

Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Water Commissioners
Monday, December 9, 2013
North Brookfield Water Treatment Facility
14 Bell Road
North Brookfield, MA 01535

Present: James Kularski, Tim Nason, John Thomasian, Stephen Jones –Water Superintendent
and Shiela LeBlanc – Recording Secretary

Absent: None

Guests: Susan Caron – 86 Ward Street

Meeting opened: 6:00PM

1. Mr. Kularski made and Mr. Thomasian seconded a motion to approve the minutes of the November 4th, 2013 meeting as written. So voted.
2. **Sue Caron – 86 Ward Street** – Mrs. Caron was present to ask if the Board would consider waiving the turn on fee from the water shut off in October.

She explained that she mailed two checks to the Town Collector, one for her mother's water and sewer bills and one for her own water and sewer bills. Her mother's check was deposited and her check was returned to her stating she needed a bank check. She admits that both were late but she does not understand why they accepted her mother's check and not hers. She had signed both checks and has lived in North Brookfield all her life.

She explained that she is a school teacher and has only one day a week to pay her bills. When she went to pay her water bill on line she messed up her password and was locked out of her bank account and where it was a Saturday she had to wait until Monday to get it reset. She submitted her payment through the bank on Monday night and the water was shut off the next day. When she went to the Tax Office to clear this matter up she was told she needed to pay by cash or bank check. She was referred to the Water Department and spoke with Mr. Jones who told her that she could pay by credit card at the Tax Office. When she returned to the Tax Office they told her there were fees for use of the card and also an additional \$100.00 turn on fee added to her account. She proceeded to pay this entire amount at that time and had her water turned back on that night. She requested that the Board consider a waiver of her turn on fee.

Mr. Thomasian made and Mr. Kularski seconded a motion to waive the \$100.00 turn on fee for Caron – 86 Ward Street. So voted.

3. **Correspondence – Vinny Gianfriddo – The Board reviewed the note received from Mr. Gianfriddo but took no action on it.**
4. **Leak Detection** - The leak at 10 Ward Street has been repaired. Once again it turned out that there were leaks on both sides of the curb stop so we paid half of the bill. The largest of the leaks by far was on the homeowner's side.

Mr. Jones looked into Mr. Kularski's idea of calling the leak at 136 Ward Street a cross connection violation. No one he spoke to had ever thought about that or heard of it. Due to this we decided to write a letter to the occupants of this address telling them that the water would be turned off on April 1 if the leak had not been repaired before this date. This letter will be the only notice and the water will not be turned on again until the leak is fixed. Usually we turn it on when they hire a contractor but they hired one this fall to get us to turn it back on and then fired him before the work started. We cannot turn it off now due to the cold weather so the leak will run all winter.

This past November ended up being the lowest non February month for total water pumped since the treatment plant went on line. We pumped 7,107,000 gallons for November, approximately 1 million gallons less than last year. Mr. Jones attributes this to the leaks that have been repaired over the past couple of months.

5. **Superintendent Retirement** - We have been able to complete the FY2015 budget using the decisions made by the board regarding the new water superintendent. One thing that we hadn't discussed was exactly how to pay the new superintendent for the 3 month training period. Do we pay hourly or salary? If we are going to pay hourly then we have to add money into the overtime line item account in the budget. If we do pay overtime, we should use hourly rate that Mr. Jones last was paid to be able to add money into the overtime line item without raising the total budget figure. If we pay salary we don't have to change anything. If we pay salary though, do we go with a 6 month contract that would cover the probationary period or a 3 year contract like the one Mr. Jones currently has. The final decision on this belongs to the Board of Selectmen but they will want the recommendation of the Board of Water Commissioners.

The Board agreed that we should keep it salary and look for a 6-month contract to cover through the probationary period.

Mr. Jones recommended that we make a date to meet with the Selectmen to discuss this and to discuss his contract which will be up at the end of this fiscal year. The Board agreed to send a request to meet with the Board of Selectmen on January 14th and if not then January 28th.

Mrs. LeBlanc questioned the legality of having two contracted Water Superintendents and how that would work. She also pointed out that this may have to be in executive session.

Mr. Jones explained to the Board that this is a complicated issue. We have not thought of everything and it seems that something new comes up every day.

6. **Preliminary 2015 Budget Request** – The Commissioners received a rough draft of the FY 2015 budget. The Board of Selectmen has asked us to plan a level funded budget with no raises.

