

BOARD OF WATER COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING OF MARCH 20, 2023

REGULAR MEETING: The regular meeting of the Board of Water Commissioners was held at the 438 Granby Road on Monday, March 20, 2023. Chairman Brian S. McClaflin called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

ATTENDANCE:

Chairman	Brian S. McClaflin
Clerk	R. Scott Williams (Absent)
Associate Member	William L. Schenker
Superintendent	Jeffrey A. Cyr
Office Manager	Jennifer Fernandes
Foreman	Jeffrey Levreault
Billing Clerk	Kari Scytkowski
Resident	Julie Gentile
Resident	Eden Duperier
Resident	Al Zuffoletti

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: William L. Schenker made a motion to approve the minutes of February 16, 2023. This motion was seconded by Brian S. McClaflin. Motion Carried.

FY24 BUDGET DISCUSSION AND VOTE: Jeff Cyr presented the budget for FY24 on the overhead projector. (See Note 1) Jeff noted the only 2 budget items that were not decided on at the last meeting were the raises for employees and the Treasurer's salary. Jeff provided the Board a summary of the Clerk/Treasurer's duties at the last meeting for their review. Jeff received an email from the Clerk/Treasurer that she is proposing a 5% raise for her office. Jeff noted that if the Board decides to change paying the Clerk/Treasurer's office to a flat fee annually by Water it may help to eliminate the dissention between the departments. Brian McClaflin proposed changing the current 75/25 split to a flat fee for the Clerk/Treasurers' office. Kari Scytkowski suggested changing the line-item name to Clerk/Treasurer or Admin salary office, so to take the person out of it, and it's not perceived as one person if there are several people in that office helping to do the job. Brian said that is definitely something to think and talk about. Resident Pauline McClaflin asked is there a reason why the Clerk/Treasurer's office would be asking for a 5% raise, was there stellar service? Pauline asked why would that office be getting 5% when everyone else is getting 2 or 3%. Brian responded that is a great question, and it was contentious last year as water gave 2% raise to employees including that office, but then water was told we had to accept a 4% raise for that office even though water had already voted on the budget. Brian continued that Mr. Williams last year was adamant not to give anyone a raise even the Clerk/Treasurer's office, but water was just forced to give 4% and that is why he brought up at the last meeting discussing changing the rate for the Clerk/Treasurer to a flat rate to avoid tensions and having this happen again. The account for the Clerk/Treasurer will be overdrawn due to the fact that the amount of \$16,954.00 was a specific line item in the water budget. This line item will be overdrawn because of this. Brian suggested water paying a flat fee for the Clerk/Treasurer's office annually and if Prudential wants to give a 4% or 5% raise it won't affect us being able to vote on

the Water budget. Brian suggested maybe changing the name of the line item and paying the Clerk/Treasurer \$17,500 flat fee. Brian said prior to 2018 the share was always \$10,000 a year for the Clerk/Treasurer's office. Jeff Cyr said back when the change was made in 2018 from a flat rate to 25% the duties of the Treasurer's office were changing and the water department was given a sheet of the duties the Clerk/Treasurer was doing showing that the duties were expanding. The Clerk/Treasurer's office was scanning checks to deposit all the water payments electronically into the bank instead of the water department physically bringing deposits to the bank. That has since changed and we now have reverted back to the water department bringing deposits to the bank. Pauline then asked what exactly does the Clerk/Treasurer do for the water department now? Pauline knows that there are warrants that have to be signed and the office cuts checks and mailed. Jennifer Fernandes said that this is one of her duties, the warrant to pay bills is generated at the water dept., it is sent down to that office, checks are printed and mailed and a copy of the warrant is filed at that office. Payroll is also processed and submitted along with the annual meeting materials and report. The Treasurer is also responsible for entering the budgets for Water into the accounting system along with the making sure the Water investments (stabilization accounts) are sent to Bartholomew once it is voted on by the people at the annual meeting. Pauline said from what she understands of the Massachusetts General Law Clerk/Treasurers office, once a warrant has been signed and processed it clearly stated the Clerk/Treasurer has to make that payment in a timely fashion to avoid late fees. Pauline asked if this is happening on a steadfast basis or are there times when payments aren't being made and the water is incurring fees, which means we the tax payers are paying? Jeff replied that we have had fees with the credit card, Gulf and Waste Management. Jeff can't say its on a regular basis but it has happened. Pauline asked if the Clerk/Treasurer is getting these bills in time? Jeff responded that the Clerk/Treasurer is having that issue with the credit card bill receiving the invoice via snail mail. Jeff has reached out to some of our vendors to get bills via email to avoid having to pay bills late and suggested that to the Clerk/Treasurer. Pauline responded technically from what she has read the only thing that the Treasurer can deny, once a warrant is signed, is something they think is fraudulent. It can then be brought to the attention of one of the Boards. Jeff responded that water has had concerns about that because the Water Communications account has had money taken out by the Clerk/Treasurer on a regular basis and it has never been approved by the Board or him. Jeff has heard that there was another \$229 taken out recently. Brian said that this is happening because of the T-Mobile situation and noticed a double payment taken out of communication account. Brian stated that only about half of the phones are being used and they are splitting up the bills 3 ways and we are all being charged for the extra phones that are not even being used. Brian said we are still getting charged for T-Mobile phones that the Board never accepted and have never used and we are paying our Verizon phones and the checks are not being mailed, so we've almost been shut off a few times, which is why he has authorized to pay the bill via the credit card, because we can't lose those phones for emergencies and water testing. Brian said the Fire Dept is not even using all the phones they are paying for. Eden asked just for historical knowledge, that office does 75/25 percent of the work, 75% down there and 25% for water per day? Jeff responded that it is not necessarily for per day it is overall the duties performed for the water is about 25%. Bill said he was part of the decision to

