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Town of Ayer

RATE REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES FOR

Tuesday, September 10, 2019, 3:30pm

Attendance: Selectman Jannice Livingston (Chair); Mary Spinner; Lisa Gabree (Finance Director); Mark Wetzel (DPW Superintendent); Mark Smith (Fin Com Rep); Pam Martin (DPW Business Manager); Robert Pontbriand (Town Manager)

Absent: Rick Skoczylas

Call to Order: The meeting of the Rate Review Committee was called to order by J. Livingston at 3:34pm in the First Floor Meeting Room of the Ayer Town Hall.

Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (March 21, 2019):

The Committee reviewed the meeting minutes from the previous meeting on March 21, 2019.

Motion: A motion was made by M. Spinner and seconded by J. Livingston to approve the March 21, 2019 meeting minutes. **Motion passed 7-0.**

Initial Review and Discussion of Transfer Station Rates (Permits and Bags):

M. Wetzel stated that he needed to get all the final numbers and plug them into the rate model. He further stated the increased trash disposal/hauling costs and increased recycling costs continue to drive costs in the Solid Waste Division upward.

J. Livingston asked if there was any increase in permit and/or bag sales since the Transfer Station flyer went out with the taxes.

P. Martin stated that they have not notice and increase at this time.

P. Martin further stated that the Committee should investigate only offering pro-rated permits to new residents to Town and not offer pro-rated permits to existing customers/residents.

M. Spinner stated that she would like to see better enforcement of the use of Transfer Station bags, bulk stickers, and checking permits. She has observed a lot of regular trash bags and bulk items without stickers being allowed. She further stated that Staff are not enforcing the rules.

J. Livingston concurred with M. Spinner that there needs to be better enforcement of the rules by staff. She recently saw photos of regular trash bags at the Transfer Station on social media.

M. Spinner stated that this is an insult to the people who follow the rules and it is costing the Town potential revenue every time regular bags are allowed, etc.

J. Livingston stated that she would like to see a Senior Tax Worker up there as well as trained volunteers.

P. Martin stated that in the past we have tried this and could not get volunteers and/or Senior Tax Workers to do it.

J. Livingston stated that she would like to see a kiosk at the Transfer Station where you could buy stickers, bags, and bulk stickers.

M. Smith stated that before we spend more money, we need to enforce the existing rules. It seems that "familiarity breeds contempt" up there with respect to staff and residents.

J. Livingston stated, I think we can all agree that there needs to be better enforcement of the rules at the Transfer Station and staff needs to be visible.

M. Smith stated that it is cheaper to put items in the swap shed than to pay for a bulk sticker. That needs to be monitored and enforced better.

R. Pontbriand stated that he and M. Wetzel will meet with Transfer Station employees regarding enforcement concerns.

J. Livingston stated that perhaps we need to investigate better signage and/or new signage with respect to the rules and other important instructions for the public.

R. Pontbriand asked when the Committee needs to have any new rates in place.

P. Martin stated that we like to start selling the new stickers in November and the new stickers and rates would be effective for January 1st.

J. Livingston stated that she is concerned about the timeline for this Committee to make a recommendation to the BOS and the BOS vote the recommendations and then implement the new changes. She further stated that ideally, she would like to not see any increases.

L. Gabree stated that the challenge is that the ongoing subsidy of the Solid Waste Enterprise Fund remains at approximately \$250,000 and we need to ultimately not have a subsidy.

P. Martin suggested that the Committee investigate increase the current age of 60 for the Senior Citizen Rate to the age of 65. This would be consistent with the Senior Citizen age of 65 for other Town Senior Citizen Rates such as the Senior Citizen Water Discount, etc.

R. Pontbriand proposed that for the next Rate Review Committee Meeting, the Committee prepare to discuss the following: a review of the most recent numbers with respect to determining any potential rate recommendations; R. Pontbriand and M. Wetzel will meet with staff regarding enforcement concerns; the Committee will look at increasing the age from 60 to 65 for the Senior Citizen Rate; and the Committee will look at the issue of not offering pro-rated permits except for new residents.

The Committee concurred with this plan for the next meeting.

Initial Review and Discussion on the Water and Sewer Rates:

R. Pontbriand stated that it is early to discuss the water and sewer rates but asked if anyone had any items to discuss.

J. Livingston reported that the BOS is establishing the FY 2021 Budget Calendar and that she wanted the Committee to be aware and to offer any input on the Committee's meetings in February/March with respect to the water and sewer rates.

M. Spinner asked if the Town has seen any increases in revenues since the connection fees were raised.

M. Wetzel said not at this time but there are some projects coming up.

M. Wetzel stated that the Committee should be planning to address the Devens Wastewater Contract which will expire in 2021 but this is the year to get a consultant on board and to develop the Town's strategy. He also stated that he would like to have the Committee review and discuss funding options to put sewer on Groton Shirley Road. As the Committee is aware, the Town has design money for the water main for Groton Shirley Road which could include the sewer design; the issue for the Committee will be a funding recommendation to fund the sewer.

J. Livingston asked that we look to see if there are any completed projects with remaining funds that can be re-appropriated to other projects.

L. Gabree said that she would investigate this.

Scheduling of Next Meeting:

The Committee agreed to schedule the next meeting of the Rate Review Committee on Wednesday, October 2, 2019 at 3:30pm.

Motion: A motion was made by M. Spinner and seconded by J. Livingston to adjourn the meeting.

Motion passed 7-0.

The meeting adjourned at 4:48pm.

Minutes recorded and submitted by R. Pontbriand, Town Manager

Minutes reviewed and approved by the Rate Review Committee: October 2, 2019

Signed:  10-2-2019
Robert A. Pontbriand, Town Manager