

CITY OF NORTHAMPTON, MA
PUBLIC WORKS COMMISSION MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

Called to order at 5:30 p.m. in the Public Works office building by Mr. Mike Parsons.

Mr. Parsons noted that the meeting was being recorded by NCTV.

PUBLIC COMMENT - There was no public comment.

FOR APPROVAL

Item #1: On a Motion made and seconded, the Commission VOTED to APPROVE the minutes of the January 13, 2016, Public Works Commission Meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Item #1: Set Date for a Hearing to View and Discuss the Private Way Status of Bottums Road –Mr. Parsons said that this item has been referred to the Commission by the City Council. Mr. Laurila noted he did a little bit of research and said the Board of Public Works had previously voted to allow Bottums Road to become a public way. He said that the department already did a survey plan and sent it back to the City Council who did not approve it as a public way. He mentioned that there has been another petition filed to make it a public way and they have asked City Council to reconsider their decision. He said since the process is the same for the Commission as it was for the Board of Public Works, the Commission needs to have a hearing at the site of the request and walk the private way and then come back to the meeting to make a decision. He said we have to notify the abutters with certified letters so there is an amount of time it will take to get the administrative work done for this process so the department needs at least a few weeks. Mr. Parsons noted that he could not make a meeting on the 9th or 16th of March and asked if we could have the hearing and commission meeting on March 23, 2016. The Commission set the date for the Public Hearing for March 23, 2016, at 5:00 p.m. Mr. Parsons said he had some questions as to where there was a turnout for the vehicles to turn around in and it was originally suppose to be on the Ksieniwick property but they objected to it so the turnaround was on a different property but the map that was given to the Commission shows the turn on the old property. Mr. Laurila said the map that was given to them is the old version and the turnaround is closer to Clement Street. Mr. Parsons said the City does not want to go to the end of Bottums Road and wants to be closer to the Clement end but the Planning Board has rejected this public way. Ms. Foxmyn asked if there was a policy for accepting private ways and Ms. Schmidt noted Mr. Parsons came up with a matrix for the Commission to follow, however, many times there were public roads similar to a private way and the Commission felt they should accept them. She noted it was a struggle for the Commission over the years they worked on this project.

OLD BUSINESS

Item #1: **Water and Sewer Rate Study** – Mr. Parsons said that the Mayor commissioned a consultant to look at the way the city sets water and sewer rates for the city and Mr. Laurila forwarded the study to the Commission for review. Mr. Laurila said the idea was to look at various options for setting water and sewer rates. He said he would walk through some of the slides and the conclusions that came out of the study for the Commission. He mentioned there was a kickoff meeting to discuss what the objectives

and goals were for the study and the results were to provide water conservation, provide assistance to economically disadvantaged customers, improving equity among customer types and enhancing revenue stability. He stated there are a lot of major Waste Water Treatment Projects coming up that need to be funded on the capital side. They reviewed our current rate structure which is the same rate for everyone in the city, regardless of the amount of water they use. He noted we charge a very small fixed cost based on meter size, usually \$1.00 or \$1.25 per quarter for most residents. He also said the city does not charge anything for fire protection for a commercial system. He showed the Commission the current rate structure, which is \$5.58 per 100 cubic feet for water, \$6.08 per 100 cubic feet for sewer. Sewer is based on the water usage charged at 100% of the usage. He said we have a very small number of industrial meters in the city, around 5, that have a separate sewer meter, because they have a process that significantly reduces the discharge into the sewer, such as Coke, so they meter the discharge.

