 years. Bard said that there are ARPA, or federal funds are coming and there may be other infrastructure money coming to the state that may be available but whether they are available to individuals is a question. He said some large systems have had financial buffers based on income, but we have not because of our size. June said this is a decision we need to schedule soon with the decision needing to take place before knowing about any additional money coming in. She wondered if there could be an incentive for the 9 potential users where the Water Sewer Commission would pay for the meter portion of the expense. Bard thought there could be a rate incentive, but the current users would have to be convinced it was basically in their own best interest to do something like that to help reduce rates in the long term.
- that Josh asked what the expected outreach to residents would be, he has owners, but not residents electronically. Bard suggested flyers be placed in the mobile home park mailboxes. June said a paid mailing would need to be done. Josh asked about what the flyer would say looking for guidance from the Commission. Bard wanted to let people know that the meeting can be accessed remotely as well. June asked if another location should be found. Bard suggested the library. David asked if the ZOOM account could manage all the participants. Josh will increase the ZOOM capacity as has been done in the past.

6) Consideration of calling a meeting to review the project with building owners and residents in the proposed expansion area

Josh reported:

- that Bard asked about setting the date for the meetings since documents seems to be ready and invite people to the meeting on the 9th or 16th of September. David said a Special Meeting would be on the 13th. Bard asked if documents should be distributed beforehand. Josh said when we have the vote depends on when the decision to move forward happens, he said from that point it would take about 7 weeks to get everything together for a special vote. Kendall asked if both meeting could take place at the same time. Josh said the paperwork could be ready by the 13th and would check with the attorney but thought the cost would be about \$1000. June thought waiting for the vote prior to spending legal fees was best. Bard agreed. The process for the bond vote approval, final engineering and dates were discussed. Josh needed to verify some of the information. Bard observed that dates need to get pushed out to keep the items sequential and not taken out of order with construction being in the spring of 2022 if approved.
- that documents for the meeting may be streamlined to keep them less confusing.
- that Fran wanted to be clear that the mobile home park would have one hookup and billed on that basis with billing based on the water flow for the entire park. Kendall said it would be consistent with Riverview. Josh noted that the documents do have information that reflects the mobile home park resident's situation. Bard said that Mr. Brown did mention he

might place meters on some individual residences but not all and that the Commission has no purview over what happens in the park itself.

7) Other items related to the Gateway Sewer Expansion Project - none

4. Adjourn

Bard moved to adjourn; Fran seconded. Roll call vote: David, June, Fran, and Bard voted affirmatively. The meeting adjourned at 7:09 PM.

CHAT

00:20:55 Kendall: Phase III or bust.

00:23:12 Kendall: It is by far cheaper and more efficient for him to connect to the system. He is simply negotiating.

00:38:33 Kendall: 90 days is non-negotiable with a failed system, and anyone that wants time should be evaluated.

00:45:02 Kendall: Once the district is expanded, the CWSRF MIGHT be able to finance more if failing/failed systems are found

00:45:39 June Heston: Thank you!

00:46:56 Kendall: And...if the town designates that area as a growth district, lots of \$\$\$ might be available from CWSRF

00:52:08 Kendall: Has anybody asked about an incentive for the entire system to cover the bond, as it would still result in a 20% decrease

00:55:39 Kendall: What is the deadline for the expansion vote?

00:57:53 Kendall: Can we work on both at the same time?

01:10:25 Kendall: Several landlords have done that privately.

01:13:01 Kendall: Linda has a list of residents for the vote in the new expansion area, I believe.