Groton Water Commission

Regular Meeting of the

Board of Water Commissioners

Tuesday, April 11th, 2023

 Virtual Meeting via Zoom

# Minutes

Present are Chairman Jack McCaffrey, Vice Chairman Greg Fishbone, Member James Gmeiner, Superintendent Tom Orcutt, Business Manager Lauren Crory and Dave Patangia, and Tyler Schmidt from Environmental Partners, and Michael Ohl from CEI.

Mr. McCaffrey called the meeting to order at 7:31pm. He stated that the meeting is being recorded and everyone introduced themselves.

**Manganese Treatment Plant**

Mr. Schmidt said the concrete slab has been sealed but R.H. White is making corrections. The lagoons and access road are being worked on. Subcontractors will be at the building completing their work and everything is on schedule. One item, the battery pack actuators are delayed until November. These two actuators are not critical to the process and are there for an emergency shut down only. There have been 311/319 submittals returned and 45/45 RFIs returned. There have been eight change orders and eight PCOs. The change orders have resulted in a positive $15,000 credit so far. The 2000 gallons propane tanks will be installed by the contractor now. The solar panel change will be added once the approval is received from the town. The current pay requisition of $242,000 is being reviewed.

Mr. Fishbone asked if we should be concerned about not having the actuators in place, if there was a power failure while we are waiting for them. Mr. Schmidt said that the treatment plant will be online in December so they should be installed before then. Prior to December, the treatment plant will only be run to waste. Mr. Orcutt asked if there is a lag time before the generator kicks in and Mr. Schmidt said its about 90 seconds so the actuators would close the valves. The intent of the actuators is if the generator does not kick on after 90 seconds, they will kick in. Mr. Patangia added that the system will be functioning but the keys will not be turned over to the town until the actuator is received.

Mr. Fishbone said he is concerned because we are up against the consent order. Mr. Patangia said that he is surprised this is the first issue we had and they will stay on it. Mr. Fishbone asked what happened with the concrete seal. Mr. Schmidt said they sealed it last week and the weather was foggy and it may have been a moisture issue. Mr. Schmidt thinks it was not applied evenly or was rushed and he is going to push for a quality of work issue and get a resolution. Mr. Patangia has not seen this happened before but they will get to the bottom of it. Mr. McCaffrey asked if they will reapply this week and Mr. Schmidt said they can’t just reapply and need to talk to the vendor about the options and how soon they need to act before it is fully cured.

Mr. McCaffrey asked the status of the solar panels and Mr. Orcutt will check with the state this week. Mr. McCaffrey asked if the roof can hold the solar load and Mr. Schmidt said it was designed to hold the panels. Mr. Orcutt asked if mechanical piping will be next week and Mr. Schmidt said it will occur once the masonry is done.

**Whitney Pond Well #3**

Mr. Ohl said that last Monday, SCADA was running and the electrical subcontractor completed their work and they were able to pump water. The technicians have been working on running it at least a couple hours day. Mr. Ohl said that the flow meter size issue has been resolved with DEP. Since we do not have the VFD, it is putting out more flow and pressure than it typically will be. The electrical subcontractor is still expecting the VFD in June. The solution may be to put it in and regain the full control. Otherwise, will need to gage the pumping and pressure to correlate with the system. Mr. McCaffrey asked if the VFD is going in the big building or the little shed and if we can move it around. Mr. Ohl said the original contract said to put it in the well then reinstall it into the plant. Mr. Ohl said he will confirm the VFD install date. The electrical subcontractor has been very responsive so Mr. Ohl hopes for install by July 4th. Mr. McCaffrey asked how long it will take to install and Mr. Ohl said a few days.

Mr. Orcutt said they are concerned about the timing of the soft start because of the flow rate, so they would ideally like the VFD installed sooner rather than later. Mr. Orcutt said they ran it at 620 gallons/hour at consistent pressure and the levels didn’t move. Mr. McCaffrey asked when it will be sampled and Mr. Ohl will look at DEP’s approval letter again and get the sampling timing. Mr. Orcutt is hoping for May approval from DEP. Mr. Ohl said they have given approval of the pumping rate and the withdrawal, just not the construction. Mr. Orcutt said the final step is Worcester DEP running all of their tests and giving the final construction approval. Mr. McCaffrey asked if anything could jeopardize that. Mr. Orcutt said the SCADA needs to be finalized.

