

Town of Richmond
Meeting of Water and Sewer Commission
Minutes of August 7, 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, Angela Cote, Bob Heiser

MMCTV Video: <https://archive.org/details/RichmondWaterSewer08072023>

Call to Order: 6:00 pm

Welcome: Wolaver

Public Comment: None

Additions or Deletions to the Agenda: None

Approval of Minutes, Warrants and Purchase Orders

Minutes:

Furr moved to approve the Minutes of 7/17/23 meeting as presented. Sander seconded. Roll Call Vote follows discussion.

Wolaver: On line 112, it should be the letter O and not the number 0. On line 318 the 0.12 should be 1.20. On line 326 it should be “billed” and not “build.”

Furr moved to approve the Minutes of 7/17/23 meeting as amended. Sander seconded. Roll Call Vote: Furr, Hill, Sander, Wolaver in favor. Motion approved.

Purchase Orders:

Sander approved PO# 4489 to Chittenden Solid Waste District for shipment of dewatered sludge not to exceed \$160,000. Hill seconded.

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

Warrants:

Sander moved to approve the 8/7/23 Warrants as presented. Furr seconded.

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

Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present

50
51 **Announcement of filling the Water and Wastewater Superintendent position**
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53 Arneson: I promoted Steve Cote to the Water and Wastewater Superintendent position.
54 We proceeded with an interview with me and Commissioners Morgan and Jay. We were
55 all very impressed with what he brought to the table. The last six months or so he's
56 showing great leadership skills in identifying a lot of the issues that we have over at the
57 plant. He's done a really good job showing a sense of urgency, working through all of
58 those issues, getting them on a big to do list, prioritizing and still reacting to emergencies.
59 His mechanical acumen and experience come through extremely valuable here in the
60 department. He also uses outside resources extremely well looking for experts from the
61 State or other facilities for guidance on complicated operations.
62

63 Steve does not have his Water 3 licenses just yet. He's eligible to get that in September.
64 His Wastewater license, he's not eligible for the 4 or the 5 until September of 2025.
65 However, both Alan and Brad have the time served. Once one of them passes, we will
66 have the Wastewater license on staff. Then we can talk with Simon Operation Systems,
67 where we currently contract for the licensed operator to see about changing that
68 agreement. We also will be looking to hire a fourth person position here shortly. We
69 talked last meeting about a fifth position potentially. Steve wanted to see how things
70 kind of go with four people working in that capacity before we decide.
71

72 Wolaver: Congratulations Steve.
73

74 Cote, S: I appreciate all your support.
75

76 Sander: I'm very happy for two reasons. First of all, I'm happy that we were able to hire
77 from within. Second, I really want to thank you for bringing a lot of things to our
78 attention. That's exactly what I'm looking for in that position. I'm looking forward to
79 many years of a good relationship going forward.
80

81 Hill: It is sort of the perfect storm that you've stepped in. Thanks for stepping into it and
82 keeping us moving forward.
83

84 **Review of Wastewater Treatment Facility Compliance Evaluation Inspection**
85 **Report**

86 Wastewater Treatment Facility Compliance Evaluation Inspection Report.pdf
87 [https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Water_Sewer_Commission/Meetings/2023/0](https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Water_Sewer_Commission/Meetings/2023/08/4b_Wastewater_Treatment_Facility_Compliance_Evaluation_Inspection_Report.pdf)
88 [8/4b_Wastewater_Treatment_Facility_Compliance_Evaluation_Inspection_Report.pdf](https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Water_Sewer_Commission/Meetings/2023/08/4b_Wastewater_Treatment_Facility_Compliance_Evaluation_Inspection_Report.pdf)
89

90 Cote, S: It's supposed to be an annual report. I did not really understand how getting an
91 "excellent" was really awesome until our contract officer said they only had three
92 "excellents" in 15 years. You got one with a plant that's falling apart. Even though our
93 plant is in rough shape, they were quite happy with all of the things that we were doing to
94 make it right. That's where they gave us the "excellent." The report says Burlington, but
95 I have contacted them to find out why that is.
96

97 Arneson: We got the report and Steve said we're going to implement the
98 recommendations and the requirements and please correct this and give us a final copy.

