

## **DRAFT Meeting Minutes**

October 14, 2020

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

The meeting was called to order via **Zoom** video conference by Chairman Bob Kelly at 6:30 pm. Other Committee members present on the video conference included Mr. Carl Wikstrom, Ms. Kelly Warner, Mr. Ben Mosher, and Selectboard representative Ms. Molly Cowan.

### **2. Water and Sewer Bill Abatement Requests**

Eleven abatement requests were discussed by the Committee.

- a. John Wilson, 316 Water Street. The customer, Mr. Wilson, who was in video attendance from Newmarket, was seeking an abatement on his water and sewer bill for increased usage from a toilet and pipe leak at a tenant in Exeter. Mr. Wilson indicated that the tenant had not notified him of the leak until he saw his June bill.

The Committee discussed the aspects of the request outlined in the application and assessed that the user should receive a 50% Water and Sewer bill abatement for usage in excess of his average annual quarterly usage. Mr. Kelly moved, and Mr. Wikstrom seconded, a motion to **recommend an ABATEMENT REQUEST** of \$486.83 based on DPW's calculations. The motion passed 5-0.

The Committee also recommended to the user that they consider installing a Deduct Meter in the future, so he doesn't get charged for Sewer usage.

- b. Michael LaPia, 12 Little Pine Lane. The customer was seeking an abatement for an excessive water and sewer bill related to a leak in his irrigation system. Reportedly, the ratepayer found a leak in his system after several days, but it was not noticeable due to the dry weather.

The Committee discussed the occurrence details and felt that this excess usage was accidental but was partially the ratepayer's responsibility under the Abatement Policy. Mr. Kelly moved, and Mr. Mosher seconded, a motion to **partially approve the ABATEMENT REQUEST** with an 50% excess sewer use abatement of \$346.64. The motion passed 4-1 with Mr. Wikstrom voting no.

- c. Raja Noori, 25 Acadia Lane. The customer, who was not in attendance, was seeking an abatement for an excessive water and sewer bill of an unspecified nature. No details of the request and occurrence were provided except to note that to pay the bill would be a financial hardship. An account balance of approximately \$190 and current charges of approximately \$337 were noted.

The Committee discussed the occurrence details and felt that the reported account was not inordinately excessive. Mr. Mosher moved, and Mr. Kelly seconded, a motion to **deny the ABATEMENT REQUEST**. The motion passed 5-0.

- d. Robert and Joan Bilharz, 17 Exeter Farms Road. The customer, of whom Bob was in video attendance, was seeking an abatement for an excessive water and sewer bill related to a leaking outdoor spigot.

The Committee discussed the occurrence details and felt that this excess usage, was an accident though somewhat the ratepayer's responsibility under the Abatement Policy. There appeared to be extenuating circumstances as to why the resident did not immediately notice the leak. Mr. Wikstrom moved, and Mr. Mosher seconded, a motion to **approve an ABATEMENT REQUEST** on the excess sewer usage of \$285.71. The motion passed 5-0.

- e. Ann and Bill Campbell, 111 High Street. The customer, of whom Bill was in video attendance, was seeking an abatement for an excessive water and sewer bill related to a hose that was accidentally left on while they were away for a few days.

The Committee discussed the occurrence details and felt that this excess usage, was an accident though somewhat the ratepayer's responsibility under the Abatement Policy. The resident did not immediately notice the leak because they were away. Mr. Wikstrom moved, and Mr. Kelly seconded, a motion to **approve an ABATEMENT REQUEST** on 50% of the excess sewer usage of \$174.25. The motion passed 5-0.

- f. Joanne Moynihan, 40 Hampton Road, C-2. The customer, who was not in attendance, was seeking an abatement on their water and sewer bill for

increased usage from a toilet and shower leak. The usage did not appear to be excessive, but DPW reported that there was a leak and it had been repaired.

The Committee discussed the aspects of the request outlined in the application and assessed that the user should receive a 50% Water and Sewer bill abatement for usage in excess of their average annual quarterly usage. Mr. Kelly moved, and Mr. Wikstrom seconded, a motion to **recommend an ABATEMENT REQUEST** of \$15.63 based on DPW's calculations. The motion passed 5-0.

- g. Paul and Louise Galante, 24 Exeter Farms Road. The customer, Paul of whom called in, was seeking an abatement for an excessive water and sewer bill related to a leak in his irrigation system. Reportedly, the ratepayer found a leak in his system after several days, but it was not noticeable due to the dry weather.

The Committee discussed the occurrence details and felt that this excess usage was accidental but was partially the ratepayer's responsibility under the Abatement Policy. Mr. Kelly moved, and Mr. Mosher seconded, a motion to **partially approve the ABATEMENT REQUEST** with an 50% excess sewer use abatement of \$175.63. The motion passed 5-0.

