



Established

1996

SPRINGFIELD WATER AND SEWER COMMISSION

POST OFFICE BOX 995
SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS 01101-0995
413-452-1300

Minutes of Meeting

March 24, 2022

The Springfield Water and Sewer Commission held a hybrid meeting on March 24, 2022. The meeting was held in accordance with Chapter 22 of the Acts of 2022.

Chairwoman Otero called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m. and announced the Commissioners that are participating. Secretary for the Commission Jaimye Bartak called the attendance roll:

William E. Leonard, Present
Daniel Rodriguez, Present
Vanessa Otero, Present

Also Present
Joshua Schimmel, Executive Director
Norman J. Guz, Commission Counsel
Anthony Basile, Comptroller
Domenic Pellegrino, Director of Finance
Jaimye Bartak, Communications Manager/Secretary for the Commission

Participating Remotely
Bill Fuqua, Director of Wastewater Services
Darleen Buttrick, Director of Engineering
Bob Stoops, Chief Engineer
Frank Zabaneh, Senior Engineer
Jim Laurila, Director of Water Operations
Christina Jones, Deputy Director of Water Operations
Steven Frederick, Deputy Director of Wastewater Operations
Kristin Monfette, Safety Manager
James Richardson, Director of IT
Ryan Wingerter, Deputy Director of Field Services
Theo Theocles, Director of Legal Affairs/Chief Procurement Officer
Raemarie Walker, Assistant Procurement Officer
Katie Shea, Educational Outreach and Communications Specialist

Business Matters

1. Approve the minutes of the meeting held on February 8, 2022, without reading, because copies were furnished to each member of the Commission for their review.

UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER LEONARD AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

**VOTED YES –
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER LEONARD
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:**

to approve the minutes of the meeting held on February 8, 2022.

2. Approve the minutes of the meeting held on February 17, 2022, without reading, because copies were furnished to each member of the Commission for their review.

**UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER LEONARD AND SECONDED BY
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ**

**VOTED YES –
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER LEONARD
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:**

to approve the minutes of the meeting held on February 17, 2022.

3. Approve the minutes of the executive session held on February 17, 2022, without reading, because copies were furnished to each member of the Commission for their review.

**UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER LEONARD AND SECONDED BY
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ**

**VOTED YES –
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER LEONARD
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:**

to approve the minutes of the executive session held on February 17, 2022.

New Business

4. Appeal by Owner of 801 Perimeter Road, Ludlow.

Tabled.

5. Consideration of Public Speak Out Procedures: Report by Commission Counsel.

Atty. Norm Guz presented proposed procedures for accepting public comment.

**UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER LEONARD AND SECONDED BY
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ**

**VOTED YES –
COMMISSIONER OTERO**

**COMMISSIONER LEONARD
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:**

to approve public comment procedures as presented except to limit comment period to three minutes.

6. Financial Update: Report by Comptroller.

Comptroller Tony Basile reported there was a \$108.3 million ending cash balance, which was a \$3.4 million decrease due to projected capital spending and advances.

The operating budget has been spent at \$71 million, which represents 96% of the budget. Funds have had to be transferred due to unexpected increases in chemical costs, specifically chlorine.

There has been just under \$50 million in capital spending, mostly on the river crossing project.

There was \$101.5 million in total revenues expected. Summer retail was lower than projected due to the wet summer. The variance of \$3 million will be offset due to unexpended funds on the cash side.

There was \$25.5 million in unrestricted cash, and 76% of cash is restricted.

There were \$7.1 million in receivables, of which \$2.4 million is over 60 days.

There was just under \$900 million in assets, and just under \$693 million in total liabilities. There is \$568 million in long-term debt.

7. Transfer of funds request in FY22 O&M Budget: Report by Comptroller.

Mr. Basile reported that due to cost increases, a recent bid opening for chemicals came in higher than expected, requiring a transfer of \$235,000 from contract services.

**UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER LEONARD AND SECONDED BY
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ**

VOTED YES –

COMMISSIONER OTERO

COMMISSIONER LEONARD

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:

to approve the transfer of funds request as presented.

8. Consideration of Utility Billing Credit Summary and Summary of Accounts Receivable for February: Report by Director of Finance.

