

Minutes

WATER AND SEWER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Regular meeting

7 p.m. April 4, 2024

Board Meeting Room of Town Hall Annex, 105 E. Corbin St.



Present: Chair Jenn Sykes, