

Joint Meeting of the Water & Sewer Commission And the Electric Utility Commission Meeting Minutes, September 14, 2020

Roll Call: Steve Fitzhugh, Dennis Donahue, John Stevens, Charlie Morse. Others present: Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Tom Clifford, Rob Townsend. The meeting started at 6:30 PM.

Approval of Minutes from the August 3, 2020 Meeting

Motion by Dennis Donahue, seconded by John Stevens, to approve the minutes of August 3, 2020. **Motion passed 4-0.**

Meeting of the Electric Commission

Solar Project Updates

Steve Fitzhugh presented an update on the Bone Hill solar project noting that the project received the Certificate of Public Good (CPG) from the Public Utility Commission and that the developer anticipates bringing the project on-line the end of December. Jeff Schulz noted that he has signed the interconnect agreement for the project.

NED still has not received any updates from Darn Tough on their proposed solar project. However, Darn Tough will be the off-taker for the Nantanna Hydro project.

Next, Steve noted that he has done additional research on a potential solar project on Norwich University property to the North of the Town's wellfield. A potential solar project on the property will likely be constructed by a private developer. NED could potentially do a land swap with Norwich and NED would then have a private developer build it. The first step is to conduct a feasibility study to determine whether the project is feasible.

Other Business

Steve noted that the Public Utility Commission approved a special agreement to allow NED to wheel GMP power on NED lines to serve GMP residents in the areas of West Hill and above in Northfield. NED will bill GMP a flat rate for the use of NED lines. Charlie Morse asked if there are other VT utilities with this type of wheeling arrangement. Steve responded that there are no other utilities with this type of arrangement and that is the reason for the special contract through the PUC.

Steve also noted that the PUC extended the order halting disconnections of electric customers with delinquent accounts through the end of September and is considering extending the moratorium through October 15; which raises concerns for NED due to the increasing number of delinquent accounts, especially considering winter is approaching and the limits on disconnections in winter. Accordingly, the question is whether NED should wait until a final decision on this issue is received from the PUC, or send shut off notices without PUC permission? Charlie Morse asked what is the percentage of nonpayment? Doug Reed is researching the amounts. Charlie suggested a two-step approach: sending shut off notices to the customers with pre-COVID delinquencies and a statement/letter to those with delinquent accounts after the start of COVID. John Stevens agreed with the two-step approach.

Meeting of Water and Sewer Commission

Request to Connect to Municipal Sewer – 965 South Main St.

Jeff Schulz stated that the owner of the Elizabethan Inn at 965 South Main Street (Tom Clifford) is proposing to connect both the building that houses the Inn and the barn on the rear of the property to municipal sewer. Mr. Clifford proposes to run a 1½ inch sewer line service connection from his property to an existing manhole within the town right of way. The proposed line within the right of way will be approximately 250 feet. Also, Mr. Clifford proposes to subdivide his property such that the two existing buildings will be on separate lots, and both lots will be served by the new service line and a proposed small private sewer pumping station. Jeff noted that he and Patrick have no major concerns with the proposal and the proposed system is designed by an engineer. However, per the sewer ordinance, the property owner is responsible for all costs for the installation and future maintenance of the new line. Mr. Clifford is aware of the installation and future maintenance costs. The Commission discussed the request and was in support of the proposal. **Motion** by Steve Fitzhugh, second by John Stevens to approve Mr. Clifford's application to connect to the municipal sewer. **Motion passed 4-0.**

Route 12 and Route 12A Sewer Issues

Jeff Schulz reviewed copies of the plans developed in 2010 for the extension of municipal sewer on Route 12 South and Route 12A, noting that he was unable to find any project reports or cost estimates. Jeff stated that Patrick Demasi recalls that the project estimate was over \$3 million. Charlie Morse stated that the project cost has likely increased significantly and would now be difficult for the current rate payers to fund. The Commissioners agreed and felt that the project is unlikely to proceed at this time.

Northfield Wastewater Treatment Facility Permit Renewal

Jeff Schulz noted that he provided the Commission with a copy of the VT ANR's draft sewer operating permit for the Northfield Sewer Plant, which was discussed at a previous Commission meeting. The public comment period for the draft permit runs from August 28 to September 28. Jeff noted that he and Patrick sent comments on the draft permit to the VT DEC during the pre-public hearing period requesting changes to the draft permit. The comments pertained to the DEC's significant reduction in the total allowable release of phosphorus from the plant, and the increase in the number of toxicity tests. ANR responded that they could not change the draft permit to address our comments due to State and Federal mandates. Jeff plans to resubmit the previous comments to ANR in a formal letter. The Commissioners agreed with the proposal to send a formal letter with comments to VT ANR.

Water Ordinance

Jeff Schulz presented a final draft of an updated water ordinance to the Commission for final review and approval. Charlie Morse asked whether there is a need to require backflow preventors considering that Northfield's system is highly pressurized. The Commissioners noted that it is standard practice to require backflow preventors and that the preventers are needed if there is water break or system shut down. Next, Charlie suggested changing the term sinking fund to capital fund. Next, there was discussion regarding the requirement that all new construction must be connected to the municipal water system in areas where it is reasonably available. The Commissioners discussed the issue and concluded that because it does not require existing property owners to connect to the system, and that having all new construction connected is beneficial to the system and rate payers, that the provision should remain in the ordinance.

Motion by Charlie Morse, second by John Stevens to approve the water ordinance with the modification to change the wording from sinking funds to capital funds.

Motion passed 4-0.

Motion by Charlie Morse, second by John Stevens to adjourn the Joint Meeting of the Electric Commission and the Water/Sewer Commissions. **Motion passed 4-0.**

Jeff Schulz, Town Manager