99 Steve's already putting together a timeline for action on all those. The State had a really
100 good understanding of where we were and where we hope to get to.

101
102 Cote, S: We've completely redone our organization of files. We have a file system by
103 month for Water and Wastewater. Everything's got a home now. Some of the reports are
104 now digitized. But they still require you to keep a hard copy. We actually have all of the
105 records for every year from 1996 to the current in a box. I believe it's 10 years and we
106 can start getting rid of them.

107 108 **Discussion of billing for water used for flood cleanup**

109
110 Arneson: It was brought to my attention by George Gifford that during Irene there was a
111 waiver essentially of water usage by flood damage to houses. It went back to the
112 previous meter readings for the previous quarter to account for each resident probably
113 using extra water to help hose out their houses. Bob Heiser is here and had a neighbor
114 hook onto his house to help hose out their house. He was wondering if there was any sort
115 of relief. I haven't researched it any further to understand what authority the Commission
116 had to do that.

117
118 Hill: It doesn't matter what happened in 2011. Is it safe to conclude the action taken by
119 this Commission and previous Water Sewer Superintendents did not comply with law or
120 ordinance. That's where I start, what is the authority of the Commission to waive fees for
121 a group of people who have been impacted by a flood, some act of God? I will observe
122 that it's a large number when we go through a flood, but this has happened in other
123 incidents, like a neighbor's pipe froze and they run a hose from that house to the next
124 house. We should start with the legal basis for where we have the authority to do that. I
125 haven't found it yet. I think that's where we should start, what's our authority and under
126 what circumstances? If I had to use a bunch of water to put out a fire at my house, will
127 you waive my fee as well,

128
129 Furr: It'd be good idea to research that and have a policy in writing that we can refer to.
130 I would vote for recommending that we research this. If it can be done, then we put it in
131 writing where everybody can see it.

132
133 Hill: And to make sure that we actually have the authority to do it by policy versus
134 ordinance. A reminder that ordinance is a longer pathway with a public hearing. I just
135 couldn't find where we had that authority.

136
137 Arneson: We've considered this before with people who've had a leak and ask for similar
138 things. We determined there really wasn't a way for the Commission to do that. There
139 was no authority, and then it would go to the Board of Civil Authority, in that there's nine
140 very specific reasons of why you can waive a bill. I'll dust those notes off, bring those
141 back, and we can have a better conversation.

142
143 Farr: We never approached anyone about what was available with our leak because we
144 received such terrible service from the previous employees.

145
146 Hill: If I recall correctly, there was a leak that went on for a while, and it went unnoticed.
147 Then suddenly you get a big bill. I ponder what our authority is under existing statute,

ordinance, policy. Can we create something? Is it effective retrospectively? It's usually effective from the date of passage.

Farr: When we received our bill that was so high, we fixed it in 10 days. Our next bill was almost half of what the leaking bill was. It could have been double digit kind of 1000s of dollars. It would be good to have some sort of policy.

Hill: Is this subject to FEMA reimbursement? Is it something not to shift the burden from a small group of ratepayers to the federal government. But that might not be a bad idea if it were feasible.

Cote, S: Going forward with our new meters, each customer has the ability for daily consumption.

Furr: You can spot leaks by the 24-hour activity thing.

Cote, S: I suggest you will just go read the meters right this week and see how many gallons they use. We read them the previous month, that would give us a pretty good average of what their daily use was for that month. You could take the previous two quarters and give you a daily average for a person's house.

Cote, A: I wanted to echo what Barb was saying at the end regarding FEMA reimbursement especially for those houses that had flood insurance. The water consumption for the cleanup efforts would definitely qualify as a reimbursable cost through their insurance. Homeowners insurance is also a way for somebody's hot water tank or something breaking and there being this release of water. As you're drafting and coming up with policy to put into effect in the future, I'm not sure we want to be allowing double dipping, that the homeowner would be reimbursed by both the insurance company and the Town of Richmond's Water and Sewer Department.