Director of Finance Domenic Pellegrino reported that there was \$6.7 million in net billings, and \$6.9 million in collections, leaving an accounts receivable balance of \$6.1 million. This is an improvement from last February. Receivables have decreased by 28% but are still 23% higher than the three-year average.

There were 6,560 aged accounts totaling \$2.4 million. This is 48% lower than this time last year, but 56% higher than the three-year average. Mr. Pellegrino noted that shutoff postings began on March 17.

Mr. Schimmel noted that Wayfinders helped 100 accounts last year. The LIWAP program has still not been launched by the state. There is approximately \$900,000 in LIWAP funding from the state due to come through local LIHEAP agencies. The maximum that customers could receive is \$300-400, but there is a no shut-off clause associated with this amount, even though the account would not be paid off in full. There is language being considered that would delay shutoff instead for one billing cycle. Mr. Schimmel reported that shutoff season would be back to normal, except the accounts with the highest outstanding balances would be targeted first. Mr. Schimmel noted that the Commission was committed to delivering the LIWAP program in the best way possible.

Commissioner Otero asked about supporting Wayfinders ARPA application and advertising the LIWAP program in the newspaper and in different languages. Mr. Schimmel responded yes.

Mr. Pellegrino reported 82 credits that were issued for \$10,196.04.

UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER LEONARD AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

VOTED YES –

COMMISSIONER OTERO

COMMISSIONER LEONARD

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:

to approve credits in the amount of \$10,196.04 as presented.

9. Consideration of Cobble Mountain 637 Power Transmission Line Poles Replacement: Report by Senior Engineer.

Director of Engineering and Capital Projects Darleen Buttrick reported that 22 new poles will be drilled and set during a planned shutdown of the power station in May.

UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER LEONARD AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

VOTED YES –

COMMISSIONER OTERO

COMMISSIONER LEONARD

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:

to approve the agreement with HG&E for Cobble Mountain Power Transmission Line Poles Replacement.

10. Consideration of Bid No.22.22 - Filter 6A Underdrain Replacement Project at West Parish Filters: Report by Director of Water Operations.

Ms. Buttrick reported that three bids were received for the underdrain replacement project. R.H. White is the lowest responsive bidder. The contract is 40 days and will be complete in 2022.

Ms. Buttrick continued that new nozzles will be purchased for Filter 6A, and the West Parish Filters operations team will perform venting. The plan is to improve the existing filters rather than purchase spare parts, as there is a new design of the nozzles that improves the release of air.

Commissioner Otero asked why not still have spare parts. Director of Water Operations Jim Laurila replied that advanced purchase of the underdrains would put the Commission at some risk, as not all the filters are the same size so there is a chance they would not be useful. Instead, modifications have been made to the backwash process to reduce peak pressure. The pressure is also being tracked to evaluate filter performance.

UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER LEONARD AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

**VOTED YES –
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER LEONARD
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:**

to authorize the executive director to execute the Filter 6A Underdrain Replacement Project with R.H. White.

11. Consideration of Human Resources Consultant Contract: Report by Executive Director

Executive Director Josh Schimmel reported that the former human resources manager has agreed to assist with hiring and onboarding until a new human resources manager is hired. The contract is not to exceed \$10,000.

UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER LEONARD AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

**VOTED YES –
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER LEONARD
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:**

to approve Human Resources Consultant contract.

12. Consideration of Human Resources Manager Job Description: Report by Executive Director.

Mr. Schimmel reported that the Human Resources Manager job description has been updated and proposed a starting salary of \$85,000-\$110,000.

UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER LEONARD AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

**VOTED YES –
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER LEONARD
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:**

to approve the Human Resources Manager job description and starting salary.

13. Consideration of Human Resources Specialist Job Description: Report by Executive Director.

Mr. Schimmel reported on an update to the Human Resources Specialist job description, which has been filled with the former executive assistant. That executive assistant position will be backfilled. Mr. Schimmel proposed a starting salary of \$55,000-70,000 for the Human Resources Specialist position.

UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER LEONARD AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

VOTED YES –

COMMISSIONER OTERO

COMMISSIONER LEONARD

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:

to approve the Human Resources Specialist position and proposed starting salary.

