

# **Town of Richmond Water and Sewer Commission Meeting Minutes of October 17, 2022**

**Members Present:** Bard Hill, David Sander, Jay Furr, Greg Tucker, Morgan Wolaver

**Members Absent:** None

**Staff Present:** Josh Arneson, Town Manager; Duncan Wardwell, Assistant to the Town Manager; Linda Parent, Town Clerk

**Others Present:** The meeting was recorded for MMCTV, Cara LaBounty, June Heston, Jim Monahan, Joy Reap, Mary Houle

**Call to Order:** 5:00 pm

**Welcome by:** Sander

**Public Comment:** None

## **Additions or Deletions to the Agenda:**

Sander: With the Board's permission, I would like to strike the Superintendent's Report which is being replaced by a staffing update.

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

### **Staffing Update**

Arneson: Water and Wastewater Superintendent Kendall Chamberlin has resigned effective at 5 pm today. I accepted his resignation and thanked him for his years of service. There is no severance package attached to this resignation. I will not be discussing details associated with the resignation as it is a personnel issue. I have been in touch with the existing Water and Wastewater staff regarding this development and we will be working with them for our operations plan going forward. My intention is to hire a full-time Water and Wastewater Superintendent. This process will take some time to complete. I have been in touch with State officials from both Water and Wastewater to inform them of this development and to get a plan in place to ensure Richmond meets State requirements for licensed operations in the immediate future.

### **Update on fluoride levels and chlorine in Richmond's water supply**

Arneson: Included in the packet is the September monthly report for water. This report contains information on fluoride and chlorine levels. The levels were at 0.6 mg/L as of Wednesday, October 5 when I observed a fluoride test conducted by Stephen Cote and Kendall Chamberlin. It takes a few days to get it up to 0.7mg/L. The packet also includes an email from Ben Montross, Drinking Water Program Manager with the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation with an explanation regarding chlorine levels in the Richmond Water Supply. There is a target level of 0.1 mg/L for chlorine. Going forward we will target those levels.

Furr: The reason why the State doesn't think we need to disinfect higher is because we do not have a point source contamination issue. As the report said, we are getting good groundwater with plenty of natural filtering by the ground. That is why we do not need to go above and beyond.

Hill: We never had any issues with infiltration unless with open water repairs or broken lines.

Furr: The State has us perform an E. Coli check and it was 2014 when we last had any contamination.

Hill: If we look at the report, then it is difficult to tell what the correct levels should be. I was thinking we could produce something about what these values mean and what they should be. Looking at a range of values by themselves is difficult to determine quality.

Sander: We could highlight values which are out of the specifications. We could also do a footnote at the bottom of the report to list the State guidelines. Or we could put out a table to show the desired ranges. We should decide on a course tonight.

Arneson: We can get those levels from the State and create a sheet to list.

Furr: We can put that on the Town website with details specific to the reasons for those ranges.

Wolaver: It might be good to point out that some days might be below your target level on some days.

Houle: The norm for bloodwork shows those ranges with a given test. It should be a standard like an index.

LaBounty: If you acknowledge when it is not out of range for a reason then that is a better situation for your users. You would not be altering the report but just adding to it.

Furr: I would be able to use a .pdf creator to work with the existing reports.

### **Discussion of Gateway Wastewater Expansion Project including review of responses from mailing and review of costs to Town to date**

Arneson: The packet includes the mailer that went out to property owners. We received feedback forms from six properties. The packet also includes the list of properties associated with Phases 1B and 2. We received feedback forms from six properties. Five were in favor of the project and one was opposed. This leaves us with 10 properties that we have not heard from. The feedback forms and a tracking sheet are included in the packet. The one property that opposed was in Phase 2. The next step would be looking at a special assessment district. One option is to just focus on Phases 1A and 1B since the property owner who opposes the project is in Phase 2.

Furr: The one property who objected were interested at the time of our walk-through. I wonder if we approach them, we can understand why they oppose now or get them in the yes column.

Arneson: Also included in the packet is a spreadsheet of costs to the Town to date for the gateway project. I was able to find costs related to the project since 2020, when the project revived while I was with the Town. This does not include the costs from 2014-2017 when this project first started. I searched the paper and electronic files in my office. I could not locate engineering contracts for the Preliminary Engineering Report from 2016 or the Scoping Study from 2015. Green Mountain Engineering prepared those documents but unfortunately is now out of business. I reached out to the former owner to see if they still have the contracts on file. He recalled there were several contracts with the Town. I have also reached out to Langrock, Sperry and Wool to see if they have detailed invoices for their services as we keep them going back five years. We are statutorily required to keep invoices for a year after the audit closes and we have invoices going back to FY2018. The costs from 2020 onward include some legal expenses associated with a consecutive sewer system with the Reaps, an updated preliminary engineering report, and more legal expenses dealing with possible expansion scenarios and bond vote from last December.