Furr: Definitely some research to be done.

Heiser: It's a tough situation to be in. We're in pretty good shape and it's all because of generous neighbors and people coming from all over. We're very thankful and we're not trying to get out of our fair share.

Cote, S: We could go tomorrow and do Esplanade in a couple of houses on this side. That would give us a rough estimate. We will have those numbers calculated out and just see what we're talking about. In the future, with our new meters, we could just go to a computer.

Hill: This might not be the top topic for FEMA, but it seems like it is a question to ask. When homeowners used a lot of water to clean up damage from the flooding, that's a cost like many other things. We presume the answer is yes.

Arneson: I did ask the initial question of FEMA and the initial response was it may not be covered. But I'll ask again. I think as a cost of cleanup, maybe there's a way to do that.

196 Wolaver: For the houses on this block, can you get flood insurance?

197
198 Heiser: I've heard a lot of people on Esplanade have been rejected for FEMA for one
199 reason or another. People have deductibles on flood insurance and homeowners
200 insurance, and that claims can increase flood insurance premiums.

201
202 Arneson: The assistance for individuals, you have to apply to your insurance first, and
203 then they will consider covering expenses not covered by insurance. If they went to
204 FEMA first, they're going to say no, go back to your insurance. You have to exhaust
205 other avenues before you get to FEMA. It's similar with the Town.

206
207 Hill: It is an administrative task to make sure you've done everything correctly.

208
209 Wolaver: I can appreciate the deductibles are usually pretty high on those policies as
210 well. We'll take a look at that to see what our boundaries are and whether we can help out
211 or not.

212
213 **Review of list of water and wastewater items to be repaired or replaced**

214 Water and Wastewater Items to be Repaired or Replaced 8-2-23.pdf

215 [https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Water Sewer Commission/Meetings/2023/0](https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Water_Sewer_Commission/Meetings/2023/08/4d_Water_and_Wastewater_Items_to_be_Repaired_or_Replaced_8-2-23.pdf)
216 [8/4d Water and Wastewater Items to be Repaired or Replaced 8-2-23.pdf](https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Water_Sewer_Commission/Meetings/2023/08/4d_Water_and_Wastewater_Items_to_be_Repaired_or_Replaced_8-2-23.pdf)

217
218 Cote, S: We've cured all the problems that we had after the flooding with the pump
219 station. We've had the float replaced inside the pump station. As soon as the flood was
220 down, we brought the press back up online and we found out that we're using too much
221 polymer. Through a process of elimination, we found out that one side would run clean,
222 and the other side would not. He gave us a contact of the treatment plant in Brattleboro,
223 they have two presses like ours. They fill a tractor trailer truck every 30 hours with
224 sludge. Their presses are twice the size, they have four channels. They had one of theirs
225 apart to show what the problem is a ripped screen. The guy knew what he was doing. He
226 retired on August 1. He showed us how it came apart and what the problem is.

227
228 He said you can run your press on one side without the other screen. We're still running
229 it with one side, we're barely keeping up. We need to take the other side off the press.
230 They take apart the belt every 18 months down in Brattleboro. Our press has never had a
231 screen change in 20 years. The bad thing is the screens are \$10,000 and there's two of
232 them in a side. They recommend that they take theirs apart about every 18 months, when
233 they start to see a problem. It's basically a large stainless-steel screen, the sludge goes in
234 and the water goes through. We've been operating just one side. There is a ton of daily
235 maintenance that has not ever been done on the press. Every 24 hours, the press is
236 supposed to be completely torqued. We don't have a torque wrench that works. We have
237 the manuals, but it's different when you get somebody who's had 15 years of experience.

238
239 He gave us his contact information and he'll come by and consult and see how your press
240 is running. We have got to take one side of the press apart and we're going to end up
241 spending probably close to 20 grand to put it back together. In Brattleboro they keep two
242 screens in stock all the time.

