

Town of Exeter (NH) Water & Sewer Advisory Committee (WSAC)
Nowak Room, Town Offices, Exeter, NH

Meeting Minutes

For Meeting of April 12, 2023

1. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Bob Kelly on Wednesday April 12, 2023 at approximately 6:59 pm. Other Committee members present included Carl Wikstrom, Ben Mosher, and Alan Mangan. Selectboard representative Ms. Molly Cowan was not in attendance.

Representatives of the public were also in attendance in person and via Zoom call to discuss applicable abatement requests.

2. Water and Sewer Bill Abatement Requests

Nine abatement requests were discussed by the Committee, as follows:

- a. 4 South Street. The customer, Keri Marshall on behalf of Marshall Family Trust, was in attendance. They were seeking an abatement on a recent water and sewer bill for increased usage from a failed water line that drained into a dirt floor crawl space. Reportedly, no water from this leak entered the Town sewer system.

The Committee discussed the aspects of the request outlined in the application and assessed that unforeseeable, accidental usage had occurred but had been repaired. Mr. Wikstrom moved, and Mr. Kelly seconded, a motion to **recommend an ABATEMENT for 50% excess Water and full excess Sewer usage** of the average annual amount. This amounts to a calculated amount of **\$393.51**. The motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.

- b. 1-3 Westside Drive. The customer, Darlene Tousignant, was in attendance. She was seeking an abatement on a recent water and sewer bill for increased usage from leaking toilets in a seldom used part of their house.

The Committee discussed the aspects of the request outlined in the application and assessed that unforeseeable, accidental usage had occurred but had been repaired. Mr. Wikstrom moved, and Mr. Mosher seconded, a motion to **recommend an ABATEMENT for 50% excess Water and 50% excess Sewer usage** of the average annual amount. This amounts to **\$260.80**. The motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.

- c. 336 Water Street. The customer, George Higgins, was not in attendance, however, the customer's tenant, Barbara Zywiec, was in attendance on his behalf. Mr. Higgins was seeking an abatement on a recent water and sewer bill for increased usage from a leaking toilet in a remote part of the home. Mr. Higgins is elderly and was in Florida during the leak occurrence.

The Committee discussed the aspects of the request outlined in the application and assessed that unforeseeable, accidental usage had occurred but had been repaired. Mr. Kelly moved, and Mr. Wikstrom seconded, a motion to **recommend an ABATEMENT for 80% excess Water and 80% excess Sewer usage** of the average annual amount. This amounts to **\$535.53**. The motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.

- d. 8 Marlboro Street. The customer, Clarence Cross, was in attendance. He and his wife co-own the residence and were seeking an abatement on their water and sewer bill for increased, on-going usage from leaking toilets. Reportedly, due to its location, the leak was not discovered by the customer until recently at which point he installed new toilets and fixtures.

According to DPW records reviewed by the Committee, the customers had received high usage notifications three times in 2022; currently a bill of over \$4,200 is outstanding with average usage exceeding \$1,300 per quarter. Records show that average usage prior to March 2022 was about \$450. Also, according to recent records, once weekly spikes in usage are still occurring. The Committee thought these spikes far exceeded normal household uses such as showers and laundry.

The Committee discussed the aspects of the request outlined in the application and assessed that unforeseeable, accidental usage had originally occurred in March 2022 but had not been repaired until recently. There is also no evidence of a full repair as some high usage continues. In order to avoid Mr. Cross having to come back, Mr. Kelly moved, and Mr. Wikstrom seconded, a motion to

recommend an ABATEMENT for 80% excess Water and 80% Sewer usage of the average annual amount for the November 2022 bill only. This amounts to **\$624.57**. The motion passed 4-0 by voice vote. The Committee also recommended that the abatement is contingent on the customer working out a payment plan with Billing to pay down his bill

Also, it was recommended to the customer to pay particular attention to this toilet and potentially hire a plumber to review his installation as it appeared from the data download that it had been periodically leaking for quite a while and a leak is still occurring somewhere in the residence.

- e. 79 Front Street. The customer, Sarah Brown Russ, was in attendance via Zoom conference. She was seeking an abatement on a recent water and sewer bill for increased usage from a burst pipe during the February cold snap. Reportedly, the leakage filled the basement and drained out through the foundation and no water from this leak entered the Town sewer system.

The customer was out of state when the pipe break occurred. The town came over to her house and shut off her water until she could get it fixed.

The Committee discussed the aspects of the request outlined in the application and assessed that unforeseeable, accidental usage had occurred but had been repaired. Mr. Wikstrom moved, and Mr. Mosher seconded, a motion to **recommend an ABATEMENT for 80% excess Water and full excess Sewer usage** of the average annual amount. This amounts to a calculated amount of **\$2,536.29**. The motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.

- f. 41 Main Street. The customers, Gino Ranaldi and Carla Dobosh, were not in attendance. They were seeking an abatement on a recent water and sewer bill for increased usage from a leak associated with a steam boiler. Reportedly, access to one of the units to conduct repairs was delayed. The customer had originally received a high usage notice in October 2022. Repairs were made in November, however, an abatement for the January 2023 bill was also being requested.