As discussed, we have included money to hire a new superintendent in March of 2015, 3 months before Mr. Jones leaves. This includes the salary and benefits for the new superintendent. Also included in this money is the sick day buy back and vacation pay that Mr. Jones will be due. The total for this is \$51,658, which will be funded by requesting a transfer from the retained earnings account.

Also in this budget is funding for a new computer for the SCADA system and an update on the SCADA operating system. The computer we are using now is 6 years old. We did replace the hard drives after 3 years as was suggested by LCS, our SCADA I.T. contractor. They had also recommended replacing the computer itself after 3 years. Mr. Jones has received an estimated quote from LCS and has budgeted \$9,000 for this work to be done.

We have also budgeted to buy a smart phone for the superintendent with a data plan. Mr. Jones feels it is time to do this as there is lots of information on a smart phone that a water superintendent can use to do the job, including the Ping alert system that has replaced the reverse 911 system that the Sheriff's office used to have. Mrs. LeBlanc has tried to work out a way to combine the sewer and water cell phone plans that will make the additional cost for us much less. Mrs. LeBlanc explained that by purchasing a smart phone for use by the Water Superintendent we will need to increase our line item budget for the cell phone by \$360.00 to cover the cost of a data plan. This data plan is \$30.00 per month. If we combine with the sewer into one cell phone plan we could potentially see a savings of \$240.00 of this data plan. We would have the plan in our name and pay the entire bill then reduce our yearly sewer fee by that amount as we have done with their share of the static IP address. The problem is that now the sewer is looking to change the sewer superintendent's phone again and this may change everything. What we currently have budgeted in our Phone Expense will cover the full costs of adding this smart phone for the Superintendent either way.

Mr. Kularski asked if this would be another 2 year contract with AT&T. His son currently has a smart phone that he pays \$45.00 a month for unlimited text, voice and data. Mrs. LeBlanc noted that she believes that is a pay as you go phone and we would not be able to do this as we need to be invoiced in order to pay for the fee each month. Mr. Jones noted that the costs of the smart phone would only be \$49.99 if we upgrade through AT&T. The phone that Mr. Kularski's son uses cost quite a bit more.

The Board was in agreement to purchase the smartphone for the Superintendent.

Mr. Jones noted that he cut the system improvement account by \$2,030.00. It is now at \$23,652.00. This amount of money is usually enough to repair all main breaks; system leaks,

and replace broken hydrants. Once again we have added nothing for proactive work on the distribution system since there is no extra money unless we raise the user fees or borrow. Since the fees are already high we have not proposed to raise them at all this year.

We have increased the amount of money we use to service our vehicles. Our F350 will be 14 years old and the F150 will be 10 years old when this budget begins. Both vehicles are in good shape but we know that more repairs will be coming. At this point it is still cheaper than buying a new vehicle.

We have lowered the amount needed for chemicals by \$1,400.00 due to the lowering amount of total water we treat. After we sent out the budget to the Board we found out the new chlorine state bid price is much lower than we had been paying so Mr. Jones has been able to lower the chemical line item by another \$1,600.00 for a total of \$3,000.00. This may go down again when we get the state bid price for sodium hydroxide. We have also lowered electricity, heating fuel, and testing and research by small amounts.

Our total budget is at \$925,581.00 which is an increase of \$39,390.00 from last year. The actual increase is the \$51,658.00 as was mentioned earlier but it doesn't show up that way because the MWPAT amounts have changed. Otherwise our total budget is the same as last year. Our operating budget minus the debt and superintendent line items is up by \$2,836.00 an increase of .6%. The amount we are budgeting for user fees is down \$500.00 or .07%.

Mr. Jones noted that this budget is due to the Finance Committee and Selectmen in early February.

