

Minutes

Ashland Water and Sewer Commission 6 Collins St., Ashland, New Hampshire June 20, 2017

CALL TO ORDER: David Toth, chair of the Commission, called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: David Toth and Alan Cilley. Ernie Paquette was absent with notice.

OTHERS PRESENT: Christine Cilley, Kathleen DeWolfe and Sherry Downing.

NEW BUSINESS: The Commissioners reviewed the minutes from Tuesday, May 16, 2017. The minutes were amended to read “Michelle Roberts will begin GIS training on Thursday, May 18, 2017.” Allan Cilley made a motion to accept the minutes as amended. David seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The Utility Partners issues were tabled until the next scheduled meeting.

Steve Heath has advised the Commissioners that the fire hydrant testing was very successful. The data collected will be entered into the department’s GIS system.

The Commissioners held a debrief on a discussion with the Board of Selectmen about the Concerned Citizen issue the commissioners submitted to in response to negative statements made about septage lagoons and the town’s drinking water made during a meeting of the board on June 7, 2017.

The commissioners felt it was important to correct misinformation about the lagoons and drinking water expressed during the Select Board’s goal setting exercise and to address other rumors the commissioners have heard from multiple, credible sources. The intent was not to blame individuals but to correct the public record. See the attached Concerned Citizen’s Issue.

The commissioners asserted that the written Concerned Citizen’s Issue is completely accurate and objective. Nobis

Engineering reviewed the text of the submitted letter for factual content. Nobis engineers and Utility Partners personnel were present at the Select Board meeting to answer questions and address public concerns.

As a result of the meeting, the commissioners recommend that all departments including Water and Sewer and the Electric Department be included in town goal setting exercises. Selectmen should also consult with the Water and Sewer Department on technical issues before making public statements, and the liaison from the Select Board should bring concerns select board members may have before the commissioners. Many issues related to the town's drinking water and the operation and functioning of the lagoons are complex, and the data collected through testing often requires interpretation and analysis by engineers and other qualified people.

Christine Cilley said the Selectman should have consulted the Water and Sewer Commissioners before making any statements about the lagoons or drinking water.

The commissioners intend to continue to work closely with the all departments of the town on all projects; however, they will respond immediately and in public to rumors, false claims, and misinformation.

The commissioners have attached the Concerned Citizen's letter to the minutes because certain members of the Select Board spent much of the meeting addressing procedural issues intended to prevent the letter from being read at the meeting rather than focusing on the substance of the concern. Copies will also be available in the billing office.

The Commissioners will meet with Tom Schwartz of Woodard & Curran and Jeff Hayes of LRPC to discuss the design of the septage receiving station and contracting options.

The commissioners provided background information on the receiving station in response to a question from Kathleen DeWolfe.

The initial plan to use specially adapted roll-off containers to filter out grit and non-biological solids has been changed as a result of testing. The containers clogged immediately

after septage was introduced and would not drain.

The commissioners, Utility Partners personnel, and engineers from Woodard & Curran visited four different treatment facilities to see various types of equipment in operation. The design now being developed will include a rotating drum system designed to remove non-biological solids and a grit removal system or chamber. A separate system will be installed in the flume to remove solids from town sewage.

Sherry Downing asked the commissioners if they will take the plans for the septage receiving station building before the public. The department will submit a site plan to the Planning Board for review. It is our understanding that the Planning Board will make their recommendations and send the site plan to the selectmen for review. We believe that a public hearing is also required but that the building does not to be voted on.

William Bolton of PRLAC raised concerns about the septage lagoons in an email to NHDES. A copy of his email is attached to these minutes. In his email to Theresa Ptak of NHDES, he said that the Ashland Select Board was concerned that in a 1996 NHDES Report it states that the lagoons leak 50,000 gallons of sewage per day. He also stated that cracks in the clay liner make it impossible to stop the leakage.

The commissioners pointed out that the Ashland Select Board has not publically expressed any concerns about the lagoons; however, a selectman did so. The commissioners cited the fact the lagoons were in fact designed to “leak” and act much like a leech field. They do not; however, leak sewage as test results show. The 1996 NHDES report and a similar EPA Fact Sheet show that the lagoons are not lined. These reports show how the lagoons are designed and establish the criteria for ground water discharge testing.

The commissioners said that the department passed an inspection of the WWTF NHDES performed an on June 20, 2017, in response to Mr. Bolton’s email.