He went on to the next slides which show various rate options such as seasonal rates, tiered water rates, fixed charges, second meter policy, sewer rate setting methodology, and private fire protection charges. He said these options were discussed in meetings and he would go over them briefly. He said seasonal rates are intended to drive up water conservation in the summer months when the usage is higher. The consultant found that this would be very difficult to implement because we have a quarterly billing system and not a monthly system of billing. He then discussed tiered water rates, which is what they decided would work, which is based on the more water you use, the higher the rate. He said there is a lot of consideration that goes into a tiered system so if your establishing a tiered rate, you're being fair to people and not penalizing one class of water user. Fixed charges also came out of the recommendation because when you own and operate a water system, the vast majority of costs are fixed but currently we only gather 1/2 of a percent from fixed charges on meters. The consultant thought it made much more sense to try to get the revenue from a fixed charge versus a charge that was based on the amount of water used. He said the intent of the effect of this is to stabilize our revenues, especially after implementing water conservation efforts which produces less water use. He mentioned there was a discussion of having second meters for irrigation for people that want to have a way of measuring water that is not going down the sewer. He said there was an administrative effort and additional billing cost, cost for installing the meter and backflow issues associated with managing second meters which was then discarded as an option. But this issue was addressed in sewer rate setting methodology which establishes a basis for billing sewer which is currently at 100% of water usage, to 80% of water usage which will address the water that does not go down the sewer. Mr. Parsons mentioned that another issue regarding billing residents at 100% of water use is that certain industrial users were not paying the same rate because they measured their sewer usage, there was an equity issue. Mr. Laurila then discussed the last option which was fire protection charges, which are fixed fees based on the way we maintain our water system. He said a lot of this is based on fire protection needs. He noted that water storage and pipe size for delivery of water is all based on fire protection needs, which is an increased cost of capital to build them.

Mr. Laurila then explained the tiers the consultants came up with which are customers with a 1" meter or smaller which are most residential homes, have a 0-16 CCF at \$4.73 and over 16CCF at \$6.21 per CCF.

Customers with meter larger than 1" are charged \$6.09 CCF.

Quarterly Fixed Charges are:

5/8" meter = \$12.64, 3/4" meter = \$18.96, 1" meter = \$31.59, 1.5" meter = \$63.17,

2" meter = \$101.07, 3" meter = \$189.51, 4" = \$315.85, 6" = \$631.69, 8" meter = \$1,010.69.

These charges account for 8% of the revenue needs for the budget.

Mr. Laurila said that Fire Protection Charges will generate approximately \$100,000.00 annually and the charges are as follows:

2" fire line = \$10.00, 3" fire line = \$25.00, 4" fire line = \$60.00, 6" fire line = \$170.00, 8" fire line = \$360.00, and 10" fire line = \$645.00 quarterly. He noted there are only a small amount of fire protection lines for residents so they decided not to charge them as the Fire Department has been promoting fire protection lines for residents.

Mr. Laurila then spoke about an affordability plan for residents. He noted the Board of Public Works had discussed this in the past but never implemented a plan. He said it made sense for those residents who are already eligible for relief on taxes with the city, would become eligible for exemption on their fixed charge. They would still have to pay for water and sewer usage but the fixed fee would be waived. He also noted we do the same thing for the current stormwater fee.

He then discussed the impacts for residents for the new fees and based on water usage currently they pay approximately \$68 per quarter and these new fees would generate \$69 per quarter for an increase of under \$2.00 per quarter. Mr. Laurila stated he liked the tier system and the affordability plan for residents but it will be a change.

He went on to discuss the sewer fees noting that the average bill will go down 77cents per quarter. They will be charged \$7.52 per CCF based on 80% of the water usage.

Mr. Laurila mentioned the next step is to go before the City Council after the Mayor looks at all of the recommendations and the consultant will assist the City in presenting the changes. Also the city wants to have a calculator on the web site so you could enter your water usage and it would show your current bill and future bill under the new system.

Mr. Hartwell asked if these rates would support the infrastructure needs for the future especially the capital projects and was told that the capital projects were all put into the model and the rates should support these needs.

