

Town of Exeter (NH) Water & Sewer Advisory Committee

Minutes for Meeting of

December 20, 2023

1. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order in the Wheelwright Room at the Town Office Building, 10 Front Street, Exeter, NH by Chairman Bob Kelly at 6:30 pm. Other Committee members present included Mr. Carl Wikstrom and Selectboard representative Ms. Molly Cowan. Committee members Messrs. Alan Mangen and Ben Mosher were unable to attend.

2. Water and Sewer Bill Abatement Requests

Five abatement requests were discussed by the Committee.

- a. 3 Smith Avenue. The customer, with representative Ms. Laura Platt-Lunardo in attendance via Zoom, was seeking an abatement for an excessive water and sewer bill. Reportedly, the water heater tank associated with their boiler in their basement leaked without their knowledge. The leak became steam from the boiler and no water was discharged to the sewer.

The Committee discussed the occurrence details and felt that, even though this usage was the ratepayer's responsibility under the Abatement Policy, portions of it might fall under the "accidental usage" clause due to the fact that the leak occurred in the basement. Mr. Wikstrom moved and Mr. Kelly seconded a motion to approve 80% of the excess water usage and 100% of the excess sewer usage above normal customer usage over the past year as per the Abatement Policy. **ABATEMENT AMOUNT of \$452.90 (141.93 + 310.97) APPROVED** by a vote of 3-0.

- b. 89 Washington Street. The customer, with representative Mr. David Makos in attendance, was seeking an abatement for an excessive water and sewer bill. Mr. Makos indicated that he had filled his pool this summer and was looking for an abatement for the sewer portion of the bill since the pool would/was not emptied into the sewer.

The Committee discussed the occurrence details and noted that the Policy does not currently account for pool filling abatements. Though this usage was the ratepayer's responsibility under the Abatement Policy, Mr. Kelly noted that typically customers will install a deduct meter if they want a sewer abatement for landscaping or pool use. However, in this case, the pool will not be emptied every season, just topped off, which Mr. Makos indicated he is happy to pay for. Mr. Kelly moved, and Ms. Cowan seconded, a motion to approve 100% of the excess sewer usage above normal customer usage over the past year. **ABATEMENT AMOUNT of \$251.33 APPROVED** by a vote of 2-1 with Mr. Wikstrom voting against.

- c. 27 Water Street. The customer, Mr. Jason Martone of The Chocolatier in attendance via Zoom, was seeking an abatement for an excessive water and sewer bill. Reportedly, a seldom used toilet lost a fill hose connection which caused a sizeable loss of water.

The Committee discussed the occurrence details and felt that, even though this usage was the ratepayer's responsibility under the Abatement Policy, portions of it might fall under the "accidental usage" clause due to the fact that the leak occurred in a remote location within the commercial establishment. Mr. Kelly moved and Mr. Wikstrom seconded a motion to approve 80% of the excess water and sewer usage above normal customer usage over the past year as per the Abatement Policy. **ABATEMENT AMOUNT of \$818.57 (297.43 + 521.14) APPROVED** by a vote of 3-0.

- d. 5 Chestnut Street. The customer, Mr. Scott Cerrato not in attendance, was seeking an abatement for an excessive water and sewer bill. Reportedly, after a high water usage notice from the town, the customer repaired a seldom used toilet valve. However, the repair did not take and a plumber had to do another repair causing the high water usage to go into a second billing period.

The Committee discussed the occurrence details and felt that, even though this usage was the ratepayer's responsibility under the Abatement Policy, portions of it might fall under the "accidental usage" clause. Mr. Wikstrom moved and Ms. Cowan seconded a motion to approve 50% of the excess water and sewer usage on the first (August) billing period only (above normal customer usage over the past year as per the Abatement Policy). **ABATEMENT AMOUNT of \$4,040.44 (1,467.53 + 2,572.91) APPROVED** by a vote of 3-0.

- e. 13 Little Pine Lane. The customer, Mr. Jeremy Nadeau not in attendance, was seeking an abatement for an excessive water and sewer bill. Reportedly, a seldom used toilet leaked for a time encompassing two billing periods without being noticed.

The Committee discussed the occurrence details and felt that, even though this usage was the ratepayer's responsibility under the Abatement Policy, portions of it might fall under the "accidental usage" clause due to the fact that the leak occurred in a remote location. Mr. Kelly moved and Mr. Wikstrom seconded a motion to approve 50% of the excess water and sewer usage on the first (February) billing period only (above normal customer usage over the past year as per the Abatement Policy). **ABATEMENT AMOUNT of \$475.99 (173.01 + 302.98) APPROVED** by a vote of 3-0.

3. Regular Business

- a. Utility Operations Report

Mr. Kelly alerted the Committee to a few utility operations items that have occurred over the past three months.

The Webster Ave. Pumping Station, approved for a renovation in 2022, has required some additional work and, unfortunately, costs for labor and materials have risen significantly since that original warrant article. An additional \$884,000 is being sought at the March vote.

The rate study, the draft of which was reviewed by the Committee at their September meeting, was approved by the Selectboard in late September. This included the creation of a new Fire Hydrant Fee section in the General Fund that would allocate funds from the entire town into the Water Fund for the purposes of covering the costs by the Department of producing water to be used for town-side fire flows.

- b. Utility Financial Report

The quarterly financial reports were previously distributed by the Finance Department under a separate email. Mr. Kelly reviewed fund balances and anticipated revenues in 2024.

4. New Business

None at this time.

5. Other Business

- a. Water and Sewer FY 2024 Budget. Mr. Kelly, as chair of the Town Budget Committee's Water and Sewer subcommittees, reviewed the draft budget presented to the Selectboard for FY 2024. The Water Budget was up approximately 10% over 2023 while the Sewer budget is essentially level.

- b. Surface Water Treatment Plant. The DPW originally presented a Warrant Article for \$2.5 million for preliminary and final design of a potential new Surface Water Treatment Plant near the current facility on Portsmouth Avenue. A new plant is required to provide drinking water within new Federal and State guidelines, as well as to supplement our Groundwater Treatment Plant, built in 2015 but not producing as expected.

The Budget Committee reviewed the request and felt that we needed some preliminary work done prior to taking that step. Specifically, facility location, sizing and operational requirements need to be assessed. In addition, the town is also in the midst of conducting pump tests for an additional well to supply the GWTP. The BRC felt that getting those two efforts in sync was a better idea than getting right into preliminary design.

To that end, the BRC recommended a \$500,000 multi-year preliminary assessment phase for consideration in March to the Selectboard.

6. Committee Calendar

The Committee schedule has been changed to the first Wednesday of one month per quarter. The exact dates will be scheduled at the availability of the Committee members. Mr. Kelly adjourned the meeting at approximately 7:45 pm.

Respectively submitted,

Bob Kelly
Recording Secretary pro tem
December 26, 2023