Hill: This is a reasonable question that we are obligated to produce. It is useful to the taxpayers and the Commission. We could look back at previous Water and Sewer Commission notes to look for approval of invoices and purchase orders. If after five years, we do not know what happened then that might raise questions about our approach and a possible process improvement.

Furr: We shouldn't be scrounging around for invoices. I use Quicken for home and it is a few mouse clicks to look up a specific expense like gasoline. I have not seen the NEMRC software, but it should have project coding and tagging. We cannot go back in time to accomplish it but going forward we should. We should provide this information for any Town project.

Sander: I know we had a running total going until 2016-2017 so we should be able to find a spreadsheet or something like that.

Arneson: I have not seen a running total from the previous Town Manager. We can find the expenses since 2020. The next step would be to look at the files from each individual meeting.

Hill: I was somewhat surprised this was not easily produced.

Wolaver: I assume this is something in how we need to code our expenses. I thought the CPA would have records. Do we keep a digital record of everything?

Arneson: We did not keep digital records of every individual invoice. With the pandemic, we started scanning packets of invoices. In the NEMRC system, it would be listed as an expense for Green Mountain Engineering but it wouldn't break it down for specific costs associated with Gateway or other projects. Likewise, each legal bill might

have 7-8 different items. We started to break down these invoices into individual expenses associated with this project.

Houle: Pete Pochop was the point person at the time, and he might be worth contacting to see if he has any information to share. He used to work for Green Mountain Engineering.

Sander: He was the lead engineer on the water tank, and I think he was for the preliminary expansion as well.

Parent: We do have the Langrock, Sperry and Wool boxes in the basement.

LaBounty: The NEMRC systems is about data in equals data out. If you don't code it then you don't get the data out. It is available in NEMRC if time to code it. The CPA samples some of your invoices not all of them. I suggest going back and looking at the older meeting minutes. I would have thought with COVID you would have had a better scanning system. I am also questioning when you last shredded documents.

Arneson: The last physical files we have is FY2018.

LaBounty: I think you should stop shredding invoices until you have a better system. You are also missing very recent engineering activity from 2020. I want all the contracts from 2020 before the invoices. I am telling you that you are missing contracts and invoices from 2014 up to 2021. You have a problem as a Water and Sewer Commission if you cannot provide the public with information. I have been ignored for a number of years. I am offering to help and organize. This needs to be fixed. I thank you for taking this seriously. Of the 6 surveys that were returned, how many are from the original Reap property sub-division? Did you include the direct costs to those users and individual properties?

Furr: Yes, it is broken out to metered costs, bond re-payment costs, fixed costs by individual property.

Arneson: The spreadsheet shows the Reaps are at 840 W. Main St. There are four documents of favor in here that were sub-divided into Willis. If you go back to the spreadsheet, it shows up as In Favor once as 840 W. Main St. The Governor Peck property is a huge parcel that stretches around to Rt. 2 frontage.

Hill: We looked at the map that shows the Governor Peck property at previous meetings.

Furr: If you look at the paragraph (bottom of page 3), it describes the Governor Peck and Verburg Lane address descriptions for Phase 2.

Arneson: The letter also explains the bond costs, the fixed and metered fees once the project is constructed. The letter illustrates the costs associated with a property connecting to the system such as the metered fees, wastewater allocation fees, the cost to connect, and the cost of a meter and meter installation. We provided some sample costs based on different scenarios.

LaBounty: If these numbers are based on before the bond vote then they are way off based on inflation. A septic pump station will cost \$8,000 alone.

Arneson: We did update the construction costs for the entire system.

LaBounty: I question the \$5,000 to \$8,000 as accurate costs as many houses on Rt. 2 are not that close to the road.

Hill: It is prudent to have dates on these documents as the costs do change.

LaBounty: I am worried about the average homeowner understanding these costs where a commercial developer will have a better idea.

Sander: I think we should reach out to the “no” property to understand their perspective.

LaBounty: I do not think you should pressure the “no” property but just reach out to those properties who did not reply.

Furr: They were previously in-favor so maybe there are some nuances we do not understand.

Hill: We might properly start with Phase 1 and then move to Phase 2. Two of the properties on Phase 1 are the Cemetery and Richmond Land Trust. Are we asking for a response from the Cemetery and Richmond Land Trust? It might be moot due to the no or low payback based on their Grand List Values.