*Item #2: **Role of Public Works Commission*** – Ms. Foxmyn stated she wondered how the expertise of the Commission could be used better for the actual decision making within the city and Mr. Parsons said there use to be a committee with City Council where Public Works issues were discussed prior to the administrative changes within the City but we no longer have that committee. Mr. Parsons stated he did have a brief discussion with the Mayor and it is on his mind as to how this Commission will make sense going forward. Ms. Schmidt mentioned in past years the Board would meet about budget issues and have tutorials on the proposed budgets so there was a discussion about rate increases and how capital projects could fit into the budget without impacting the residents with large increases but she was impressed with the consultants who took the residents into consideration in their proposal and with the affordability plan. Mr. Parsons said he wants to be on the Commission but he also wants to be doing something significant and not just receiving updates every month. Mr. Laurila stated the Commission was established by the Mayor so what the Commission does or doesn't do, has to do with what the Mayor wants the Commission to do. He said his own feeling is that when the Board was

established, he was happy to have seven other very smart people to look at everything the department was doing and give good input, which he appreciated. He said now he is just communicating with the Commission as to what we are doing after the fact and before it was communicating prior to anything being done. Mr. Parsons said it is clear that the authority the Board use to have has gone to the City Council and the Mayor.

Ms. Adams left this meeting at the end of this item.

INFORMATIONAL

Item #1: **Contract Update** – Mr. Laurila reviewed the contracts that have been signed since the last Commission meeting.

LIST OF CONTRACTS JANUARY

CONTRACT NAME	AMOUNT	VENDOR	BUDGET
WWTP Chemical Accident Prevention Services CO#1	\$8,400.00	Tighe & Bond	Sewer Enterprise
Upper Roberts Meadow Dam Removal Design CO#5	\$20,250.00	GZA GeoEnvironmental	Water Enterprise
Land Purchases DeLano Property (Watershed)	\$90,000.00	DeLano	Water Enterprise
Land Purchase Martiniano Property (Watershed)	\$90,000.00	Martiniano	Water Enterprise
Industrial Park Interceptor Replacement Design CO#4	0.00	Kleinfelder	(Time Extension)
Pulaski Park Phase I Construction CO#3	\$1,354.00	Mountain View Landscapes	Pulaski Park
Red Pine Stands 21 & 25 (Time Extension)	0.00	Cotton Tree Services	(Time Extension)
WWTP electrical Upgrades	\$35,958.00	Amp Electrical	Sewer Enterprise
Audubon Road Reconstruction Design	\$126,750.00	Tighe & Bond	
State Vehicles – FY16 Ford 350S (5)	\$231,740.00	MHQ	Sewer, Stormwater, Water Enterprise (Borrow \$46,348)
State Vehicles – FY16 Ford 550S (3)	\$224,429.00	MHQ	Vehicle Replacement Borrowing
State Vehicles – FY16 Ford Transit Vans (2)	\$47,668.00	MHQ	Water & Sewer Enterprise

Iron Worker 140 Ton	\$42,500.00	Airgas USA	
Hinckley Street Reconstruction GeoTechnical Engineering	\$42,200.00	Kleinfelder	Chapter 90
Bliss Street Water Main Replacement Resident Services co1	\$10,700.00	Robert Mellstrom	Water Enterprise
King Street Brook ANRAD (Abbreviated Notice of Resource Area Delineation)	\$11,700.00	CDM Smith	

Item #2: Compost Update – Mr. Laurila TABLED this item until the next meeting.

Item #3: Bridge Street Cemetery Update – Mr. Laurila stated he received a draft preservation plan for the Bridge Street Cemetery which was posted online this week and tomorrow evening there will be a public forum at the Senior Center where Martha Lyon will present her recommendations and get some input from residents. He said the plan outlines priorities for projects and funding needs.

The Meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Present and voting were David Shearer, Rosemary Schmidt, Wendy Foxmyn, M.J. Adams, Mike Parsons and Gary Hartwell. Pat Goggins was absent. Also present were B.J. Nubile, Office Manager, James Laurila, Acting DPW Director and City Engineer.