14. Consideration of Senior Project Engineer Job Description: Report by Executive Director.

Mr. Schimmel reported that the Senior Project Engineer job has been updated to meet current needs and based on market value. Mr. Schimmel proposed a starting salary of \$105,000 - \$130,000.

UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER LEONARD AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

VOTED YES –

COMMISSIONER OTERO

COMMISSIONER LEONARD

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:

to approve the Senior Project Engineer job description and proposed starting salary.

15. Update on Water and Sewer Activities: Report by Executive Director.

Mr. Schimmel reported on contracts under \$250,000 that he has signed, including the purchase of land, design for the water treatment plant, assistance with the annual report, and a price agreement for chemicals.

Mr. Schimmel reported that the reservoir is 99% full.

Mr. Schimmel reported that mask requirements were lifted March 14, and that 85% of the staff is vaccinated.

Mr. Schimmel reported that customers were receiving advance notice that they were eligible for shutoff due to non-payment.

Mr. Schimmel reported the Commission received a NON from MassDEP regarding disinfection byproducts. Mr. Schimmel reported that the reliance on the slow sand filters due to the repairs of the rapid sand filters is resulting in poorer water quality.

Mr. Schimmel reported that design of the new treatment plant is underway. The design consultant is also designing an approach to the 2022 source water quality sampling program, and evaluating options on addressing Dam #2.

Commissioner Otero requested tentative timelines for these efforts. Mr. Laurila responded that nozzles are being procured for the rapid sand repairs, and new nozzle caps and nozzles are expected in 4-8 weeks. By the time filter 6A is repaired, the rest of the nozzles will be replaced elsewhere. Deputy Director of Water Operations Christina Jones reported that the new nozzles should help improve air scour distribution. Completion of the project is expected by July 3.

Mr. Laurila continued that research was ongoing about the feasibility of the alternatives for the power plant, and on-site analysis will take place during the planned shutdown in May.

Mr. Schimmel reported that a work order is currently in place to vet cost estimates for the repair of the 42" bypass pipeline.

Mr. Pellegrino reported that the IRS has completed its audit of the Commission's 2014 Series A Bonds. The audit resulting in no negative findings related to the bonds.

Mr. Basile reported the FY23 budget process is close to finishing and will be reviewed by a third-party consultant. Commissioner Rodriguez requested the draft budget in advance.

Director of Wastewater Operations Bill Fuqua reported that the pump station masonry is wrapping up, to be followed by a new brick façade. Tunneling work has also been completed. The nutrient removal project at the wastewater treatment plant is at 60% design and progressing well. SUEZ has been acquired by Veolia.

Ms. Buttrick reported that the clearwell demolition is complete and improvements to chemical storage are ongoing at West Parish Filters. The sewer repair at Watershops Pond is ongoing, with one section of new lining complete.

Director of IT James Richardson reported on changes to staff, and that cybersecurity monitoring has been heightened due to events in Ukraine.

Director of Legal Affairs Theo Theocles reported that the bidding market continues to be challenging, particularly related to iron and steep piping, the raw materials for which are sourced in Ukraine. Escalation clauses are arising in supplier contracts. The Locust Street project and new security contract will go out to bid soon. Housing court will also be active due to the start of shutoff season.

Deputy Director of Field Services Ryan Wingerter reported that crews are addressing asphalt cuts and replacing galvanized service lines, and flushing will start with the warmer weather.

Atty. Guz reported that mediation for the 42" bypass is set for April 7 in Boston.

Mr. Schimmel reported that the Commission is receiving funding from ARPA, including \$2.5 million in loan forgiveness for the Locust Transfer and clearwell projects. The funding will be received when the SRF loans are closed in the years ahead.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked if there is more grant or loan forgiveness money to be anticipated. Mr. Schimmel replied that ARPA money will be gone but there is still funding available from the

infrastructure bill. EPA released guidance approximately two weeks ago. Atty. Guz added that despite Sen. Gomez's efforts to provide the Commission with additional funding from the state's bond bill, it was defeated.

UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER LEONARD AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ

VOTED YES –

COMMISSIONER OTERO

COMMISSIONER LEONARD

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:

to adjourn at 10:40 a.m.

16. Consideration and/or action on any other matters that may come before the Commission at this meeting.

None considered.

Submitted By:



Jaimye Bartak, Secretary