



Town of Ayer

RATE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes from May 25, 2021

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

Also in Attendance: Carly Antonellis, Assistant Town Manager; Dan Van Schalkwyk, Town Engineer

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 4:00pm on the Town's remote Zoom meeting platform by J. Livingston.

J. Livingston read the following into the record: *Due to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, Governor Baker issued an Emergency Order Temporarily Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law. Public bodies otherwise governed by the OML are temporarily relieved from the requirement that meetings be held in public places, open and physically accessible to the public, so long as measures are taken to ensure public access to the bodies' deliberations "through adequate, alternative means." This meeting will be broadcast live on Channel 8, and on Zoom. The public may participate remotely by following the call-in information on the bottom of the live broadcast screen.) For the Zoom meeting information relating to remote participation, please contact Carly Antonellis, Assistant Town Manager, at cantonellis@ayer.ma.us or 978-772-8220 prior to the meeting.*

Review and Approval of the Previous Meeting Minutes (March 15, 2021):

The Committee reviewed the DRAFT meeting minutes from the March 15, 2021, meeting.

Motion: A motion was made by R. Skoczylas and seconded by M. Smith to approve the March 15, 2021, meeting minutes. **Motion passed 7-0 by roll call vote** (J. Livingston, Y; M. Smith, Y; P. Martin, Y; R. Skoczylas, Y; M. Wetzel, Y.; L. Gabree, Y.; R. Pontbriand, Y.)

Update on Current Water and Sewer Revenues:

L. Gabree advised that overall revenues are on target. We are closely monitoring Solid Waste revenues to the end of the year. Expenses appear to be on target. The DPW Superintendent is concerned about a potential \$30,000 shortfall in the Wastewater Enterprise which we are closely monitoring.

M. Wetzel advised that each month he reviewed the project line items in the Wastewater Enterprise and his projections show a potential shortfall around \$20,000 but his projections may be exaggerated, and he will review again.

L. Gabree stated that since the new bond issue, she will review the actuals on costs, and this could be lower due to such a favorable bond rating that may help.

[M. Smith left the meeting at 4:06pm]

M. Wetzel stated that the Solid Waste Enterprise looks pretty good based on the projections.

Update on the Devens Wastewater Contract Negotiations:

M. Wetzel provided a presentation on the update of the Devens Wastewater Contract Negotiations which provided a general overview. The contract expires on December 31, 2021. His presentation provided a current overview of the existing contract. In terms of the new agreement the Town needs to update the flow and loading requirements; evaluate the cost structure (seeking to reduce annual cost); update the terms to provide the ability to modify the agreement (the current agreement provides no mechanism to modify the agreement); and other legal terms and clarifications.

M. Wetzel further advised on action to date: hired ARCADIS Engineers to assist in review of terms, capacity requirements and costs; meeting with Devens Utilities to discuss rate structure and options; updated wastewater flow requirements based on past trends and future development; updated wastewater treatment plant loading capacity for industrial use permitting; and ARCADIS has reviewed existing agreement and made comments.

L. Gabree stated that her initial issues with the current contract are the term was too long; future capacity is too much; and the minimum flow requirements seem very high.

R. Skoczylas agreed with L. Gabree and stated that the term of the new agreement should be no more than 10 years.

Update on the Contract Operation Evaluations:

M. Wetzel provided the Committee with an update and presentation on the contract operations for the Wastewater Division. The investigation's primary goal is to determine if contract operations are a good option for the Town of Ayer. The current issues with the Wastewater Division are aging wastewater staff; difficulty finding qualified operators; operating costs; aging assets/increased maintenance; and increasing regulatory restrictions.

M. Wetzel further stated that the evaluation will determine: Will contract ops save money? Will contract ops result in better maintenance of equipment? Will contract ops provide better service? How would contract ops be implemented? (i.e., treatment plant only; Union/existing employees; procurement and contract). Actions taken to date have been met with contract operations company to get input on the "market" and issues; hired ACRADIS Engineers to assist with evaluation of costs and implementation; DPW is preparing a detailed report addressing the questions; and will get additional input and costs from contract operations companies. All of this will culminate in a report containing an operations assessment; procurement alternatives evaluation; and feasibility and implementation considerations.

Update on Current Transfer Station Revenues:

J. Livingston stated that at the last meeting she asked about ideas regarding bags and other improvements for the Transfer Station. She stated that black bags are still being used and ending up in the Transfer Station. We should go back to stickers.

M. Wetzel stated that he will speak to the Transfer Station Personnel regarding concerns over black bags and to enforce.

L. Gabree stated that the revenues through April look good, but they are going to be "close" coming up to the end of the fiscal year.

P. Martin stated that the sales of Transfer Station permit stickers are higher than expected.

L. Gabree stated that we will have to wait until the end of the fiscal year to get an accurate number.

R. Skoczylas asked if there is a big difference in the cost of the bags versus the cost of the tags.

J. Livingston stated that she does not recall the costs of the bags increasing as often when we used the tags/stickers system. The problem is with the price of the bags.

L. Gabree asked if people would complain about stickers versus bags.

J. Livingston stated that the increase cost of the bags is due to an increase in the costs of plastic to make the bags.

P. Martin stated that one potential option (though it may not be popular) would be to hire another staff person to monitor/enforce the bags. The position would be about a 24 hour a week position.

New Business:

L. Gabree stated that sometime in the future the Town needs to look at a “hybrid” Transfer Station. Move to curbside but keep some of the functions/services of the Transfer Station open such as the swap shed and bulk items.

J. Livingston stated that we do need to revisit this discussion with the public in the appropriate public meetings/forums. The last time we looked at the issue(s) of the Transfer Station was in 2014.

R. Skoczylas stated that he finds L. Gabree’s idea of a “hybrid” Transfer Station interesting but how would it be funded?

M. Wetzel stated that in 2014 we did look at a hybrid model.

J. Livingston said that at the time it was more expensive.

M. Wetzel stated that the hybrid model at the time was a lot more expensive.

Scheduling of Next Meeting:

R. Pontbriand pointed out that he had the next meeting on the agenda as June 22, 2021, but he remembered that the Rate Review Committee normally meets every other month except for the rate development period in February/March.

J. Livingston stated that is correct, at this time we should meet every other month.

The Committee scheduled the next meeting for Tuesday, July 27 at 4pm. Whether the meeting will be on Zoom or in person is to be determined prior to the meeting.

Adjournment:

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

Motion passed 7-0 by roll call vote (J. Livingston, Y; M. Smith, Y; P. Martin, Y; R. Skoczylas, Y; M. Wetzel, Y; L. Gabree, Y; R. Pontbriand, Y.)

The meeting adjourned at 4:47pm.

Minutes recorded and submitted by Robert A. Pontbriand, Town Manager.

Minutes reviewed and approved by the Rate Review Committee on October 12, 2021

Signed: Robert A. Pontbriand 10/12/2021

Robert A. Pontbriand, Town Manager