change to 25% for Treasurer and at the time it seemed like a fair amount but looking at things now a flat rate of \$17,500 is roughly 25% and he is all for the flat rate with no percentage increases, but that amount can be revised at any time. Bill feels that with a change to a flat rate for the Clerk/Treasurer it makes it very clean, so there are no confusions with percentage increases. Eden suggested changing the wording on the line item for the budget to Office of the Clerk/Treasurer, as that office could be one person or several people doing the duties.

After a brief discussion, William Schenker made a motion to change the wording in the Water budget from Treasurer's Salary to Office of Clerk/Treasurer. This motion was seconded by Brian S. McClaflin.

Motion Carried by a 2-2 vote.

William Schenker made a motion to change the 25% paid annually out of the Water budget for the Office of Clerk/Treasurer aka Treasurer's Salary to a flat amount of \$17,500 per year. This motion was seconded by Brian S. McClaflin.

Motion Carried by a 2-2 vote.

After continued discussion about employee raises, William Schenker made a motion to give the Water Department employees a 3% raise. This motion was seconded by Brian S. McClaflin.

Motion Carried by a 2-2 vote

William Schenker made a motion to approved the FY 23/24 Budget as presented with the changes in a flat amount annually of \$17,500 for the Office of Clerk/Treasurer and a 3% raise for water employees. This motion was seconded by Brian S. McClaflin.

Motion Carried by a 2-2 vote.

WATER RATE DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE VOTE:

Jeff Cyr opened up the discussion of raising the water rates to plan for several projects and improvements in the future. Bill Schenker would like very much to start to sock away funds for the pipeline and the water main projects. Jeff Cyr reminded the Board that one water tank will need to be painted within the next 3-5 years, but we will be able to get a zero percent loan from the MWRA, if the water rates are increased, monies can be put toward paying those loans. Jeff laid out a capital plan at the last meeting regarding the proposed timeline to address some significant expenditures. We also only have about \$106,000 in the New Water Mains Account and \$100,000 left in the Newton St. Account to use for water main projects. Jeff communicated with Police Chief, Gundersen regarding a possible police detail that we will probably need on Pittroff Avenue at a cost of \$58/hr., so that is going to add to the costs significantly. Jeff said we will be okay for this fiscal year with funds for water main projects. Bill would like to see different percentage rates and how much our rate would go up and how we would infuse our budget and projects. Resident Eden Duperier asked if the public was upset when water went up on rates last time. Jeff Cyr said in the past we have given the rate payers a notice three months in advance, sent in their water bills with explanation and that has helped. Jeff noted that surrounding communities are increasing rates 20 percent this year and the following year. Resident Julie Gentile said as a resident she used a lot of water one summer and received a phone call from the water department to see if everything was okay and to make her aware of it. Julie said there is still an awareness by the water department to the residents about overuse and she appreciates it as a consumer. Julie continued to say that on the business side of things there is so much done in house at the water department and a lot of people don't realize how much money they are saving the

consumers. Her husband works for Springfield DPW and they don't get half of the labor done as they do here along with the repairs on the vehicles the guys do in house to save money. Is she going to be upset with her water rate going up a little bit knowing that she is taken care of and protected in every possible way, no she is going to understand. Resident Pauline McClafin stated she too has been notified when usage was very high. Bill stated he would still like to talk to the Auditor before making a decision on a water rate increase. The Board will table deciding on raising rates.

