

**"These minutes of the Town of Whitefield Board of Selectmen have been recorded by its Secretary. Though believed to be accurate and correct they are subject to additions, deletions, and corrections by the Board of Selectmen at its next meeting when the Board votes its final approval of the minutes. They are being made available at this time to conform to the requirements of N.H. RSA 91-A:2."**

Selectmen's Meeting Minutes

Monday, April 12, 2021

At the Selectmen's meeting held on Monday, April 12, 2021 at 5:49 p.m. the Selectmen participated via Zoom:

Peter Corey is at his home in Whitefield, maintaining social distancing.

Shawn White is at this home in Whitefield, maintaining social distancing.

John Tholl is at his home in Whitefield, maintaining social distancing.

Chairman Corey called the Meeting to order at 5:49 p.m.

A motion was made by Shawn White to enter Non-Public Session at 5:49 p.m. pursuant to NH RSA 91-A:3, II(l) Consideration of legal advice by legal counsel, either in writing or orally, to one or more members of the public body, even where legal counsel is not present; NH RSA 91-A:3, II (e) Consideration or negotiation of pending claims or litigation which has been threatened in writing or filed by or against this board or any subdivision thereof, or by or against any member thereof because of his or her membership therein, until the claim or litigation has been fully adjudicated or otherwise settled; NH RSA 91-A:3, II d – Consideration of the acquisition, sale, or lease of real or personal property which, if discussed in public, would likely benefit a party or parties whose interests are adverse to those of the general community. The motion was seconded by Peter Corey. Roll Call Vote: Corey: Yes; White: Yes. Motion passes 2-0. John Tholl joined the non-public session at 5:55 p.m.

The Board adjourned from non-public session at 6:14 p.m.

Chairman Corey called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Peter Corey is at his home in Whitefield, maintaining social distancing.

Shawn White is at this home in Whitefield, maintaining social distancing.

John Tholl is at his home in Whitefield, maintaining social distancing.

Others participating: Frank Lombardi; Fred Ingerson; Mark; Claire Houghton; Terry Lufkin; David Glover; David Clifford; Bob Loiacono; Mark Saffian; Shawn Sherwood; Bruce & Sondra Brekke; Sue Packard; Dom Frank; James; Rob Larson; Bob Stiles; Tom Ladd; Cassidy Parker; 444-7141.

Chair Corey said that we need to identify a Selectperson that will represent the town on the Feasibility Study Committee for the Town of Carroll to withdraw from SAU 36. There is a statute that requires a meeting and to form a committee. Peter said we are not sure of the exact details of when the meetings will be or the times. Shawn said he is unable to participate at this time due to other commitments, and Peter said he is quite busy with other board meetings and will not be able to accommodate it. Shawn said it looks like things have to be taken care of pretty quickly. Peter and Shawn were both in favor of appointing John Tholl to the Feasibility Study Committee. We will let John and the SAU know.

Peter said that we have some tax deeded properties available in town. These were the properties we tore the houses down and cleaned up the properties. The property on Union Street there is a lien placed on the owner's property in Claremont. The other properties the town cleaned up have a lien on the property itself. In the past, we usually take sealed bids, but given the market currently we might be better off to have a realtor list the properties. They all have town water and town sewer. We may be able to generate more income for the Town by listing and selling them with a realtor. Shawn said he is fine with that.

A motion was made by Shawn White to approve the minutes of the March 22, 2021 Selectmen's Meeting. The motion was seconded by Peter Corey. Roll Call Vote: Corey: Yes; White: Yes. Motion passes, 2-0.

6:45 p.m. Water/Sewer Rate Public Hearing – Chair Corey called the public hearing to order.

Will do our best to be sure everyone can ask a question or make a comment. Please leave your microphone off to prevent the background noise. You can raise your hand on screen or through the zoom application. Keep comments professional and concise. Shawn noted that if you are calling in on your \*6 unmutes phones.

Peter reviewed the Water/Sewer Rate Change sheet..

For water there is an increase of \$3.00 each half per meter size:

5/8 - \$135 to \$138

1 - \$174 to \$177

1.5 - \$226 to \$229

2 - \$278 to \$281

3< - \$330 to \$333

For sewer the increase in rate has tripled per each half:

5/8 - \$65 to \$185

1 - \$104 to \$302

1.5 - \$156 to \$458

2 - \$208 to \$614

3< - \$260 to \$770

With respect to water usage, there will be an increase of \$1.10 from \$6.55 to \$7.65 per 1,000 gallons of water actually used.