**High School PFAS – Updates**

Mr. Orcutt said later this week, they are going to meet with DEP Worcester, Boston, and the Water Resources Committee. They are going to discuss getting water from Dunstable (estimated cost $17,000,0000 and 80/20 split). The Groton Water connection is estimated at about $16,000,000 and they are reviewing how long it would take. Mr. Gmeiner should be available via zoom at 3:30 on Thursday for the meeting.

Mr. Schmidt said they are looking for direction on Dunstable obtaining the necessary Water Management Act permit. This would enable them to pull more water from their wells. Mr. McCaffrey asked if the Dunstable Water Commission is involved and Mr. Orcutt said one commissioner has been involved. Mr. Schmidt said Pepperell is running their system and Paul Brinkman has been speaking on their behalf. Groton would not need any adjustments to their Water Management Act permit.

Mr. Schmidt said they would also need an Interbasin Transfer Permit to pull water from Merrimack to Nashua. They want to know if DEP thinks it is worth the effort and how long the process would take for both permits. Mr. McCaffrey asked how involved DEP is at this point and Mr. Schmidt said that DEP Worcester is more involved but DEP Boston is not involved yet. The DCR regulates water transferring basins.

Mr. Gmeiner thinks that Mr. McCaffrey did a good job articulating our position at the last meeting.

Mr. McCaffrey asked what the Commission’s position should be moving forward if the water is coming from another town and which town’s Commission would handle that. Mr. Orcutt said Alternate I would result in an IMA which would outline all of the details. Mr. Gmeiner explained that in sewer we bought into the plant and handle our own customers. The High School could just be a customer of Pepperell. Mr. Orcutt said there are 5-10 homes in North Groton that are served by Pepperell. Mr. Gmeiner thinks we would want to be more hands on. Mr. Fishbone said his questions would be who owns the pipes, who is paying for the pipes, who owns the water, who is responsible for the end users and customers. Mr. Orcutt said Groton’s share would probably be about $5 million. Mr. McCaffrey asked why they don’t do the whole capital project and then charge us. Mr. Orcutt said they would then be spreading that cost among all of their customers. Mr. McCaffrey asked how many customers would benefit from this and Mr. Schmidt was estimating about 100,000 gallons per day would be needed for the high school and some surrounding homes. Mr. Orcutt said we will want to have some kind of control of water quality also. Mr. Schmidt clarified that Pepperell is already going to have an IMA with Dunstable at the tune of $10 million. They said they could change their alignment and figure out this cost share. He thinks that a master meter set up will be hard to manage but they could work out some kind of plan to offset the forfeiture of the control of the main.

Mr. McCaffrey said that they can legally pump Pepperell water but it does have some level of PFAS. Pepperell is ok with this but Groton does not have the same beliefs. Pepperell’s Jersey Well is in the 10-15 ppm range. Mr. Orcutt said that would not be for drinking purposes in GDRHS and Groton is following the EPA specifications. Mr. Gmeiner sometimes thinks we should be building PFAS filtration into the system right now, and we need to have some oversight of the water quality going into the high school. Mr. Orcutt said the school is looking to get irrigation water. Mr. Orcutt thinks that issue is secondary and the drinking water plan needs to come first. He said that putting in a treatment system for irrigation purposes is not going to be cheap and will end up being temporary. The Board Members agree they don’t want to be involved in the irrigation side of things but don’t want PFAS water to be used.

Mr. McCaffrey asked why does Pepperell care about our High School? Mr. Orcutt thinks it could be a mechanism because they could plan to sell all of the water and avoid some debt payments. Mr. McCaffrey said it is cheaper for Dunstable to go the Pepperell route. Mr. Schmidt said Pepperell is already working on a large project down 113 so may have benefits to looping in Groton High School to this project.