We took the time to clean the septage receiving tanks out. We took the fire hose, and we stirred the tanks up. When we drained them down, we stirred all the solids up. Then we let them aerate overnight. We drained them down the next day and then we took the solids out. We ended up with about 12 cubic yards in the first tank. We paid P&P to come. We did not have confined space training at that time, so they had to supply a person to go down in the hole and basically vacuumed all of it up. We cleaned out one tank and they took the solids to a drying bed in Middlebury, and it was about \$1,500 to dispose of it. We did the second one and that one cost us a little more because the drying beds in Middlebury were full. We had about 15 yards that went to Winooski to their drying beds and that cost us about \$3,400. We have our own drying bed in Richmond, it was used for years, it is just full of junk. Going forward, we're going to approach the State and see if they will allow us to clean one side of it. We might have to put a small divider block wall up and use our own drying bed. Then we just call Casella to bring us a dumpster and we dispose of it ourselves trying to save some money. The solids that we took out are grit and dirt. What we were left with was gravel. We're just talking about doing it to get through this clean-out process and save some money. I thought the \$1,400 for a truckload of Middlebury was pretty good but they don't often have space to take it because they use it for their own stuff.

The transfer switch for our generator which switches automatically was running. The transfer switch itself was 20-years old, they don't make any parts for it, so it had to be completely replaced. It was \$5,200 for a new transfer switch. We had to run the generator when we weren't there.

Update on purchase process for water tank mixer

Cote, S: We made some more calls to the companies. There was a cheaper bid, they do not supply a three-phase mixer and they do not use the VFD with it. There were some discrepancies with the other company who had put in the mixer in October. Their new price was way higher than what they charged us in October. The size of the mixer they priced on their bid was a G-9 and our tank takes a G-12. They ate the cost difference and held up to their bid. I followed up with some price differences on the cleaning.

Arneson: We should have a recommendation by the next meeting.

Review of monthly water data for July

Monthly Water Report for July 2023.pdf

https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Water_Sewer_Commission/Meetings/2023/08/4f_Monthly_Water_Report_for_July_2023.pdf

Arneson: I didn't copy this in color, so the highlights are missing. There were only a couple of instances where we were a little bit below on any of the levels. You'll notice that there's four or five days with no data, that's when the pump was down. Except for the 12th when we pumped some water direct to waste just making sure we were cleaning everything out. But outside of those days I think we did a good job of keeping our levels where they should be.

293 Cote, S: Everything came right back up after the flood and worked really well. It is such
294 a bonus to have 10 days reservoir up on that hill. It really gave us the time to do
295 everything we needed. The tank was still at 13 feet when we turned it on, it maxes out at
296 24.

297
298 Wolaver: Having that buffer really paid off.
299

300 **Update on gateway sewer expansion**

301
302 Arneson: We need to schedule another subcommittee meeting with the Reaps.
303

304 **Discuss Items for Next Agenda:**

- 305 *Gateway Expansion
- 306 *Meter installation
- 307 *Water audit
- 308 *Stormwater into wastewater
- 309 *Meter reading for Esplanade

310
311 Cote, S: We should see about getting flood relief on the filter fabrics. After the flood,
312 we just couldn't clean them. They're just inundated with silt and stuff.
313

314 Arneson: You and I should meet with the engineers that are doing the waterline
315 inventory and see what their planning can be for stormwater inspections.
316 for you.
317

318 **Adjournment**

319
320 *Sander moved to adjourn. Hill seconded.*
321 *Roll Call Vote: Farr, Furr, Hill, Sander, Wolaver in favor. Motion approved.*
322

323 Meeting adjourned at: 6:54 pm
324

325 **Chat file from Zoom:**

326 00:27:25 MMCTV Erin: Can Steve come to the microphone.
327 00:31:34 Erin Farr: I don't have enough internet to access video but Im
328 listening!!
329 00:31:46 Richmond Town Host: Reacted to "I don't have enough ..." with 👍
330 00:31:48 Jay Furr: 👍