7. **MIIA Grant** - We applied for and have received another MIIA grant. MIIA is the non-profit insurance arm of the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA), insuring over 400 cities, towns, and other public entities in Massachusetts. Over the years we have applied for 5 grants and have received 4 of them. These grants paid for our confined space safety equipment and this year paid for two (2) lockout tag out stations for the (2) two buildings we work at. These two stations are worth a total of \$1,278.00. We have the stations and are planning on mounting them soon.
8. **Tree Cutting in Watershed** - During the last meeting Mr. Jones mentioned in New Business that someone had been cutting trees alongside the North Brook Canal and on town property. We sent a letter to the Conservation Commission because the tree cutting was occurring within the 200' Rivers Protection Act area. He received an email from board member Ann Hicks today saying they are going to discuss the situation at their meeting tomorrow night. Mr. Jones plans on attending this meeting at 7:00 at the library. This issue is second on the agenda. We also copied the Board of Selectmen on this notice due to some of the cutting occurring on town land. Board of Selectmen, Chairman, Mary Walter and Mr. Jones visited the area and we both agreed it would be best if the area was posted so people would know it was town land. She suggested the Water Commissioners write a letter to the Selectmen asking to post this land with a sign that reads "No trespassing per order of Board of Selectmen". She mentioned that she had spoken to landowner James Mendala and that he said it wasn't him that was cutting the trees.

The Board did agree to send a request to post a sign as noted above. They asked that Mr. Jones get prices for signs for the next meeting.

Mr. Jones noted that he and Andy Lalashius have also posted a Drinking Water sign in this area. We have seen action in this area before. This is a handy area for people to dump trash as has happened in the past. Tree cutting was done in this area two years ago and the Conservation Commission sent a cease and desists to landowner James Mendala.

Mr. Thomasian noted that the Conservation can send another cease and desist order but the D.E.P. can put more teeth into it if this is continuing to happen. They can choose to fine the land owner if necessary.

9. **Watershed Inspection by D.E.P.** - Every three years the Department of Environmental Protection does a watershed inspection. DEP Source Water Specialist Kathy Romero came out from DEP Boston and we discussed our programs for geese and beavers, the repair of the Horse Pond Dam, the educational information we sent out to residents in the watershed last year, the letters that we sent to various town departments in New Braintree asking them to let us know if they knew of any contamination events within the watershed area, the problems we have been having with the Mendala farm, the watershed signs that were posted in the watershed in New Braintree and she asks a lot of questions regarding the watershed. Mr. Jones then brought her up to the dam to show her the repairs that were made and they drove through the watershed. We haven't received any correspondence regarding the inspection as of this time. The timing is good in that it comes during the same year that our Source Water Protection plan update is due and both cover the same subjects.
10. **Source Water Protection Plan Update** - Mass Rural Water Source Water Specialist Bruce Young came out and we discussed the Source Water Protection Plan Update that is due this year. It basically covers all the subjects mentioned in the Water shed inspection. Mr. Young will take this information and write the update for us at no additional cost. We will then submit it to DEP for approval. This also has to be done every three years. We are a dues paying member of the Mass Rural Water Association and are very fortunate to have an association like this to help us out with things of this nature.
11. **Budget Transfer Request- As** was mentioned at the last meeting the budgeted funds for service and repairs on the trucks have been mostly spent. The last of the repairs for now, replacing the driver's side exhaust manifold was finished this past month. Since we are only half way through the fiscal year We would like to transfer the following funds into the vehicle line item

\$569.31 from the Insurance Expense Account to the Vehicle Expense Account. Our insurances are all paid up and this is the money that is left over.

\$1,000.00 from the Materials & Supplies Expense Account to the Vehicle Expense Account. We will have to cut purchases over the second half of the year.

Mr. Kularski made and Mr. Thomasian seconded a motion to submit a request to transfer \$569.31 from Insurance Expense and \$1,000.00 from Materials and Supplies Expense to the Vehicle Expense Account. So voted.

12. **Superintendent Report - Water Main Break** - There was one water main break this past month and that happened this past Saturday night at 11:30 PM on Crooks Road. The 6" AC line broke and drained the water from the upper section of School Street and Crooks Road. The water was shut off at 12 midnight and turned back on at 6:30 Sunday morning. Once we shut off the gate valve to Crooks Road there were only four houses without water. E.M. Thibault Excavating worked with us to repair the main. As usual with this type of break we ended up replacing one 13' section of 6" AC pipe with 6" PVC pipe. By the time we finished putting the road back together it was 10:30 Sunday morning. There was still cloudiness from the air in the lines this morning so Mr. Jones flushed Crooks Road again and took a coliform sample into Microbac Labs as required by DEP. Mrs. LeBlanc did all the paperwork that is required for this type of break including contacting DEP for an asbestos disposal waiver number that she needs to contact the hazardous waste removal company that picks up the broken pipe. She also fills out the trench permit application form and road opening forms that are required by the Highway Department, and the Emergency Response form required by DEP.