Mr. McCaffrey wants to meet with Mrs. Collette to make sure Groton’s position on PFAS is clear. Mr. Orcutt will invite her to the next meeting. Mr. Gmeiner asked if we should invite Mrs. Collette only or the entire Board of Health. Mr. Fishbone thinks it’s a good idea to touch base with them.

**Unkety Brook Well Site – Conservation Restriction**

Mr. Orcutt sent out maps that show the conservation restrictions at the Unkety Brook Well site. Mr. Fishbone asked if there was a difference between the two maps. Mr. Orcutt said the latest map has the Delaney Parcel highlighted that will not have the Conservation Restriction on. Mr. Fishbone asked about the advantage and Mr. Orcutt said that the conservation folks want the whole parcel but it includes our well site, but this provides a building envelope that will help us avoid red tape down the road. Mr. Orcutt said the area might shrink but he is trying for the largest area we may need.

Mr. Gmeiner made a motion to approve the plan from Dillis and Roy dated March 15th, 2023 outlining the building envelope and parcels X and Y, Mr. McCaffrey seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

**500 Main St – Groton Farms**

Mr. Orcutt introduced John Amaral in regards to his 200 rental units at the Deluxe property. HE said that the Town Manager, John Amaral, and a representative from the Board of Water Commissioners will need to have a working group to discuss the Water Connection Fees, infrastructure, etc.

Mr. Amaral thinks we are very early on, but it would be beneficial to get together early to start to talk about these items. Mr. Amaral would like Greg Roy to attend the meetings also. Mr. Amaral said that they mainly work with the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals are ultimately giving the approval of the Chapter 40B. However their expertise is not Water, Sewer, Public Safety etc, so it’s important to meet with all of these departments.

Mr. McCaffrey asked the cost of this entire project and Mr. Amaral said it is early in the process and it is a moving target as construction costs and interest rates move. They are the developer and are using Dillis & Roy and working with a contractor on budget numbers. Mr. McCaffrey asked if it is $100 Millions and Mr. Amaral said it will be less than that. The plan includes 32 townhomes and 168 apartments (some one bedroom and some two bedrooms). The ZBA process will be another 5 months. Mr. Orcutt is helping work on a MassWorks Grant to help with some of the infrastructure for the project as well as ARPA funds, but that will not get us all the way to the development.

Mr. McCaffrey asked if Mr. Amaral has seen our connection fees and Mr. Amaral said he currently thinks they are high and wants to see how that number is justified. Mr. McCaffrey said that his understanding is the connection fees are standard but said this is a large scale that we don’t have precedent for. Mr. McCaffrey said it sounds reasonable that there would be a discount but we have been hard on our users with rate increases and capital fees over the past few years and our cash reserves are not in a great position so we need to be mindful of these items when we look at any discounts. Mr. Orcutt said there wouldn’t be a discount, but there could be relief if they help out with the system then we can have a trade off for some connection fees. Mr. Amaral said that makes sense and it is about being constructive and coming to an understanding of the fees. Mr. Fishbone looks forward to discussing but doesn’t have much comment yet. Mr. McCaffrey said this sounds like a series of meetings and he will be going away for two months. Mr. Amaral said there is a deadline for the MassWorks grant so asked about the deadline and Mr. Orcutt said June 2nd is the deadline but he would like it wrapped up the first week of May. Mr. Orcutt said they are scheduled for Friday Morning, currently. Mr. Amaral said Greg Roy will be out next week. Mr. Amaral wants to make sure we do not violate any open meeting law. Mr. McCaffrey said if they designate one commissioner to attend these meetings they are following the open meeting law and are aware of the rules.

Mr. Gmeiner said that our regulations outline what would need to be done to waive connection fees.

**Other Business**

Mr. Orcutt said that flushing has started and it will be a busy few weeks. Mr. Orcutt said irrigation systems are starting up.

Mr. Gmeiner made a motion to approve the minutes of March 28th, 2023 as written, Mr. Fishbone seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Next Meeting is April 25th, 2023.

Mr. McCaffrey made a motion to adjourn at 9:05pm, Mr. Gmeiner seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lauren Crory