

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Water Commissioners
Monday, January 13, 2014
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: None

Meeting Opened: 6:06PM

1. **Minutes – Mr. Thomasian made and Mr. Kularski seconded a motion to approve the minutes of the December 9, 2013 meeting as written. So voted.**
2. **Budget Proposal 2015** - The only changes that have been made from the draft budget submitted last month is in the telephone line item. The Sewer Department decided they did not want to join with us for a combined telephone plan. Mrs. LeBlanc has rearranged the numbers to reflect this. Otherwise there are no changes from last month.

Mr. Kularski questioned the formulas in Sheet #21. It was determined that the formulas for the increase/decrease column were backwards and will be corrected prior to submission of budget.

Mr. Kularski made and Mr. Thomasian seconded a motion to accept this budget request with noted changes to Sheet 21 and to submit it to the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee. So voted.

3. **Tree Cutting** - Due to the tree cutting on town land adjacent to the North Brook Canal we sent a letter to the Board of Selectmen to request posting No Trespassing Signs per Board of Selectmen, as recommended by Selectmen chairman Mary Walter. (A copy of this letter was in the Board's packet.) We haven't received anything back in writing but Chairman Mary Walter verbally told Mr. Jones that the Selectmen had approved the request at one of their meetings. At the last meeting we talked a little about what kind of signs we were going to purchase.

Mr. Kularski recommended buying a regular No Trespassing sign at Klem's and he would print something to customize the sign. Mr. Jones questioned if this was the route they still wanted to take.

The Board agreed that we should stick with this route for the sign as of right now and Mr. Kularski stated that he will work on "Per Order of Selectmen" sticker for the sign.

4. **Water Main Breaks** - On December 8th at 11:30 PM Mr. Lalashius received a call from dispatch about water coming out of the ground on Crooks Road. He investigated the situation and confirmed a water main break in the area. He called Mr. Jones, Thibault Excavating, and Dig Safe to get the repair process rolling. They shut down the water main to Crooks Road at 12:30 AM and closed the road to traffic. After excavating the area they found a hole in a 13' section of AC pipe that was causing the problem. They replaced this piece of pipe, and turned the water back on at 6:30 the next morning. The road was repaired and opened a few hours later. As they always do these days after a break a sample was brought to Microbac Laboratories and tested for coliform. The sample came back negative. They flushed Hillsville Road and Crooks Road many days afterward to get the air out of the lines. This road will have to be repaired in the spring.

They also had a water main break on North Main Street on December 18th. Mr. Jones was notified of the break at 5 PM and reached the scene by 5:20 to find a river of water flowing down the road, starting at 291 North Main St, across from the Catholic Church. Mr. Jones had already called Mr. Lalashius and when he reached North Main Street he also called Thibault Excavating to come in to help us close the gate valves needed to shut off the flow of water. They all worked together to shut down six gate valves, including two 16" gate valves, to isolate the break. At least one of the gate valves did not hold and they ended up going back further on the south end of North Main Street and shutting four more gate valves, making it ten that they shut off. They ended up getting the water shut off by 7:00 PM. The water was shut off on North Main Street from the car wash to South Main Street, including all the businesses on Main Street and Maple Street.

Mrs. LeBlanc has estimated that over 300 people were without water during the repair which made it a State Level 2 Emergency. North Main Street was closed to traffic from the car wash to Church Street. It took a while to find the actual break. There was a town drain line on one side of our 16" cast iron water main and an abandoned 3" steel gas line on the other side so they had to excavate very slowly. They actually had to remove the town drain pipe to get to the water main. There was 1 ½ foot of frost in the ground at the time and quite a bit of ledge. Mr. Thibault had to use a hammer hoe to break up the frost and the ledge. By the time they found the actual leak and excavated the pipe it was 5 o'clock the next morning. As you can see from the picture in the packet, the break was a blowout of a hole in the pipe the shape of a football but much larger. You don't see many breaks like this, usually they crack.

Mr. Jones hired Hydra Tech to come and do the actual fix on the main. While they repaired the water main, Ed Thibault and his crew worked on repairing the town drain line. They turned the water back on very slowly starting around 9:30 AM. While Mr.