Arneson: We might have to have it for a special assessment district. You can see which properties are Phase 1 or 2 in the second column of the spreadsheet.

LaBounty: Is there a budget for the continued expenses associated with a possible expansion?

Arneson: We have been claiming it under legal and engineering line items.

LaBounty: I recommend you break it out and then you are able to code it.

Furr: It looks NEMRC is able to code this the way we want it.

Hill: If we had project coding then it would be easy to look up totals for a project.

Wolaver: Who enters in all that information?

Arneson: Our Finance Director, Connie Bona.

LaBounty: The Department Heads specify where it is coded for Connie. It is literally 2-4 keystrokes.

Wolaver: As long as you created all the classes and codes to help break it out.

LaBounty: There are typically 5 buckets that dump into a project code.

Furr: A project can have sub-codes for engineering or other expenses. A ledger can be as complicated as we want. I cannot believe that this hasn't come up before.

Hill: What about next steps? We should reach out to Phase 1B properties, make a decision based on Cemetery and Land Trust hill, and consider how far we can go toward Phase 2.

Wolaver: Do we need 100% agreement to do Phase 1B?

Arneson: You can get a special assessment district based on a vote of all the users. In order to have unanimous consent then you need agreement of all the folks. In Phase 1B, the only voting properties might be the Reap properties if we exclude the Cemetery and the Land Trust. I think it is a legal question for who needs to sign for unanimous consent so that we would legally have that to proceed for a bond vote.

Wolaver: If we stopped at the Reaps property, then would we still have the size of the line to continue expansion?

Furr: Yes.

LaBounty: Are you asking for a bond vote to bring it to the Reap properties? If the people in the Reaps development are the only people covering the costs, then the bond vote would make the Town liable for the development costs.

Arneson: Also, so we can consider future expansion. It will serve the properties on Rt. 2 as Phase 1A which is within the original Water and Sewer district. We would need a bond vote but there are users in Phase 1A who would benefit. Phase 1A is just beyond the turnaround.

Reap: I want to confirm that we tried to do these many times on our own. We were in negotiations with the Town to bring it down on our own. The Town put the brakes on it because they wanted to explore going through Rt. 2 to the Gateway. We have been waiting for this process for 2-3 years. We never asked for anyone to pay for this. It was brought upon us.

Hill: The Reaps would propose to bring it up and down the hill for their properties. If we service along Rt. 2 then it provides for other properties. We are discussing a budget for the expansion. We are expanding our system to people inside the district without charging them the additional construction costs of the expansion.

LaBounty: I am suggesting that new connections in this system be paid for by those who benefit from it. There are examples of the developer paying for a line connecting to the system at Buttermilk and on Railroad Street. On Cochran Rd expansion, there was some dirty business going on. It is not fair to the developers who paid for their costs when users are paying for other expansions. I have been here for years and have not been listened to.

Hill: It is part of the public record that we have talked about this and there is a precedent for extending within the district as opposed to on private property.

LaBounty: I am not trusting what your Superintendent has told you.

Hill: As a point of record, we have talked about Phase 1A within the water system on the Rt. 2 line is extending it further at a cost to the current customers. We have had that conversation at least three times.

Houle: If you go to each Town Report you can find a snapshot of what you planned to do.

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

### **Minutes**

*Wolaver moved to approve the Minutes of 10/3/22 as presented. Hill seconded.*

*Roll Call Vote follows discussion*

Furr: There were a couple of things where I thought, did I say that or did Bard say that? I don't care. The minutes are close enough as the sense of what happened is there.

Wolaver: I said a lot more but that is it.

*Roll Call Vote: Hill, Furr, Sander, Tucker, Wolaver in favor. Motion passed.*

### **Warrants**

*Furr moved to approve the warrants as presented. Wolaver seconded.*

*Roll Call Vote: Hill, Furr, Sander, Tucker, Wolaver in favor. Motion passed.*

### **Discuss Items for Next Agenda**

- \*Historical research for expansion
- \*Update on mailing responses
- \*Update on Superintendent and interim management
- \*Expenses for Gateway expansion
- \*Coding projects in NEMRC
- \*Update on W/S Commission
- \*Unidentified Septic Lines

### **Adjournment**

*Furr moved to adjourn. Hill seconded*

*Roll Call Vote: Hill, Furr, Sander, Tucker, Wolaver in favor. Motion passed.*

Meeting adjourned at 6:29 pm

### **Chat file from Zoom:**

None