

Groton Water Commission
Regular Meeting
Of the
Board of Water Commissioners
Tuesday, November 17th, 2020
Virtual Meeting using Zoom

Minutes

Present are Chairman Jack McCaffrey, Vice Chairman Greg Fishbone, Member James Gmeiner, Superintendent Thomas Orcutt, Business Manager Lauren Crory, and Office Assistant Ann Livezey.

Mr. McCaffrey called the meeting to order at 7:35pm.

Manganese – Concept Plan, Finances, Consent Order, Milestones -#2, Select Board overview, OPM reviews

Mr. Orcutt had asked the Board to review the OPM submissions and to select their top three choices. Mr. Gmeiner said his top three choices were Woodward & Curran, Weston & Sampson, and Environmental Partners. Mr. Fishbone and Mr. McCaffrey had selected the same top three choices. Mr. Orcutt said the Board can decide if they want to interview the firms or they can go through our own ranking process to make a decision. Mr. McCaffrey asked about costs and pricing and Mr. Orcutt said we should rank our choices and start negotiations with our top choice. He assumes they will all be in the same ballpark. Mr. McCaffrey asked how this affects our budget and Mr. Orcutt said that \$50,000 was transferred in the Fall and can transfer more in the Spring to cover design costs.

Whitney Well – Expansion and Capacity Update

Mr. McCaffrey said that we are just waiting for CEI to get their drillers out to get the process started within the next two months. Mr. Orcutt said the estimated cost is \$1 million and we will need to borrow, but we will only need to pay interest for FY22. Mr. McCaffrey said that Mr. Ohl was thinking closer to \$700,000 and Mr. Orcutt said that is true but conservative. Mr. Orcutt sent the Board a revised site map from Mr. Ohl.

Longley Road Project Update

Mr. Orcutt said he spoke with the engineers working on the Longley Rd project and Mr. Ohl will begin checking their plans and calculations. Mr. Gmeiner mentioned there was someone mapping out wetlands on Longley Rd but Mr. Orcutt does not think it is for this project.

FY 2022 Budget – Review 2nd Draft

Mr. Orcutt presented the 2nd draft of the FY22 budget. Mr. Gmeiner asked about backflow income and Mrs. Crory noted that income was down last year because we had a delay in our

spring backflow testing, so not everything was billed out and collected during the fiscal year. Mr. Orcutt noted that both operators can now do backflow testing so we should remain on schedule moving forward. Mr. McCaffrey asked about the salary and wages remaining level, and Mr. Orcutt said the Town Manager asked for that, but if there are any changes we will need to transfer from reserves.

Mr. McCaffrey said if its inevitable to hire a third operator; should we hire someone young and try to get them licensed? Mr. Fishbone asked what ever happened with the discussions with Nashoba Technical High School and Mr. Orcutt said there was no traction. He spoke with DEP today and staffing did come up and will be a recommendation again. They may not allow only two operators once the new facility is online. If we put a third operator on the FY22 budget, we will need to increase rates more than 10% to offset the increase. We could consider only hiring for half of FY22 to keep the budget lower. Mr. Gmeiner asked if there is a hiring freeze right now and Mr. Orcutt said there is, but would ask for special approval given the circumstances. Mr. Gmeiner said that getting an unlicensed person to train would be great, but you risk losing them once they are licensed since it is a competitive industry. Mr. McCaffrey agrees but also thinks some towns need to start hiring unlicensed operators before there are no licensed operators left. If the employee left, we could then hire a licensed operator. Mr. Fishbone added that we do have some time to make sure we get a good fit. Mr. Gmeiner doesn't mind giving an unlicensed operator a shot. Mr. McCaffrey proposed that we inform the Town Manager about potentially looking for a third operator for FY22. Mr. Orcutt will leave it out of the budget but will explain the situation at the budget finance committee meeting to see what the comments are. If the feedback is good, we can adjust the budget to add a third operator for 6 months of FY22. The Board agreed.

Mr. McCaffrey asked how we justify a potential 10% rate increase and Mr. Orcutt said the new source well, increased expenses, and the new treatment plant.

Superintendent's Report: Water Levels and Pumping, Water Conservation Program

Mr. Orcutt said that draw down levels are the same and prior to pumping levels are also the same. The drought level has been lowered from 3 to 2. Whitney Well is down to 6-7 hours of pumping a day and Baddacook is running longer.

Mr. Orcutt spoke with DEP today and they asked about the lagoons. He told her we did work on it, cleaned and replaced the stone, and didn't see any breakthrough. He explained that we will clean the basins and sludge every couple of years. He also pushed back on small projects like this because he does not want to keep going to Town Meeting asking to borrow funds when we have larger projects in process. Mr. Gmeiner asked if the new well was brought up and Mr. Orcutt said he told her we will be asking for an increase in our permit because of developments and need for more pumping. Mr. McCaffrey asked if they directly decide about the permit, and Mr. Orcutt said that Boston will decide but they may make a recommendation.

Manganese Open Forum: continuation of discussion

Mr. Orcutt will reach out to Bob Coleman over the next few weeks to find a time for the open forum. Mr. Orcutt and Mr. Fishbone will handle the forum. The Groton Herald and Lowell Sun recently spoke to Mr. Orcutt and should have updated articles going out soon.

Mr. McCaffrey asked if the sample results were back and Mr. Orcutt said Friday or Monday they will be in and we will post them.

Other Business: Bills, Minutes, etc.

Mr. McCaffrey would like Mr. Orcutt to speak with the technicians to get their input on staffing.

Mr. Orcutt will get the rate hearing in the Groton Herald for the next two weeks. We will have our regular meeting on December 8th and the rate hearing on December 15th at 8pm.

Mr. McCaffrey made a motion to adjourn at 8:34pm, Mr. Gmeiner seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lauren Crory