The Committee discussed the aspects of the request outlined in the application and assessed that unforeseeable, accidental usage had occurred but had been repaired. Mr. Kelly moved, and Mr. Mosher seconded, a motion to **recommend an ABATEMENT for 50% excess Water and 50% excess Sewer usage** of the

average annual amount for the October 2022 bill only. This amounts to a calculated amount of **\$734.35**. The motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.

- g. 2 Linden Street. The customer, Stuart Peeke, was not in attendance. He was seeking an abatement on a recent water and sewer bill for increased usage from a burst pipe during the February cold snap. No details of the break or confirmation of repairs were provided. A review of the DPW data shows a varied usage over the past year such that confirmation of an actual water loss was not possible.

The Committee discussed the aspects of the request outlined in the application and assessed that unforeseeable, accidental usage may have occurred but confirmation of the size of leak and of subsequent repairs could not be made. Mr. Kelly moved, and Mr. Wikstrom seconded, a motion to **recommend Tabling the request** until further information could be provided. The motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.

Specifically, the Committee would like to see repair receipts or discussion, as well as a history of occupancy over the past six months to assess baseline usage.

- h. 31 Hayes Park. The customer, Amy Dillenbeck, was not in attendance. She was seeking an abatement on a recent water and sewer bill for increased usage from a leaky toilet. Ms. Dillenbeck is reportedly infirmed and on a fixed income.

The Committee discussed the aspects of the request outlined in the application and assessed that unforeseeable, accidental usage had occurred but had been repaired. Mr. Mosher moved, and Mr. Wikstrom seconded, a motion to **recommend an ABATEMENT for 80% excess Water and 80% excess Sewer usage** of the average annual amount. This amounts to a calculated amount of **\$73.08**. The motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.

- i. 43 Main Street. The customer, William Hoyt, was not in attendance. He was seeking an abatement on a recent water and sewer bill for increased usage from a leak associated with a tenant's toilet. Reportedly, access to one of the units to conduct repairs was delayed as the owner could not gain access to the unit. The customer had originally received high usage notices in August, September and October 2022. Repairs were made in February 2023, however, an abatement for the January 2023 bill was also being requested.

The Committee discussed the aspects of the request outlined in the application and assessed that unforeseeable, accidental usage had occurred but had been repaired after six month of notices from DPW. Mr. Kelly moved, and Mr. Wikstrom seconded, a motion to **recommend an ABATEMENT for 50% excess Water and 50% excess Sewer usage** of the average annual amount for the October 2022 bill only. This amounts to a calculated amount of **\$641.93**. The motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.

3. Regular Business

a. Utility Operations

An update to on-going projects, including the Squamscott River siphons, was provided to the Committee.

b. Utility Financial Reports

Mr. Kelly discussed reports that had been previously distributed to the Committee by the Town Finance Department.

4. New Business

A new initiative concerning the utility were brought to the Committee's attention by Mr. Kelly.

The Town has contracted with Underwood Engineers to complete an updated Rate Study as discussed at the last meeting. As part of the analysis, UE has determined that the budget for Fire Hydrant Maintenance (actually, fire protection system maintenance) in the Fire Department budget was woefully low and should be increased to meet American Water Works Association (AWWA) standards and recommendations. Handouts from AWWA and UE indicated that for a system the size of Exeter's, these costs should be in the 15-20% of Water system budget to account for the delta costs of fire protection versus straight water supply.

Mr. Kelly indicated that the Budget allocation for fire hydrants and the fire protection portion of our water tanks has been \$20,000 for over 15 years. Using the above calculations, standards dictate they should be \$500-700,000.

Discussion ensued and generally concluded that the Fire System Maintenance budget should be carried by the General Fund Fire Budget and not the Water ratepayers. The Committee also concluded that the budget should be increased dramatically to get closer to AWWA standards. However, acknowledging that the

potential budget increase could be unpopular with Department heads and voters, the Committee agreed that an \$80,000 increase for FY 2024 to \$100,000 was a good start. Analysis could be conducted in the next six months to determine a reasonable escalation to a number that is more specific to the Town, not a generic “15-20%”.

Thoughts included amortizing the construction costs of all water tanks, pipes, and pumping systems (but not treatment), as these are all part of fire protection services. AWWA and industry standards show that fire flow allocation is 50-60% of water system capacity, so this could be applied to the amortized construction numbers, when available.

These recommendations will be passed along to the Town Manager for review prior to a presentation to the Selectboard as part of the overall Rate Study.

5. Other Business

The Committee was apprised that the additional funding for the Groundwater Source Study was approved at the March town meeting and work would be proceeding this Spring and Summer.

6. Committee Calendar

The Committee tentatively scheduled their next meeting for mid-July due to members schedules over the next few months. The actual date will depend on abatement request volume and members’ time constraints.

Mr. Kelly adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:40 pm.

Respectively submitted,

Bob Kelly
Chair and Recording Secretary
April 13, 2023