



WATER & SEWER COMMISSION

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Minutes of the Water & Sewer Commission meeting 3/5/2021



Meeting held at Council On Aging, East Freetown, MA

9:00AM

Meeting called to order by Bob Parker

Members present:

Bob Parker; Paul Sadeck; Lee Baumgartner

Staff present:

Steven Chandler; Keven Desmarais

Fall River Water Bills

- Bob Parker and Keven Desmarais met with Terry Sullivan from the City of Fall River when the old meter was still in place.
 - Fall River would do some calculation and then they would discuss what Freetown will pay Fall River.
 - The old meter had not been sending actual reads for many years resulting in estimated bills to the Town of Freetown. FR has known about the faulty meter for years, long before any of the current FW&SC board has been active.
 - Keven Desmarais' recollection of the meeting with Terry Sullivan is that once new meter was installed, we would start at zero from that point on (because they knew their meter had not been reading accurately for many years). Keven does not recall any discussion of Freetown paying anything owed because of their estimated readings.
- Bob wants to meet with Tom Tighe, Terry Sullivan's replacement, to discuss what should be paid. Tom wants Freetown to pay the unbilled usage from a time before new meter was installed in 2019 when FR wasn't charging enough.
- Commissioners discussed that bills had been estimated for many years, going back when Mike Pillarella was working for the Freetown Water Department, and Freetown paid bills sent at the time.
 - Fall River was aware that their meter was not operating property and they didn't do anything [until August 2019].
- Paul Sadeck will not vote to pay any amount that FR claims is due just because their meter was faulty, which they new about, and now they are demanding payment after the fact.
 - The only bills that will be paid are the two that Chandler missed last fall when submitting held invoices from FR to accounting department after approval from fall Town Meeting. Bills held back since February 2019 through September 2020 because FW&SC was waiting for FR to give bleeding credit amount.
- Chandler provides board with document from Kim Fales showing which bills Fall River now wants payment for and the possible options for funding.
 - Discussion of funds in Water & Sewer Enterprise Fund.
- Bob Parker will set up meeting with Tom Tighe.

New Bedford Water Bill

- There is a .06 cent increase per CCU (748 gallons).
- Paul Sadeck states this was not part of the rate study; we may have to make an increase rate for July 1, 2021.
- Keven Desmarais suggests waiting to do anything until we get the rate increase from Fall River.

Warrant Article

- No new articles

Innovation Way

- Discussion of leak that had appeared in winter of 2017/2018.
 - FW&SC had a test done in summer and a pressure test was also conducted, there no leak found. The line has since been turned off because it is not needed at this time.
 - Keven Desmarais suggests the Commissioners come up with a long-term plan in conjunction with the state [MassDOT] since they were responsible for installing the line, so that if at any point [Freetown] needs to use that line for drinking water it can be used.
 - Keven has not seen a leak since. Bob drove by and saw some small icicles under bridge. Keven states there may be some water getting in the sleeve that covers the unused water line and that may be what is causing icicles.
 - The water line on Innovation Way was put in with no approval from the FW&SC who was dependent on the state's engineer and DW White's engineers. After the project began, Freetown asked that sleeves be put in where Innovation Way crosses the old South Main Street so that if Freetown had to do a repair it would be easy. Sleeves were installed as requested.
 - Bob asks Keven if he recalls what year MassDOT has the line put in. He thinks around 2010 but can try to find an exact timeframe. Chandler to remind Keven to reach out to DW White.

Old Filter Site

- Bob Parker asks Keven if there is anything on that site that is worth dismantling and saving.
 - Keven says everything at that filter site was built specifically for that location and anything of value has been taken off and is stored. Everything else is designed to be out the open.
 - Bob will go to site and see if there is anything that needs to be saved.

Budget

- Paul Sadeck makes a motion to submit the budget with the addition of the estimated \$12,000 needed to upgrade equipment on a new line item. Lee Baumgartner 2nd. All in favor. Motion carried.