VERIZON WIRELESS ON ALVORD ST. TANK:

Jeff Cyr attended the last Prudential meeting when Verizon Wireless called in to negotiate the lease. Verizon is paying us \$2909.50 a month for the Alvord Street tank. The Prudential board was on with a gentleman with Verizon and they were looking to negotiate that monthly amount. Jeff was asked by Prudential to go back to the water Chair and mention the Prudential board is looking to waive the 10% increase for the next five-year increment following the expiration of the current term ending December 2023. Jeff is recommending the Board not waive the increase as it cuts into what the water department is trying to do as far as keeping the water tanks up. Brian McClafin said prior to this meeting he was at a meeting where the Verizon rep was trying to negotiate the amount down. Brian does not think that we should go down, but doesn't want to lose the money. Jeff stated that in our contract with them if they would have to pay for the removal of their equipment and it would cost them close to a million dollars to do this, so they most likely will not lose them as Town of South Hadley limits where cell towers are placed. Verizon just upgraded their equipment and added fiber optics to the Industrial Drive tank and is planning an upgrade at the Alvord St. site in the spring. (See Note 2). Jeff mentioned the site is favorable due to its proximity to Rte. 5 and 91 Brian would advise the Prudential not to sign anything without the Water Boards input. Brian McClafin said they are going to table Verizon Wireless until he can get with the Prudential Board.

LEAPING WELLS DAM SAFETY REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTATION:

Jeff Cyr referenced a leaping wells dam safety report that he previously gave the Board. The water maintenance crew tackled some of the recommendations in their down time, which have been required for some time. One of the requirements being to clear the brush and trees that are on the slop of the North West side of Rt. 202 embankment by the old Christmas Shop now Delaney's Market establish and maintain standard grass and install erosion control blankets on steep slops. The maintenance crew went out and removed the brush and trees and put down wood chips. On February 17th someone called the Conservation Commissioner mentioning the water department was doing work within the wet lands of the leaping wells stream. Jeff met with Rebecca Cornell and she was concerned we were out there without contacting her first. Jeff noted that she immediately required we install silt fence and straw waddles, which was done immediately. Rebecca Cornell at that time contemplated asking Jeff to file a notice of intent, which is document produced by a wetland specialist consulting engineer. Jeff contacted Tony DeCruz at Tighe and Bond regarding the NOI and was told it would cost around \$7000-\$8000. Jeff informed Rebecca Cornell that back in 2014 Jeff filed out a notice of intent but never submitted to Janice Stone at the

time. Rebecca's response (See Note 3) was that we were no longer required to file a notice of intent. In addition to the work we have already done, we need to install erosion control blankets with grass seed in in them on the embankment to stabilize it and we will be required to maintain it once a year. In the Spring the maintenance crew will do the work required and will possibly put down a wild flower mix to enhance the look. Jeff thanked Rebecca Cornell for her cooperation and showed pictures from the report.

**PETITION TO CHANGE
WATER & PRUDENTIAL
BOARD DUTIES:**

William Schenker thanked resident Julie Gentile in her help to circulate the Petition. Julie thanked Bill for doing the work he did with the Petition. William helped to create the petition along with Attorney Mark Beauregard to better define the roles of the Water Board and Prudential Board. Bill noted that during the joint meeting with Prudential at the Senior Center District Attorney Brendan Hughes and there was talk and suggestion of a Memorandum of Agreement between Boards to help with the dissention and defining both Boards responsibilities. Well, that memorandum was never entertained or talked about again, so Bill contacted Attorney Beauregard for legal help with the Petition. The Petition states that the Water Board takes care of the Water Department and all that it entails and the Prudential Committee takes care of the running of the Fire Department and all it entails. Bill noted that he turned the petition it into the Clerk/Treasurer of the district on February 21st and had it stamped received and Bill hasn't heard a word since. Bill feels that this gives the Prudential Committee a chance to be cooperative and it will be out to the public to decide one way or the other and he feels the public has a right to vote. Bill feels the this will help to avoid any future problems between the Water Board and Prudential Committee. We are one district but with 2 entities and he doesn't pretend to tell the Fire Chief how to run the Fire Department and the Water is our problem. It is up the people to decide. We don't interfere with them and they shouldn't interfere with us. Bill is hoping some people go to the meeting this year and vote. He is hoping people leave the personalities of people out of it and vote so each entity can run effectively. He feels that we should be responsible and be held accountable for the Water Department and the Prudential should be responsible and held accountable for the Fire Department. Bill is hoping the Prudential Board puts this petition on the ballot otherwise it will make them look bad.

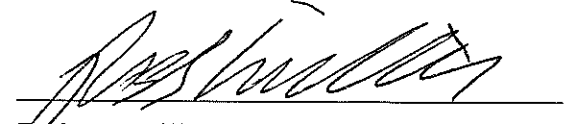
MOTION TO ADJOURN:

William L. Schenker made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Brian S. McClafin. Motion carried

ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting adjourned at 6:23 p.m.

BOARD OF WATER COMMISSIONERS


R. Scott Williams, Clerk