

WISCASSET SELECTBOARD,
TAX ASSESSORS AND OVERSEERS OF THE POOR
MINUTES, JUNE 7, 2022
COMMUNITY CENTER
IN PERSON AND VIA ZOOM

Present: Kim Andersson, Pam Dunning, Terry Heller, Vice Chair Dusty Jones, Chair Sarah Whitfield, and Town Manager Dennis Simmons

Chair Sarah Whitfield called the meeting to order at 6:09 P.M.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

2. Approval of Treasurer's Warrants

a. **Pam Dunning moved to approve the payroll warrants of May 20, May 27, and June 3, 2022. Vote 5-0-0.**

b. **Pam Dunning moved to approve the accounts payable warrants of May 24, May 31, and June 7, 2022. Vote 5-0-0.**

3. Approval of Minutes

a. **Pam Dunning moved to approve the minutes of May 17, 2022, as written. Vote 5-0-0.**

4. Special Presentations or Awards

a. Town Report Dedication: Sarah Whitfield presented to the Rines family a copy of the 2021 Annual Report dedicated to the late Peter Rines in recognition of his service to the Town.

5. Committee Appointments – none

6. Public Hearings:

a. Proposed Sewer Rate Increase: Rob Lalli, Wastewater Treatment Plant Supervisor, said the sewer system was built in 1964 with upgrades in 1982 and 1992. The system includes the sewer plant, 18 pump station and 15 miles of piping and currently has three employees. The system serves about 833 meters and operates as an enterprise fund which requires the operation and maintenance of the system to be paid by revenues from sewer bills and impact fees. Cathy Robinson, Maine Rural Water Association, said the last rate increase was in 2019, when the recommended increase was 58%; however, the actual increase was only 30%. Shortfalls in revenue have been in excess of \$200,000. She said costs are increasing and a recent DEP plant inspection revealed that the Sewer Department was keeping rates artificially low by not collecting for contingency or depreciation. Because of funding deficits, the

department has not hired a fourth employee and has deferred maintenance and repairs both within the plant and in the collection system. She cited budget shortfalls for the last four years where depreciation and contingency were not included. She said the total revenue requirement for 2023 is \$847,609, an increase of 46% over 2021. Annual increases in the proposed rate would range from \$81.60 to \$268.60 depending on cubic foot usage.

Robinson said that the state requires that rates of water and sewer shall “be sufficient at all times to pay the cost of maintaining, repairing and operating the revenue-producing municipal facility.” The Sewer Department is asking for a 46.43% increase in revenues, which will cover operating expenses, debt service costs, a capital reserve to begin to fund necessary repair and maintenance projects, and a 2% contingency. The Sewer Department will need to adjust its rates to cover increases in operation and maintenance costs, provide for an appropriate amount of contingency and capital reserve, and begin to fund a depreciation account for the replacement of assets as they need to be retired. She said customers of the Sewer Department deserve to have a properly functioning and maintained system that preserves public health.

Pam Dunning moved to open the public hearing on the proposed sewer rate increase at 6:38 p.m. Vote 5-0-0.

In response to questions, Rob Lalli said the 46% increase would not be required each year, but sewer rates would probably be increased each year according to the cost-of-living increase; an asset management plan will be put in place to determine what equipment needs replacing; additional hearings would be held and the 46% increase includes 2% for contingency but does not include depreciation. In response to Pam Logan’s question, Lalli said the increase for minimal usage would not be 46% but 22%. Kim Dolce said that in the past when the sewer rates should have been increased by 56%, the board had reduced the proposed sewer rate increase to 30% and taxpayers were responsible for the excess. That same board had planned to increase the rates each year to make up for the deficit, although that had not been done even though some members of that board were still in office the following years. Rob Lalli said that persons not on the sewer system will not be paying the increase. Chris Reid said those not on the sewer system should not be contributing to the capital reserves to pay off the shortfalls. Pam Dunning commented that when the sewer plant was built, townspeople who converted to the sewer system were told there would be no fees as it was a service of the town paid for by the town. Now homeowners are required to hook up to the sewer system and she thought the Town should continue to contribute toward the costs of the sewer system. Terry Heller asked if her monthly bill was going to go up \$6.90 and was told that was correct. In response to Dusty Jones’ question, Lalli advised looking into the 40-year-old pipes and 30-year-old pumps to make sure that failures are not resulting in costs to treat rainwater. Asked about the term enterprise fund, Lalli said an enterprise fund does not receive federal or state funding or funds outside the revenue stream which includes impact fees and sewer bills as well as ARPA funds. However, in the future, federal funds may be available to deal with climate change issues. Dennis Simmons said there is a new infrastructure bill which may help, but in order to qualify for USDA funds, the Town has to adequately finance the sewer system. Lalli said a priority list for repairs and upgrades will be generated after a new study. Dennis Simmons said no decision would be