With respect to sewer usage, there will be an increase of \$4.15 from \$5.85 to \$10.00 per 1,000 gallons actually used.

An example for a household with a 5/8 meter and using 72,000 (36,000 x 2) gallons annually: An increase of \$634 for water and sewer.

We will be going to a quarterly billing process in the near future.

Peter said he will explain why we are proposing these rate increases. He will focus on the sewer rates as the water rates were raised significantly when we completed the first phase of the water main replacement project two years ago.

In 2015 the town received a notification from the EPA that we were in violation of our discharge permits into the John's River. EPA gave us an administrative order, which could have led to fines. We were provided a timeline to adhere to correct the situation. We have gone beyond some of the timelines, but because we are in the process of engineering and construction the EPA has always granted us an extension. In 2016, USDA Rural Development said grant funding in 2016 is going to go away and you need to act quickly if you hope to capture these grant funds. We worked with Horizons Engineering and NH DES for a plan for the replacement of the wastewater treatment plant. It was a very quick process, and we were notified in August that we would need to submit an application. Our application went in January of 2017 and we were approved for a \$6,500,000 project, and of that amount \$2,934,000 was grant. The grant amount was calculated looking at our historic user rates and what we had put away for future improvements and that was the total amount of grant we were eligible for. We were offered a low interest loan. Went to town meeting in 2017 and got approval for the \$6,500,000 project. After that town meeting, and upon further review by DES, they wanted another engineering company to look at the engineering design. Working with DES it was determined it would take \$1.6 million more to actually build a suitable plant for the town. We had to go back to town meeting in 2017 for that additional \$1.6 million approval. We were also able to get a Northern Borders Grant in the amount of \$399,200 for a septic receiving station. We were able to borrow money through the CWSRF and they forgave \$160,000 in principal forgiveness. About \$3.5 million has been grant funded or loan forgiveness. The bond of \$3,566,000 we need to start to pay back over the course of 27 years at the interest rate of 1.250%. There is another loan with CWSRF for \$1,440,000 that we have to start paying back next year over 30 years. That brings us to where we are today. We have known this day was coming. We knew we would have to raise the rates for the bond payments. The rates are basically figured at looking at debt service and operating costs and spreading it over the number of users, which are 430 sewer users, and calculating it out determines our debt requirements. The treatment plant is nearly complete. The testing phase should begin in June, and we should go completely on line in September at which

time we will be able to operate the septage receiving station and generate income and offset some of these costs.

Would like to open up the hearing for questions:

Bob Loiacono said that he was at town meeting when we voted, and he thought the grants were 50/50 was what we were told back in 2017. Peter said not for the sewer treatment plant project. It came out to about 45%. It was not 50/50. Shawn said he remembers the water was a higher grant than the sewer would be. Bob said there was one comment as a possible place for revenue with the septage receiving station. Can the town put in something that says any new septic systems those people have to use our treatment plant to dispose of their waste? Peter said he doesn't think we have that requirement. Most towns make the rate lower for the folks in town. Because you are a resident, you pay a lower rate if it had to be trucked to Franklin or other areas. There will be a limit for the amount of septage we can receive.

Dave Clifford said that he is curious about how the Mountain View Grand will figure into this as there is a lot of work going on up there? Any contribution from them to help us? Peter said clearly they are a user and have a large meter so they pay a significantly larger price for meter size and they pay for the usage, gallons used. Shawn said we did get an example for Mountain View Grand and their meter size is 4" and with their average usage their sewer bill will increase from \$13,600 to \$23,575.

Dave Glover asked what the capacity of the new treatment plant is and would that provide for any out of town services being offered to offset the rate payer cost. Peter does not know the capacity. We are hoping for that to happen with the outside septage receiving station.

Mark Saffian said this all looks to be a done deal. Peter said we have not voted on these rates. Expectation they will be voted on tonight. We are open to compelling suggestions if anyone has any. Mark asked if it would be possible to get a copy of the information sheets. One is on the web site, and we will put the other one on tonight after the meeting.