Sewer Meter Computer Board

- Keven has not yet heard about the board and will call to get an update.

Meter Reading Equipment

- A quote from Ferguson was sent to Keven and he explains who Ferguson is and what each item is on the quote.
 - Ferguson is the supplier of our water meters made by MasterMeter.
 - Our reading equipment is about 10 years old now and we have been having issues reading certain meters and being able to interrogate meters. Keven reached out to Ferguson and the regional manager, Jonathan, from MasterMeter came to Freetown, inspected equipment, and has taken it to see if it can be serviced.
 - It has been determined that the equipment is antiquated technology by MasterMeter and Ferguson standards.
 - Jonathan demonstrated to Keven how a dedicated frequency from the FCC is needed to get all reads and interrogate meters because radio meters operate on such a frequency now. As it is now, any interference from a broadband of frequencies is interfering with the meter signals. Antenna warranted for 2 years and generally get replaced after 3-4 years and we are operating with the original one. When inspecting the antenna there are micro cracks in the casing and wires which has a detrimental affect on our ability to read meters.
 - The new equipment and software would have a dedicated FCC frequency and Jonathan demonstrated how well it works with the meters currently installed which operate on that frequency.
 - Keven suggests setting up a phone call or zoom call to have Jonathan of MasterMeter and Ethan of Ferguson better explain to Commissioners the details for the recommendation to update FW&SC meter reading equipment and why. Keven will give them a couple choices for meeting and let the Commissioners know.
 - Lee Baumgartner summarizes what Keven said and asks if there would be a ROI (return on investment), would [upgrading equipment] save money down the line. Keven states that the equipment we have is antiquated, outdated, and [MasterMeter] will not continue to make the meters we currently have; they will be going from 3G to 4G(?). If Keven cannot get read, we have to contact homeowner to find their meter, take a photo, and email it to the water department in order to process their bill, or, we have to estimate. This gives customers a lack of confidence in the FW&SC. Customers want to know that their meter is accurate and the bill they are paying is for the water they use. Lee says the ROI is more efficiency and accuracy.
 - Paul Sadeck asks where the money will come from. Keven states that there may be some room to reduce some the initial estimated cost and Jonathan unofficially agreed.
 - Paul states that paying for this would happen by creating a separate line item in the budget for the amount needed.
 - Paul asks about the read gun for the old-style meters and Keven says they are not making that type of touchpad read equipment any longer. They were originally made to read old Neptune meters and the industry standard is to move away from this style and produce only radio read style meters. Currently we have a loaner gun.

Staffing

- Bob Parker would like Commissioners to start thinking about making a plan for the retirement of Keven Desmarais which is expected in 2-3 years.
 - Lee Baumgartner states the first thing is to determine what the qualifications the candidate should have. The FW&SC spends a large amount of money for an outside company to do the things we cannot do.
 - Chandler explains that WhiteWater performs a great deal of tasks that the department is not able to perform.
 - Paul Sadeck says that we should certainly discuss this with Keven at the next meeting.
- Discussion of the need for more staffing:
 - Peter Jankowski, Town Administrator, says that there should be another member of staff with Keven when he goes out to work in a roadway.
 - What happens if Keven Desmarais is out of work on medical leave, who does his job? Chandler states that he would call WhiteWater since they are contracted operators for the FW&SC.

Abatement

- Chandler presented an abatement in the amount of \$13.69 from January 2021 which was not presented at the last meeting. Paul Sadeck makes a motion to abate. Lee Baumgartner 2nd. All in favor. Motion carried.

Approve Minutes

- Minutes from February 11, 2021
 - Lee Baumgartner makes a motion to approve minutes. Paul Sadeck 2nd. All in favor. Motion carried.

No bills to sign this week.

Lee Baumgartner motion to adjourn at 10:06AM. Paul Sadeck 2nd. All in favor. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Steven Chandler
Senior Clerk
Freetown Water & Sewer Commission