Hydrant replacement - We replaced one hydrant in November. This was the hydrant that is connected to Doane Pond and not the distribution system. The stem in this hydrant broke during use at the Valley View Fire.

GPS - We have continued to plot the location of the gate valves in the distributions system using the GPS system lent to us by the Mass Rural Water Association. We do this during free time and around other jobs that need doing. We have coordinates for 71 of the approximately 240 gate valves in town so far.

Job Descriptions - Board of Selectmen Chairman Mary Walter held a meeting for Department Heads regarding the job descriptions that have been developed by Kopelman & Page. Mr. Jones brought up that he feels CORI checks should be required, at least for the Water Department since we go into people's houses. She said she would look into that being part of the Town's hiring policy. We were asked to supply comments or changes on a template that was handed out at the meeting. Mrs. LeBlanc and Mr. Jones transferred the changes we made for the job descriptions in the letters that we wrote back in August onto the templates and will send them electronically tomorrow. The only one we are still working on is the part time seasonal worker job description which wasn't done. We are working with the Selectmen's Office on what to do about that.

Beaver - When Mr. Lalashius & Mr. Jones went up to the dam to start cutting brush they noticed a beaver slip into the water. Mr. Jones contacted the Board of Health and Mrs. LeBlanc wrote up the application for permission to trap the beaver out of the reservoir. We received permission shortly thereafter and called Malcolm Speicher to do the trapping. Mr. Speicher and

Peter Muise came and discussed the problem with Mr. Jones. Mr. Muise ended up setting the traps that caught 2 beavers that were living in the banking just to the left of the dam.

300 North Main Street - Last meeting Mr. Jones mentioned that we were unable to shut off the water service at 300 North Main Street due to non-payment of the summer bill. We have since located the shutoff, but due to the date, we are unable to shut it off until April 1st. A letter has been sent to the owner of the residence similar to the one we sent to 136 Ward Street, in that the service will be shut off on April 1st if the bill isn't paid by that date.

Valley View School - The contractor rebuilding the main building at the Valley View School asked to conduct a flow test on two fire hydrants on either side of the Valley View School. When they rebuild the main building that burnt they will be installing a sprinkler system and needed to know the flow the town can provide.

They are now running a new water line to one of their dorm buildings. Originally the water line for this dorm came from the building that burnt. They have connected to this line before the main building and have run a new line to the dorm. They will be installing a meter pit for the meter for the dorm because there is no cellar to the building. We worked on this with them and will be receiving a copy of the flow test.

No Lead Brass – Mr. Jones has been keeping the Board up to date on the no lead brass law since it was introduced 3 years ago. We have spent a lot of money replacing the brass that we need, including meters. What nobody ever thought about was fire hydrants. In October the EPA sent out an FAQ and one of the questioners brought up fire hydrants. EPA answered that fire hydrants were included in this law and had to be no lead as of January 4, 2014. This caught everyone by surprise, including the manufacturers. Some of them had started switching over to no lead brass but not all manufacturers had. Also, these companies had lots of inventory of the regular brass hydrants, millions of dollars' worth of inventory. Water departments also had a lot of inventory of the regular brass hydrants. We have 2 regular brass hydrants in stock and at the current price of \$2,500.00 per hydrant that comes to \$5,000.00 worth of inventory for us. The American Water Works association started working to get hydrants exempt from the law or at least get it delayed. Mr. Jones had answered emails from AWWA about or use of hydrants for drinking water and the reason why they should be exempt. AWWA worked with members of the House of Representatives to draft a bill to get hydrants exempt. We wrote a letter to our representative, James McGovern, asking him to support this legislation. Last week the House passed this bill 384 -0. Now it moves to the Senate and we have written letters to both of our senators, Markey & Warren, asking them to support this bill. We hope it will pass which will save us \$5,000.00 in new hydrant costs.

11. **New Business** - We received a letter from the Board of Selectmen regarding a meeting on paving Murphy Road. Mr. Jones added it to the commissioners' paperwork for tonight. Since Murphy Road is not part of the watershed he feels this is not a meeting we need to attend.

Meeting adjourned: 7:06 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Shiela LeBlanc

Recording Secretary