



**Town of Ayer**

**Rate Review Committee**

**Meeting Minutes from August 22, 2023**

**Attendance:** Jannice Livingston, Chair; Dan Van Schalkwyk, DPW Director; Pam Martin, DPW Business Manager; Kimberly Abraham, Water & Sewer Superintendent; Robert Pontbriand, Town Manager

**Absent:** Andrew Sealey (Fin Com Rep.); Barbara Tierney, Finance Manager

**Call to Order:** The August 22, 2023 meeting of the Rate Review Committee was called to order at 4pm on August, 22, 2023 by J. Livingston. (Note: This was an in-person meeting only.)

**Review and Approval of the Meeting Minutes from February 28, 2023:**

The Committee reviewed the DRAFT Meeting Minutes from February 28, 2023 and there were no edits.

**Motion:** A motion was made by K. Abraham and seconded by D. Van Schalkwyk to approve the meeting minutes from February 28, 2023. **Motion Passed (5-0).**

**Initial Review/Discussion on Calendar Year 2024 Transfer Station Rates:**

J. Livingston stated that last year the perception was that we were rushing the Transfer Station rate process. We are not going to rush this time and we will be more methodical in our approach. We may very well meet the same dates, but we need to do a thoughtful review and not rush.

P. Martin stated that it was not the intent to rush last year but we have a certain period of time to sell stickers which starts before January 1.

J. Livingston stated that she understands that but that last year the public perception was that were rushing the process. We had the Public Hearing date already scheduled before the Committee finalized the rate recommendations.

R. Pontbriand stated that last year we started late in the process, that is why we are starting earlier this time.

J. Livingston stated that we need to understand that the Transfer Station does not make a profit and that it is a municipal service. Additionally, the General Fund subsidy which is approximately \$160,000 is less than 1% of the total General Fund Budget. We need to really look at what is the cost of having the public up there? How many days do Employees actually need that do not involve the public for preparation purposes? Why can't Resident's use the Transfer Station five days a week? I would like to see us have a broader conversation on these questions and issues.

R. Pontbriand stated that we should consider making a list of all of the questions and issues and have a third-party professional consultant do an analysis of the operations and finances of the

Transfer Station and make recommendations to this Committee. This analysis would not include looking at the issue of curbside trash pickup.

D. Van Schalkwyk agreed and passed out a memo outlining his recommendation to the Committee to consider and pursue a third-party professional consultant to perform an operational and financial analysis of the Transfer Station. He added that the consultant firm of Weston and Sampson does this kind of analysis and that he would further research and develop a proposal for consideration if the Committee would like.

D. Van Schalkwyk further stated that there is the potential not to have a rate increase this year as it appears there may be a slight surplus based on the current rate structure as approved last year. We have seen about \$5,000 in savings from our recycling contracts and we have yet to look at the impact of raising the bulk item fees last year.

R. Pontbriand stated that perhaps an approach for this year after we have all the information and have reviewed it would be not to raise the rates this year and to complete the operational and financial analysis of the Transfer Station by a third-party professional.

J. Livingston stated that some of the other questions/issues that need to be looked at are: bags versus stickers; do we continue with permits; what about issues of further enforcement?

P. Martin stated that we do receive weekly calls from out-of-Town residents asking about using the Transfer Station.

J. Livingston stated that we did have the rate for Devens Residents living on Ayer and perhaps we would consider a higher cost rate for out-of-towners to use the Transfer Station? What about a Town-wide permit along the lines of the Sandy Pond Beach Permit?

Pauline Conley (Resident) asked about the Committee considering going back to the stickers as opposed to the bags?

J. Livingston stated that is a good question and we need to look at that.

R. Pontbriand stated that the list of questions/issues he has so far are:

- Issue of enterprise fund versus general fund for the Transfer Station
- Issue of the general fund subsidy
- How many days do employees need without the public? What is the cost?
- Issue of bags versus stickers
- Issue of having permits or not. What about a Town-wide permit? What about non-residents using the Transfer Station? What about a higher non-resident permit fee?
- What about selling permits and bags at the Transfer Station? A service kiosk
- Issue of hours of operation and issue of hours the public can use

- Issues of enforcement and monitoring of bags
- Reviewing our current rate model
- Issue of selling permits on the calendar year versus the fiscal year

J. Livingston stated that there is perhaps a false impression that there needs to be a certain number of residents every hour or every day at the Transfer Station.

D. Van Schalkwyk mentioned the Town of Harvard's model for their Transfer Station where they do not use full-time benefitted employees.

J. Livingston asked about using the Senior Tax Work-Off Program.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that we have tried on two different occasions to get someone and have not been successful. We can look at that again.

P. Martin stated that on the issue of black bags being seen at the Transfer Station perhaps they are from Town Departments disposing of their trash at the Transfer Station. The Town Departments do use black bags.

J. Livingston stated that is the first time she has learned of this and perhaps we need a dedicated Town Employee or Town Trash section at the Transfer Station so that the public understands this, and it keeps it separate.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that we will look at that.

R. Pontbriand asked if any of the contracts at the Transfer Station were set to expire.

P. Martin stated that the contract we have for purchasing the bags does expire on June 30, 2024.

J. Livingston stated that we should really look at the possibility of not having to raise any rates for the Transfer Station this year.

Pauline Conley (Resident) asked how many vacancies are on the Rate Review Committee and is there a member of the Finance Committee?

J. Livingston stated that there is a Fin Com Member, Andrew Sealey, who is not here today.

R. Pontbriand stated that there are two resident vacancies and a vacancy for an SIU (significant water user from the business community).

Pauline Conley asked if the Town would promote these opportunities.

J. Livingston stated yes.

**Scheduling of the Next Meeting:**

The Committee scheduled the next meeting for Wednesday, September 6, 2023 at 3:30pm.

**Adjournment:**

**Motion:** A motion was made by K. Abraham and seconded by D. Van Schalkwyk to adjourn the meeting at 5:02pm. **Motion Passed (5-0)**

The meeting adjourned at 5:02pm.

Minutes recorded and submitted by R. Pontbriand, Town Manager

Minutes reviewed and approved by the Rate Review Committee on September 6, 2023.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Robert A. Pontbriand  
Town Manager