made that night; a workshop will be scheduled for the new board and ultimately the board will make a decision. He recommended a policy be drafted to deal with the issue in the future.

Pam Dunning moved to close the public hearing on the proposed sewer rate increase at 7:17 p.m. Vote 5-0-0.

Pam Dunning moved to add a brief discussion with Bill Olver about the sewer plant to the agenda. Vote 5-0-0.

William Olver of Olver Associates Engineers, who has done studies on sewer plant infrastructures, said under Federal and State regulations, towns are required to maintain the infrastructure of sewer systems. He said that some of the town's sewer equipment that has a life expectancy of 20 years is now 60 years old and some of it is in critical condition. In addition to the condition of the equipment, there is the location of the sewer plant which would be in a precarious position if the sea level rises the estimated two feet in the next 50 years or experiences a hurricane with 17-foot waves. He said it was necessary to upgrade and evaluate to determine if the wastewater treatment plant can be saved at its current elevation or if it would be necessary to move it to a higher elevation. There are federal funds and grants available, but the town won't qualify unless it raises its rates.

Pam Dunning moved to add the James Weldon Johnson memorial under Unfinished Business. Vote 5-0-0.

7. Public Comment

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Ed Polewarczyk said in the past he and Pam Dunning had shared many meetings, executive sessions, and trips to Augusta for MMA events even though they did not always agree on everything. He thanked Pam for her service to the Town.

Ben Rines wished Pam Dunning and Kim Andersson the best of luck.

Susan Blagden asked that the gravestones in the Ancient Cemetery be straightened, asked when the brick façade on the Wawenock building would be repaired and when the Town was going to hire a treasurer. Dennis Simmons said Public Works has been working on the gravestones in the cemetery. Work is being done on the inside of the Wawenock building and no exterior work can be done until the interior wall is completed. Dennis Simmons said he was currently the Town Treasurer. Susan Blagden said she did not think the Town Manager should also be the Treasurer. Simmons said he would be giving up that position.

Pam Logan asked who was in charge of the handicap sign at the post office. Dennis Simmons said he had ordered a stencil and the equipment so that Town staff can paint the signs.

Bill Maloney suggested that the parking spaces above the entrance to the post office parking lot be angled, making it easier to park there.

8. Department head or committee chair

9. Unfinished Business

a. Marijuana Ordinance Update: The ORC had sent an initial draft of a marijuana ordinance to the Board for comment. Pam Dunning complimented the ORC on the detail in the ordinance which she said was close to a finished project. Sarah Whitfield asked that comments on the draft be forwarded to her or the ORC.

b. James Weldon Johnson Memorial Proposal: Dusty Jones said the weekend of June 17-19 was set aside for the celebration, and a tree proposed for the common had been donated by the task force. The Committee has donated a wooden bench created by Dusty Jones for the area where a plaque honoring James Weldon Johnson and the white oak tree would be placed. Comments ranged from the need for a town vote for anything added to the Town Common to the possibility that others should be honored before Mr. Johnson was. It was pointed out that a year ago the task force had talked about a plaque downtown, not on the common, and the project had now grown to a planned 20' x 20' plot on the Town Common together with bench, plaque, and tree. Others, in favor of accepting the gift of a tree, said they were impressed with the work of the task force and Mr. Johnson's history as a diplomat, author, poet, novelist, and teacher. (Pam Dunning left the meeting during the discussion.) **Terry Heller moved to accept the gift of a bench in honor of James Weldon Johnson. Vote 4-0-0.** Sarah Whitfield said further discussion was needed on the gift of a tree, and since the proposal was received only shortly before the meeting, there hadn't been enough time to consider the proposal. Dennis said he understood that if tax dollars were going to be spent on this gift, it would need to be voted on by the town.