The commissioners received a letter from NHDES in response to information provided to them by Peter Roth, the attorney representing the public interest in the SEC

hearings on Northern Pass. Attorney Roth expressed concerns that the installation of the towers could possibly affect the “dams” surrounding the lagoons. In the letter NHDES responded that if the excavation for the towers permanently lowers the ground level it could promote seepage toward the Pemigewasset River.

Alan Cilley met with Mike Ciance to discuss the cracks in the wall at 6 Collins St. Mike has advised monitoring the cracks to see whether they increase in size. This will help determine the probable cause. Both Kathleen DeWolf and Sherry Downing recommended that the commissioners have a yearly maintenance program for the building. The commissioners agreed.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

At the meeting of the Board of Selectmen on Monday, June 7, 2017 during a goal setting exercise, Selectman Lamos said that he believed the septage lagoons and the levels of sodium chloride in the drinking water are liabilities for the town. The Ashland Water and Sewer Department strongly disagrees. We would like the public to know that the department works directly with NHDES, engineering firms*, and licensed operators to ensure that our operations meet NHDES and EPA standards. All of our permits are up to date, and we are in 100% compliance with all drinking water and wastewater rules and regulations.

First, the Water and Sewer Commissioners would like the public to know that our water is safe to drink. We have documented that fact through testing and have recently published the results in our Consumer Confidence Report, a document that is reviewed by NHDES. The report shows that the levels of contaminants such as copper, lead, barium, nitrates, and chlorides are well below established limits. The level of chloride is 140 mg/L, well below the 250 mg/L guideline. The level of sodium is 74 mg/L, which is above 20 mg/L EPA guideline for people on sodium restricted diets. The report recommends that these people should examine their total sodium consumption. The EPA estimates that 10% of a persons salt intake comes from water and the rest from food and other drinks. Regular Milk, for example, contains 500 mg/L of sodium, and 1 cup of tomato sauce contains 1,482 mg/L of sodium. Because of the expense involved in filtering water, the EPA recommends decreasing sodium intake from food sources.

While the current levels of sodium and chloride are not a health risk, the department developing long-term plans to control sodium chloride. Tests conducted over the past 10 years by Emery & Garrett show that levels of sodium chloride in the aquifer are slowly increasing on average. We believe the major contributing factor is road salt from I-93 and Route 3. Our choices are to build a desalinization plant or move the town's well, both of which are very expensive. Desalinization involves increased operational, maintenance, and disposal costs while moving the town's well would reduce the town's water supply and limit economic development. Newer methods of filtration, however, may provide a more viable option in the future.

The septage lagoons are not a liability; they are an extremely important asset. In 2016 the department generated \$425,000 in revenue from septage receiving, revenue that supports critical capital investment in water and sewer infrastructure. In addition, we still have 85% capacity available to accept additional septage and accommodate economic development in there mill area. While lagoons are an older technology, they still provide the best natural method of treating sewage.

The septage lagoons meet all NHDES regulations. We have years of test data test data from sentry wells that monitor ground water contamination to demonstrate that contamination levels are below established limits. Based on the most recent data, NHDES issued the department a new Ground Water Discharge Permit in May of 2017.

We believe that Mr. Lamos is concerned there may be ground water contamination based on a 1996 NHDES report that says the lagoons are unlined and leak 50,000 gallons of water per day. The report, however, does not mention ground water contamination resulting from leakage, and the estimated leak rate is no longer valid

because the condition of the lagoons has changed in 20 years. Older lagoons like ours were not lined but were designed as natural filters. There is approximately 30 to 35 feet of pure sand beneath the lagoons that filter out contaminants much like a leach field. As lagoons age, a layer of sludge builds up on the bottom and slows leakage.

The department has been working NOBIS to assess the current condition of the lagoons, determine their remaining useful life, and develop a plan for the future that will likely involve replacing them with a newer technology.

Our water and sewer systems are an important and valuable asset for the town. We base that assessment on engineering data, our knowledge of the condition of our systems and equipment, and the fact that we have always been in 100% compliance with NHDES rules, regulations, and permitting requirements. We can document that we provide safe drinking water and that our lagoons meet all NHDES and EPA regulations. We are installing a new septage receiving station to protect the lagoons and extend their useful life. We are actively planning for the future and developing revenue to support needed infrastructure improvements. We will be glad to have our engineers and operators speak with the Board of Selectmen and answer any questions you may have concerning our operations.

*NOBIS, Woodard & Curran, Emery & Garrett, and Weston & Sampson

** Utility Partners