

Minutes

WATER AND SEWER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Regular meeting

7 p.m. Dec. 7, 2023

Board Meeting Room of Town Hall Annex, 105 E. Corbin St.



Present: Chair Jenn Sykes, Members Grace Beeler, Daniel Rawlins, Steed Robinson, Commissioner Matt Hughes

Absent: Vice Chair Saru Salvi and Members Mo Rasheed and Barry Weston

Staff: Utilities Director Marie Strandwitz; Environmental Engineering Supervisor Bryant Green; Civil Engineering Technician Tyler Freeman

1. Call to order and welcome of guests

Chair Jenn Sykes called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. She took rollcall, and there being no quorum she skipped to Item 4A. Member Daniel Rawlins arrived at 7:03 p.m., and Sykes confirmed the presence of a quorum.

2. Agenda changes and approval

This item was discussed after Item 4A.

The committee removed Item 9 from the agenda because Vice Chair Saru Salvi was absent.

Motion: Member Steed Robinson moved approval of the agenda with the removal of Item 9. Rawlins seconded.

Vote: 4-0.

3. Minutes review and approval

Minutes from regular meeting on Oct. 5, 2023. This item was discussed after Item 2.

Motion: Rawlins moved approval of the Oct. 5, 2023, minutes as submitted. Robinson seconded.

Vote: 4-0.

4. Updates

These items were discussed before Items 2 and 3 while waiting for a quorum.

A. Utilities status report highlights

The committee discussed the utilities status report. They discussed withdrawal restrictions and release requirements in drought conditions. Utilities Director Marie Strandwitz gave background information on the stages of withdrawal restrictions and their connection to the level of Lake Orange. If the town reservoir is near or below 180 days of supply, Strandwitz will recommend that the mayor make a proclamation for voluntary water restriction asking customers to conserve.

A new automatic water transfer switch, which transfers the plant to generator power during power outages, will be installed on Dec. 11. Staff have plans in place to ensure no impact to customers during the installation.

Strandwitz and Green gave updates on current development projects, including Aldi, the nearby car dealership, the Habitat project at East Village at Meadowlands, Collins Ridge, Persimmon at Cates Creek, and Nash Place. The Utilities Department will be revising its development process by adding some conditions to the water and sewer extension contract, including requiring a performance bond that the Utilities Department monitors and controls instead of the Planning Department.

There was discussion of the fiber projects that are being installed: Lumos and Google Fiber. Brightspeed has also indicated that they would like to install. There was an uptick in water theft in the fall, and the press releases sent by the town about water theft raised awareness and helped resolve the issue. Residents are asked to call 911 if they observe theft happening; the police will send a report to the Utilities Department, and staff will issue a penalty and a fee.

The committee discussed recent grant funding and project scheduling.

- B. Cross connection code and reimbursement recommendation to the board
Strandwitz reported that on Dec. 11 the Board of Commissioners would be presented with a simple ordinance to change the cross connection code. It will add the air gap option under swimming pools and add to the definition of bodies of water. Staff have already begun education on air gaps. The proposal will also clean up some grammar and obsolete portions of the code and make some logistical updates. There will also be a proposal to the Board of Commissioners regarding the committee's reimbursement recommendation for people who voluntarily complied with backflow requirements in the letter sent to swimming pool owners in early 2023.

- C. Bill language and format
Strandwitz reported that staff have provided requests for the desired changes to the bill language and format. The website will be updated in March 2024, and it will include a rate calculator. These updates will help customers understand their water bills and rate changes. The committee asked whether the customer's use can be compared with the average use to encourage conservation. Staff also updated the disconnection notice to be friendlier.

There was discussion of the process of donating to the water assistance fund and discussion of how to spread awareness about the program and make it easier to donate. There was also discussion of making utility payment points more available at locations such as Walmart.

- D. Budget update
Green gave a budget update. There was discussion of the Capital Improvement Program budget, which is the budget of the town's fixed assets and prioritization of projects. Costs have risen recently. Hillsborough models for three years, which determines the rates. Staff are going to do an updated rate model to help with projections.

5. Discussion

There was discussion of board member changes and candidates to fill the two vacant out-of-town seats on the board. There have been no applications since Sept. 1.

6. Reports from October/November Board of Commissioners meeting assignments

Nov. 13 Board of Commissioners meeting

Rawlins provided a report from the meeting about the town awards, which some utilities staff received. The consent agenda included codifying standards for the calculation of system development fees at 120 gallons

per bedroom per day. There was an update to the code about setting meters only once all requirements are met. There was also mention of the extension contract for the Tryon III project, which was also updated with current contract terms.

7. Assignments for Board of Commissioners meetings

A. Meeting Dec. 11 (Beeler/Vacant?)

8. Future agenda items

Bill format and language change
Budget update
Status on rate model

9. This item was removed from the agenda.

Nevertheless, the committee recognized and expressed appreciation for Saru Salvi's service on the board. They shared appreciation for the commitment, perspective, and passion she brought throughout the eight years she served.

10. Adjournment

Motion: Rawlins moved to adjourn the meeting.

Sykes adjourned the meeting at 8:25 p.m. without a vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Tyler Freeman
Civil Engineering Technician
Staff support to the Water and Sewer Advisory Committee

Approved: Month X, 202X