Lalashius and Mr. Jones worked on opening the 10 gate valves, Ed Thibault and his crew worked on repairing the road. Everything was done around 3:00 that afternoon.

Mr. Jones noted that Mrs. LeBlanc called him at the very beginning to see if they needed help. He said yes and she went up to the office where she answered many phone calls from people that were out of water and posted updates on Facebook. She called Dig Safe, the Sewer Department and the Highway Department for line locations and called DEP to report the break as we have to do with a break of this type. These are things that Mr. Lalashius or Mr. Jones usually has to do. Having Mrs. LeBlanc come in allowed them to concentrate on the actual problems with the break. For Mr. Jones it was a huge help that she came in and took control of the situation from the office end and he would like to thank her.

Joe Holway received permission from the Catholic Church for the work crew to use the downstairs room to warm up and to use the bathroom. It was a cold night and this was a great help. The Police Department setup the traffic detour while Mr. Jones was closing the gate valves and Highway Superintendent Gary Jean set up the signs and cones for the detour. A big thank you to all involved.

Apparently the water from the break flooded one cellar and one garage. Mrs. LeBlanc has put these people in touch with the town's insurance company.

All of the gate valves we used for this break were installed in 1896 as part of the original system. They all leaked during the shutdown and after opening them. Usually this is the packing on the stem and usually we can work them until we find a spot where they do not leak. They got all except one to stop leaking. The 16" gate valve in front of the car wash is still leaking. Car wash owner Mark Jolin set up a sump pump so the leak would not cause an ice buildup in front of his business. They have tried unsuccessfully turning the valve to get it to stop. We have two options. Ed Thibault has recommended excavating the gate valve and trying to tighten the bolts on the stuffing box or to replace the packing altogether.

The other option if this does not work is to replace this gate valve. The problem there is that this gate valve is the only one before going back to the tank. If we have to replace this gate valve we would have to shut the water off to the entire town except for Bell Street. The only way to avoid doing this would be to install insertion valves on both sides of the leaking valve. Sixteen inch insertion valves cost approximately \$27,000 each to install under pressure, not including the excavation. Mr. Jones has dig safed the area around the gate valve and is waiting for a shipment of packing to come before we try to tighten the stuffing box.

Mr. Kularski asked if there was any indication of what caused the break. Mr. Jones noted that there were no visible signs of what caused this break. He also noted that this area

was not filled with sand it was filled with the excavated material from when the pipes were installed.

Mr. Jones noted that these pipes are 120 years old. This whole episode is another reminder that the North Brookfield water distribution system is old and problems will accelerate as it gets older.

5. **System Improvement Balance** - We normally budget \$20,000.00 plus for the System Improvement line item account annually. This has been enough to repair the average of three or four breaks we have each year and any repairs needed on service lines or fire hydrants. The problem we are currently facing is that we have had two regular breaks already this year, and replaced a broken hydrant before this last break. This last break has cost \$23,000.00 already with at least \$4,000.00 to go to repair the road in the spring. We have spent all the money budgeted for police details for FY 2014 and there will be more details needed in the upcoming months.

Mr. Nason questioned whether he could do the detail for these jobs to save us some money. He is a retired part-time police officer and would be willing to do this. Mrs. LeBlanc is not sure how the Police Officers' contract reads and Mr. Jones is not sure about the insurance liability. One of the issues is that when we hire police for detail as a town department we will pay them overtime but not detail rate and they want detail rate. This has been an ongoing debate.

The bottom line is that we have spent all the money in the System Improvement line item with another half year to go. It is around \$0 at this time. We have some big leaks in the system, some we have found and some we have not and we will need money to fix these leaks. We have one large leak in the system that we cannot find and the next step will be to hire Carl Sopper to leak detect the town as he did last summer for \$4,500.00. We need to transfer money from the retained earnings account to the system improvement account at the next town meeting.

Mrs. LeBlanc noted that the Board needs to take a vote agreeing to run the System Improvement account in the negative until the next Special Town Meeting where we can add an article to transfer money from the Water – Retained Earnings Account.