- h. Hillary Kang, 35 Hampton Road. The customer, of whom husband Ryan Parker was in video attendance, was seeking an abatement for an excessive water and sewer bill related to broken water pipe while they were away for a few days. The leak was in the basement and as it drained to a dirt floor, was not readily discovered.

The Committee discussed the occurrence details and felt that this excess usage was an accident though partially the ratepayer's responsibility under the Abatement Policy. The resident did not immediately notice the leak because they were away. Ms. Warner moved, and Mr. Mosher seconded, a motion to **approve an ABATEMENT REQUEST** on 80% of the excess sewer usage of \$361.63. The motion passed 5-0.

- i. Aruba Capital Holdings LLC, 11 Downing Court. The customer, who was not attendance, was seeking an abatement on their water and sewer bill for increased usage from when they were power washing the commercial building. The usage was reported to be approximately 27,000 gallons.

The Committee discussed the aspects of the request outlined in the application and assessed that at a standard power washer flow of 8 gallons per minute (gpm),

the user would have had to be power washing for over 56 hours. It appeared to the Committee that something else was going on that was not reported. Mr. Kelly moved, and Mr. Wikstrom seconded, a motion to **deny an ABATEMENT REQUEST**. The motion passed 5-0.

- j. Patricia Fears Ruffner, 5 Bayberry Lane. The customer, of whom was not in attendance, was seeking an abatement for an excessive water and sewer bill related to a hose that was left on for a few days with an undetected leak.

The Committee discussed the occurrence details and felt that this excess usage, was an accident though somewhat the ratepayer's responsibility under the Abatement Policy as they did not turn the hose off at the spigot. Mr. Wikstrom moved, and Ms. Warner seconded, a motion to **approve an ABATEMENT REQUEST** on 50% of the excess sewer usage of \$53.70. The motion passed 5-0.

- k. John Steere, 21 Folsom Street. The ratepayer, whose wife Betty and daughter Katherine were in video attendance, was seeking an abatement for an excessive water and sewer bill from this past spring. Due to family events brought on partially by COVID-19, several family members were forced back home resulting in a water usage that exceeded the Tier 1 cost thresholds. The customer was trying for an abatement of the Tier II pricing so their bill could be totally calculated at the Tier I rate.

The recalculation resulted in a net difference of \$242.77 on two bills totaling over \$2,200. The Committee discussed whether additional costs could be abated due to events brought on by the COVID pandemic. The issue involves the fact there is no leak or unexplained use of water – the family clearly used the volumes noted. However, a portion of this usage was brought on by the pandemic and the need to serve nine people instead of normally two, and, while family members have pitched in to assist the customer on bill payment, this would appear to fall into the emergency measures intent of a loosening of the abatement policies implemented this past March.

No resolution was determined as the Committee was aware that 1. They did not want to provide a sweeping precedent of abating bills for additional usage, ostensibly brought on by the pandemic, i.e. weekend guests, or grandparents filling a pool for visiting children who had lost their daycare, and 2. Since there was no leak, this might be worthy of discussion with the Selectboard, similar to considered tax abatements in certain situations.

It was agreed to **table the Abatement Request** until more discussions can be conducted regarding their request versus recent usage amounts and background. Mr. Kelly agreed to work with Ms. Cowan as the Committee's SB rep on formulating a discussion with that Board.

### **3. Regular Business**

#### a. Utility Operations

Mr. Kelly discussed both the Water Treatment Plant and Wastewater Treatment Plant updates. According to DPW personnel, both facilities were still meeting their federally and state mandated treatment limits. An official tour and ribbon cutting of the WWTP on Newfields Rd. continues to be postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

#### b. Utility Financial Reports

Mr. Kelly discussed reports that had been previously distributed to the Committee by the Town Finance Department. Continued note was made of a large Sewer bond payment at the end of 2020. Town Manager Russ Dean and Mr. Kelly are monitoring cash flow in the Sewer account to assess impacts on rates as the year progresses.

### **4. New Business**

None at this time.

### **5. Other Business**

Water and Sewer Departments 2021 budgets. Mr. Kelly indicated that the town's Budget Recommendations Committee (BRC) was meeting soon with DPW to discuss the 2021 budget requests. Mr. Wikstrom asked if he could see a copy of the budget, which Mr. Kelly will pass along.

### **6. Committee Calendar**

The Committee tentatively scheduled their next meeting for the middle of December 2020. The actual date will depend on abatement request volume and some members' time constraints due to town budget review activities in the Fall. If the Town Office has not reopened due to continued protocols associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, then the meeting will be conducted as a Zoom video conference. The agenda will reflect how the meeting will be conducted.

Mr. Kelly adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:30 pm.

Respectively submitted,

Bob Kelly

Chair and Recording Secretary