

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING

VIRTUAL MEETING MINUTES

September 15, 2020

7:00 P.M.

CHERRY VALLEY & ROCHDALE WATER DISTRICT

- I. CALL TO ORDER - The meeting was called to order by Chairman Bergin @ 7: 00 P.M.

The following were in attendance:

Kevin Bergin, Chairman

2 Subscribers

Arthur Paquette - LCAC

Arthur E.J. Levesque, Commissioner

Benjamin Morris, Superintendent

Robert H. Lemieux, Sr., Commissioner

Jennifer Wood, Treasurer

Cheryl Balkus, Clerk

- II. **District Member Forum –** Subscriber Greg Buteau wanted to thank the Superintendent and others to be able to get the Risk & Resiliency Assessment performed by RCAP to be done at no cost and save the District approximately \$23,000.00 and to be able to get the Mass DEP meeting on the Grindstone Well.

Per Chairman Bergin there are some folks out that have higher water sewer bills in the Valley. He states on the water side we are doing our best to control our budget, we have kept last year and this year the same. Over the last 2 fiscal years we have been able to reduce the water rates three times. He has seen examples on the social media side of multiple hundreds of dollars and sometimes low thousand-dollar water and sewer bills. He cannot speak to the sewer side he does know that their rates are higher, and he is not on that Board, but he can comment on the water rates. Today, he asked the Treasurer to take an average of what the water bills are in the Valley. Some of the average water charges in the to include our \$25.00 base charge is \$85.52 for just the water side. That is consistent with 70%-72% District overall and have a water bill of under \$100.00 per month. There are some Subscribers that use more than the average and here those that use less than the average. Those who are posting on Face Book are significantly higher. Some of those bills posted on Face Book are clearly significantly higher than the \$85.52 average. In some instances, 10 times as much than some that we have seen. This is just information to be put out there. Per Christopher Reilley 97 McCarthy Ave it is a good point to note that the Water District rate has dropped three times in the past couple of years and this should be the marking point for the Water District. The Sewer District has a larger financial problem. Per Chairman Bergin agrees and will make it noted each time. However, its sometimes falling on deaf ears. He has seen some of the bills and they are astronomical and how some get to be as high as they are when they say they are conserving does not make sense or ad up. They are real bills and significantly higher and not disputing that, but they are significantly higher than the majority of the users.

Per Subscriber Tim Hickey has also heard that people have \$1,500.00 water bills and wanted to know if these are multifamily homes or single family. Per Chairman Bergin information posted on Face Book has the address blanked out and unknown if these are multifamily or single families. Per Mr. Hickey said that these people should distinguish if going to post the information on Face Book it is not fair to the rest of the public or the Board if 3 or 4 families living in the facility or if the facts are not right.

Bobby Lemieux 199 Main St Cherry Valley frankly the way it is perceived the water meter is the driving factor or calculating of the volume of water in and to calculate the sewer bill. So, they are joined on the same bill and most are looking at the bottom line. From personal experience paying considerably more for the water and sewer discharge from his Cherry Valley property than his property in Worcester. It is the same water - Worcester water it is hard to fathom that it costs so much more. Until you get into the operation side of things and see that we are such a small group are the driving factor of the Water and Sewer District. On the sewer side it is a third of the size and the scale of spreading it to a third of the population that is why the numbers appear to be skewed, and lumping into all the same and not looking into the details and taking the time to get educated into looking at the two.

Since day one before being elected has mentioned that the word should be put out and doing an excellent job in saving money, participating in the RCAP Audit, that there has been great improvements in bookkeeping, processes and the overall day to day operations. The Team has on a daily basis taken initiative to offset the expenses and there is the need to get the word out of that they have done a great job in minimizing expenses.

Subscriber Christopher Reilley really does think it would be in the Water District best interest to put out a brochure / flyer to the Subscribers to break it down so everyone who has a voice raised in protest or behind waving a sign and knows exactly what they are protesting and to focus on the right issues.