10. New Business

a. Scholarship expenditure approved for the 2022 General John and Mrs. Jeanette French scholarship and the 2022 Lawrence B. Haggett Memorial Scholarship. **Terry Heller moved to expend \$500 from the Lawrence B. Haggett Memorial Scholarship Fund and \$1,000 from the General John and Mrs. Jeanette French Scholarship Fund to the students who meet the scholarship's criteria selected by Wiscasset High School. Vote 4-0-0.**

b. Permit for Conduit Location – Consolidated Communications of Northern New England. **Terry Heller moved to approve the application from Consolidated Communications of Northern New England to place conduit along Chewonki Neck Road. Vote 4-0-0.**

c. Correspondence: Maine Art Gallery grant: A \$2,500 grant had been received.

d. Maine Municipal Association Ed MacDonald Safety Enhancement Grant: **Terry Heller moved to accept the Maine Municipal Association's Ed MacDonald Safety Enhancement Grant. Vote 4-0-0.**

e. Bid Opening – 1994 Top Kick: The following bids were received:

E Ryan Leighton, Bowdoin	\$8,177
Randall Hamilton, Brunswick	\$4,270
Warren Smith, Livermore Falls	\$4,222
Matt Dorsey, Wiscasset	\$3,875
Ray Bellefleur/Tony Colby	\$3,202

Terry Heller moved to authorize the Town Manager to award the sale of the 1993 Top Kick to the highest qualified bidder. Vote 3-0-1 (Andersson abstained).

f. Donation from Atlantic Motor Car for AEDs: **Terry Heller moved to accept the \$1,374 donation from Atlantic Motor Car to be used towards the purchase of AEDs. Vote 4-0-0.**

11. Town Manager's Report

Dennis Simmons reported that following the report on the status of the Wastewater Treatment Plant, Bill Olver contacted the ME DEP to review the report and set up a meeting to discuss its findings and subsequent steps to move forward. Rob Lalli, Olver, and Dennis have met with Mike Jenkins of USDA RD to discuss funding options. Included in the supporting documents are the results of the financial study for rates completed by Cathy Robinson.

Erin Bean has applied on behalf of the town's Safety Committee to MMA's Ed McDonald Safety Enhancement Grant for the purchase of ergonomically correct office equipment for the town office staff. The grant for \$2,489 was awarded and Dennis Simmons asked the board to accept the grant.

Kerry Hadley has informed Dennis that the Maine Art Gallery has been awarded a Maine Historic Preservation matching grant for \$2,489 from The 1772 Foundation for a Conditions Assessment. The grant will help lay the groundwork for future grants for preservation from the Foundation. This is the second grant received since the lease agreement was signed.

Work at the airport has been delayed by the necessity to remove clay deposits which if left would develop soft spots over time. The completion will be delayed by a couple of weeks. Work on cleaning the fuel tanks is scheduled to start June 7th.

The ORC has drafted two marijuana ordinances and if the board wishes to present these to the voters during the November general election, the board needs to have a warrant to Linda by September 1. The Legislature has passed a bill authorizing the state to reimburse municipalities that opt in to adult use for up to \$20,000 for expenses the municipality incurs developing and passing ordinances. This includes the costs of legal review, holding a town meeting, printing ballots, etc.

On June 2nd, Dennis received a call from Senator Collins' office indicating that she has included the Old Ferry Road repair in her Congressionally Directed Spending requests. While this is not a guarantee it will ultimately be approved, it is a major step forward.

The office will close at noon on June 30 for year-end closeout.

Dennis reminded all that the east end of the municipal parking lot is closed on Fridays from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. for the Wiscasset Farmer's Market. The parking area behind the municipal building may be used and accessed from Churchill Street.

12. Other Board Business

Sarah Whitfield thanked Kim Andersson and Pam Dunning, whose terms are ending, for their service to the Town.

a. Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter: At 8:19 p.m. **Terry Heller moved to enter executive session pursuant to 1 M.R.S.A. §405 (6)(A). Vote 4-0-0. Dusty Jones moved to come out of executive session at 8:26 p.m. Vote 3-0-0** (Kim Andersson had left the meeting earlier).

13. Adjournment

Dusty Jones moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 p.m. Vote 3-0-0.