Mr. Nason made and Mr. Thomasian seconded a motion to run the System Improvement account in the negative until the next Special Town Meeting where the Water Department will submit an article to transfer the funds from the Water Retained Earnings Account to cover this negative balance and further fund the account for the remainder of the fiscal year. So voted.

6. **Superintendent Retirement Update** - After the last meeting Mr. Jones emailed and spoke to Board of Selectmen Chairman Mary Walter regarding his contract. He asked

what route the Board of Selectmen wanted to take in regards to extending it. She called him and explained that the Board had discussed it last night (12/17/13) and that since the Board is looking into increasing pay this year they are not going to discuss contracts until March. Due to this Mr. Jones did not make an appointment to meet with the Board of Selectmen in January as discussed at the last meeting.

7. **Superintendent Report – Lead Free Brass** - On December 16th, EPA announced that they are changing the Lead Reduction Rule to exclude fire hydrants. The House of Representatives voted 384-0 to exclude hydrants and before the senate also voted to pass the bill. Fire hydrants aren't often used as an actual potable water source and if they are it is temporary. It is good for us in that we had two hydrants in stock of the regular brass variety that we would have had to dispose of and replace. Shortly afterward the Senate also voted to exclude fire hydrants and the president has now signed the bill. We still have to use no lead brass fittings from now on starting with tomorrow's leak repairs.

Solterra Solar Energy - We received an update from the Selectmen regarding the Solterra solar net metering proposal that the town is pursuing. The paperwork that the company has to go through with the state has not been completed yet. They expect to submit the applications for permits in 2014. It sounds like it will be awhile before this becomes a reality.

Water Leak - Shortly after the North Main Street water main break occurred we noticed a large increase in water used in town. We have been spending as much of our time as possible doing a leak detection survey in town to find the cause of this increase. It started averaging 67,000 gallons per day. We are now pumping what we usually see in the summer. During the cold snap that occurred around January 4th the amount we were pumping above average and jumped to 100,000 gallons per day. We have found two houses with broken lines and we assume this was caused by frozen pipes; both houses were empty at the time. Mr. Lalashius has found one leak so far, on Bates Street which is scheduled to be repaired tomorrow and we do have the leaking gate valve. We have been trying to find time to leak detect but there are other things going on, like reading meters, that are taking up our time. The weather hasn't been good for leak detecting either. Dick Kihart, circuit rider from MRWA, has come out twice to help us with the leak detection. None of these leaks are surfacing. If we do not find it soon, Mr. Jones plans to call Water and Waste Pipe Testing, the company that did the leak detection survey this past summer to come out and do one again. If they do the entire town it will cost \$4,500.00 which we do not currently have. The problem is that by pumping extra water we are spending more money on electricity for the pumping and chemicals for the treatment. This is a serious problem that we have to address.

He noted that none of these leaks are surfacing. The brooks are so full we can't tell if there is a leak under a brook. We still have the un-repaired leak at 136 Ward Street but even that leak has not yet surfaced.

Meter Reading - We did the semiannual meter reading on January 2nd & 3rd. There were 5 or 6 meters we couldn't read. Mrs. LeBlanc has been making appointments for us to get in and check and/or repair the meter or ERTs. She has also been trying to get in contact with anybody that has a high meter reading to see if there are ongoing problems.

Broken Hydrant - During the break on North Main Street we tried to use the hydrant at 299 North Main Street but found that it was unable to work. Mr. Jones hired Hydra Tech to repair it. This repair was done today. He always notifies the fire chief when a hydrant goes out of service and then when it goes back in service.

8. **New Business** – S.O.P. – Mr. Kularski asked Mr. Jones if there was a S.O.P. for the tank cleaning. Mr. Jones noted that there is not but he does have notes on it and he will give them to Mr. Lalashius and have him come up with a S.O.P. to isolate and empty the storage tank because it is a process.

Meeting adjourned: 6:45PM

Respectfully submitted,

Shiela LeBlanc,
Recording Secretary