Mark Saffian: Why are we going to quarterly billing, rather than semi-annual billing? Peter said we are participating in a water conservation program and part of that program is we bill more frequently so we would be more likely to catch leaks if you are billing quarterly versus semi-annually. We have had customers in the past who did not know they had a leak because no one read the meter for six months. Shawn said we are required to go to quarterly billing. The Public Works Director has said we are on a waiver for semi-annual billing at this time. Mark asked if there any considerations to people in the town who are under serious financial duress and this financial increase will be quite difficult for them to work with? It is a 27-year bond over the course of time, and it is going to be quite a lot of money for those people who are on fixed incomes. Any special program in place to assist people with special needs? Peter said we don't have special programs in place. When you look across the state, our rates are certainly not the lowest and certainly not the highest. When they calculated the grant amount they look at the

median income. Mark asked if it would be possible for us as a town to come up with a grading system to apply for an abatement? It might be a worthy thing for us to try to come up with something for people who find this difficult. Peter said that the town does have public assistance funds, and they could certainly make an application to the town.

Shawn White said that this is hitting all of us. He said his bill which in the past was around \$500 will go up to \$1,700. It is a big jump. Shawn said we are in control of how much water we use. He said he is getting a better shower head to try to save how much water we use. Everyone should take steps to try to help the bills and lower the bills.

Bruce Brekke said that Shawn had mentioned in a recent article in the Coos County Democrat that perhaps we could go to a village district system to vote on the water and sewer rather than how it is currently handled now. Shawn said that story was not exactly what he said. He was speaking about how we can stop the voters that don't use the service from voting on the water/sewer budgets, and the only way to do that is to do a village district. If you had bonds or votes to upgrade systems, people who are not on the system don't vote on it—the users would. Shawn said that the town back in 2016 was told by the EPA to upgrade the system, so even if we had a village district we would be in the same situation we are now. Ultimately, the town can look at doing a village district. It has its pluses and minuses. The board could look at it, and it shouldn't be something we jump right into. Peter said it is like a whole new commission, have to have another board, there are pros and cons to doing it. When you look across the state, the vast majority of water/sewer districts are created because they cross municipal boundaries. They don't just serve one community.

Bill Jones asked why are we giving the septic users in Whitefield a discount? Why shouldn't they pay the same as everyone else? Peter said the Whitefield residents would pay one rate and people outside would be charged a premium because their waste is coming from outside. With this project we did take \$50,000 from the taxpayers for the septage receiving station. We also created a capital reserve fund and we do collect taxpayer dollars to maintain the wastewater collection system.

Mark Saffian: Are there any businesses or industries in the town that are exempt from these fees? Peter said no, not that we are aware of. Mark said he has heard that the Summit in some way is exempt. Peter said the Summit pays the full rate for water and sewer just like everybody else.

Dave Clifford – is it required for a village resident to be tied into the sewer system and town water? Would it be possible for him to drill a well? The Town water he can but he cannot on the town sewer. Peter said if you are within 100 feet of a municipal sewer main the law says you have to tie in to the collection system. That is one of the ways you reduce the cost by adding users. When you build out the main to other areas of the town, it reduces the cost.

Dave Glover: What is the base rate to be paid? Peter said that the 5/8 meter the base rate for water is \$138 and \$185 for sewer. That is to be just hooked up.

Sondra Brekke asked if the reason there were only 430 sewer users as because the main only served that many. Shawn said that currently there are 648 water users and 430 sewer users. The sewer users are hooked to the only places the sewer pipes are at this time in town.

Bob Loiacono asked about the base rate—if we go to semi-annual billing will that base rate change? Peter replied that it will be broken out on a quarterly basis rather than a semi-annual basis.

A motion was made to approve the rates as proposed. Shawn wanted to discuss keeping the current rates for this current billing and increase the rates going forward. It is the best we can do for the users. We are going to quarterly billing, and it will make it easier to pay quarterly rather than a large semi-annual bill. The motion was seconded. Roll Call Vote: Corey: Yes; White: Yes; Tholl: Yes. The rates have been approved and will go in effect with the July 1<sup>st</sup> billing (April-June usage). We don't like to do but it is a necessity. We will have a state-of-the art treatment system that will serve us well over many years.

The meeting adjourned at 7:21 p.m.