Chairman Bergin to Mr. Reilley he had thought he previously found a possible grant for the trifold or brochure. Per Mr. Reilley he did find some educational money, but it was geared towards pools and we did not go in that direction.

If people got to know what is going on behind the scenes it would do some good instead of misapplied politics. Per Chairman Bergin perhaps we can further research to provide in the monthly billing. Per Commissioner Levesque found information from other Water Districts and Corporations that he will share later and show how efficient we are compared to others out there.

Commissioner Levesque motions to suspend the balance of the District Member Forum. Seconded by Chairman Bergin. All in favor. Approved.

The District Member Forum ended at 22 minutes and 26 seconds.

III. APPROVE MINUTES

- A. September 1, 2020** - Commissioner Levesque motioned to approve the minutes of September 1, 2020. Seconded by Chairman Bergin. All in Favor. Approved.

Per Commissioner Levesque in the past we used at the last meeting the entire half hour in the District Member Forum. It should be noted in the minutes when the District Member Forum ends if earlier than the half hour. Per Cheryl Balkus, Recording Secretary it is noted in the previous minutes and to continue going forward.

Per Chairman Bergin one notation in the District Member Forum of the 9-1-2020 minutes he had stated that the three rate reductions occurred in the past two fiscal years and it reads the past year. He requests to make a correction to the 9-1-2020 minutes to reflect this. Commissioner Levesque motions to the approve the meeting minutes with the correction of the 9-1-2020 meeting minutes. Seconded by Chairman Bergin. All in Favor. Approved.

IV. FINANCE

- A. Approve September 7, 2020 Warrants** – Commissioner Lemieux motions to approve the September 7, 2020 warrants. Seconded by Commissioner Bergin. All in Favor. Approved.

Commissioner Lemieux asked about a line item of the warrant named Deer Pond Auto/Auto Repair in the amount of \$2,670.36. Per Superintendent Morris one our pickup trucks had rotted rocker panels and a sensor on the coolant system that was malfunctioning causing the fan to run at a higher rate than it should have been.

Commissioner Lemieux asked about line item named Clear Com IT in the amount of \$962.21 and if this is a monthly fee. Per Treasurer Wood this is our IT company for Computers, Servers, Phone system and any support that we need. This is the same amount each month.

- B. Approve September 14 Warrants-** Commissioner Levesque motions to approve the September 14, 2020 warrants. Seconded by Chairman Bergin. All in Favor. Approved.

Commissioner Lemieux asked the Superintendent about First String office expense. Per the Superintendent this is a New Braintree company to make water shirts. About every year to two years shirts are purchased they need to be replaced from wear and tear. This is slightly higher because he purchased polos to be more professional instead of always wearing a dirty yellow t-shirt.

Commissioner Lemieux asked about line item Town of Leicester PD in the amount of \$200.00 – Per the Superintendent this is for police detail that comes out of Field Supplies.

Commissioner Lemieux asked about line item Spinelli CPA – Per the Superintendent this is the auditing confirm that the District uses, and this is a payment towards completing the Districts Annual Audit.

Commissioner Lemieux asked about line item for Tata & Howard in the amount of \$5,500.00. Per the Superintendent this is the first of many payments to the project costs for the signed contract to do the Grindstone Well.

Per Chairman Bergin the combined warrants include motor vehicle, office expense, insurance payroll, technology, legal, field supplies, pipes, labs, phone, taxes etc.. The total of the combined warrants is \$38,145.67.

As side note from the warrants of the last meeting, he did not have the breakdown at the time of the meeting. The amounts and breakdown of the two warrants dated 8-24-2020 & 8-31-2020 that were motioned and approved at the 9-1-2020 meeting was a Total of \$31,216.36. The warrants consisted of payroll, technology, lab work, repair & maintenance, insurance, phone, office expense, field supplies, chemicals, continuing education, consulting fees & electricity.

Subscriber Buteau wanted to know what the amount of the Continuing Education was. Per Treasurer Wood did not have the amount at the time of the meeting, However, both Operators have been taking courses for licensing. Per Mr. Buteau satisfied with this information.

C. Treasurer Report –

Revenue Received

Fiscal FY'21 Total Water Revenue \$226,222.27
 SBA Rental & Solar Rental \$3,507.04
 Reimbursements \$36,291.68
 Liens \$148.59
 Misc. \$1,631.15 \$1,631.15
 TOTAL: \$267,800.73

Operating Expenditures

FY' 21 Approved Budget \$1,217,593.91
 FY'21 YTD Total \$215,883.59
 Balance as of August 31, 2020 \$1,001,710.32
 Balance after reimbursements \$1,038,002.00

Other Payments

Loan Payments Approved Amount: \$93,000.00	Balance: \$33,307.79
Grindstone Well: \$225,000.00	Balance: \$225,000.00
Clear Well: \$355,000.00 (Special Article Meeting)	Balance: \$355,000.00

Aged Receivables Report:

As of Date:	6/30/2020	7/31/2020	8/31/2020
0-90 Days Past Due	\$33,127.71	\$26,329.78	\$50,787.37
Over 90 Days Past Due	\$20,626.03	\$26,769.10	\$22,729.46
Total	\$53,753.74	\$53,098.88	\$73,516.83

Notes:

This shows the amount that is past due to the district for water charges only.

To review the complete Treasurer Water Report, go to Reports at www.cvrwd.com

V. ADMINISTRATION

A. Grant Researcher Update – Per Christopher Reilley Subscriber and Grant Researcher in the world of grants with COVID had an unexpected unusual effect. The Federal Government refreshes their budget Oct 1 and even though promised money thru its grant program due to COVID the funding was rescinded in March and the Federal Government monies were taken back. This has never happened and a lot of grant opportunities up in the air. There are some naturally occurring limitations that prevent CVRWD because we do not qualify or do not meet criteria and we are minuscule. Example such as there is Dept of Agriculture money to build water way infrastructure because we do not have 75 farming communities within our District. There is the Dept of Interior Grants for piping and infrastructure, but we do not qualify because we are 50 miles from the coastline. Perhaps being unified may open more doors to be eligible for more grants. If we become a town wide district to see what becomes of it. The EPA has plenty of money available for conservation. Perhaps we can reclaim in the future to revitalize Henshaw Pond. There are some monies and exploratory conservations service. Now limited to Community Development Block Grants. When the cycle comes again can deal with these when it comes around. Halfway through the contracted agreement there have been fourteen opportunities but not worthy of pursuit for the District. Some opportunities found is limited 8-12 weeks and turn around is a short window. Thinks more can be done to be ready. Example is having certain elements prepared such as mission statements, biography of the players involved, demographics, breakdown of economical, racial or categorization of the subscribers in your base to go into the grant application.

Another problem is the two-week cycle between meetings and suggests that opportunity information can be emailed to all involved ahead of time to save time and apply for a grant.

Bottom line is to be ready to apply a grant application in a week or 2 or 3 to take advantage of an opportunity as we find one. This is something we could be doing while just sitting on our hands.

Per Commissioner Levesque agrees if we could email each other in between with the same grant opportunity will save time to get the facts to discuss the pros & cons.

Per Chairman Bergin the way the contract was written is the information would go to the Chairman and Superintendent and brainstorm without involving the other Commissioners. If the grant looks like a winner, they can get it to the other Commissioners prior to a meeting. Does not think involving two more Commissioners will take up more time. The way that it is scheduled now is more efficient. Mr. Reilley agrees and does not want to come in and reinvent the wheel

and knows what workflow works best and be ready to take proactive steps to be ready. Per Chairman Bergin does not recall of a grant opportunity presented to us. Even a short window that is 8 weeks and gives us time to put something to put together.

Per Subscriber Hickey the information should have been discussed in the beginning of this operation and started then and not now, it could have been asked for three months into the operation. Per Mr. Reilley to clarify he is not running the program, part of the plan that was presented is for grant planning and it was not picked up. He is operating at the pleasure of the Board, acting as a Researcher to show them opportunities and if one is found to act upon.

Chairman Bergin we need to do some work, possible some of these statements may exist.

Per Commissioner Lemieux to Mr. Hickey that it his responsibility and apologizes. It was his idea to go down the path of Grant Researching and should have stayed on top of it. He will work with the Superintendent, Mr. Reilley and the Commissioners to get our mission statement and paperwork in order and to have ready if not for the next meeting the following one.

VI. Operations

A. Superintendent's Report – They are still in the field to complete Valve Exercising and are held back a bit due to the increased number of meter changes.

The two Operators have been taking their virtual classes for licensing of distribution and treatment. Johnny is to complete his Treatment Level 2 so he has it when the Well is put back online. Christian should have his Distribution by end of year and then to start the testing for his Treatment license.

Nothing new to report on Grindstone Well. The schedule is moving forward as planned.

The end of last week he received a call from 7 Investigates to interview the Water & Sewer Districts. He met with a Reporter to discuss and the financial issues. Most of the conversation was towards the Sewer District. To his knowledge she had followed up with him after meeting with 3 Subscribers.

Commissioner Lemieux asked if the Superintendent did consult with legal before meeting with the reporter. He did not but informed Chairman Bergin it was coming. This is not the first time this has happened and did not require legal counsel. He did not feel it was not necessary to use counsel and to charge the District for the legal counsel. There is nothing to hide, no issue to discuss and gave the answers. If the Commissioners want him to contact counsel in the future can do so. Per Commissioner Lemieux does not want to spend money on legal counsel and concerned that the media can construe the information and the result can be often report different than what reality is. He is assured that the Superintendent did the right thing and to just be careful as it sees that media sensationalizes. Per Chairman Bergin thinks the local reporting has been very respectful and we are not seeing any follow up because here it is in black in white. There is not cooking the books or hiding information, we are being honest open and forthright because there is no story.

VII. COMMUNICATIONS

A. 8-31-2020 Customer Request – Aquino

Email complaint from Subscriber

To whom it may concern,

I am reaching out to file a complaint against the extremely high water and sewer bill in Cherry Valley in Ma.

I recently purchased a home and was not aware this was an issue until my first bill today 8/31/2020. I have yet moved into my home and this is the bill I am receiving it's uncalled for.

The Subscriber was emailed the information to join tonight's virtual meeting. The Subscriber was not on the call.

Per Chairman Bergin there is a negative \$10.00 previous balance, the service period of the bill is 7-2-2020 thru 8-3-2020 for 1,377 cubic feet. Total bill \$653.50. The charge for the water including the base charge \$198.25 and the charge for Sewer is \$465.25. The Subscriber has the new meter to view usage history that has been reviewed by the Board. The actual email is filing a complaint and does not request consideration or forbearance. The Subscriber is reaching out to file a complaint and it's uncalled for. We know how the rates are determined and our respective Boards and budgets. The details show the day to day usage and shows that the water was used and went thru the system. If there was a leaky toilet it is an amazing amount of water that can refill a tank and can be thousands of gallons of water. If going thru the system will be required and to be responsible in paying the bill. Per Commissioner Lemieux advises when managing a project like this, needs to be there to oversee and check for any problems. It is bad for them but the fact the meter recorded the usage of the water and the ratepayer will need to pay the bill.

B. 9-8-2020 Payment Plan Approval – 12-month payment plan to begin

October 1, 2020 and end October 2021. Commissioner Levesque motions to approve. Seconded by Chairman Bergin. All in Favor. Approved.

VIII. PERSONNEL – Nothing to Report

IX. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

A. Approval of Next Meeting - Commissioner Lemieux motioned to hold the next Virtual Meeting Tuesday, October 6, 2020 @ 7:00 PM. Seconded by Chairman Bergin. All in favor. Approved.

X. ADJOURNMENT- Commissioner Levesque motioned to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Chairman Bergin. All in Favor. Approved. Meeting adjourned at 8:39 P.M.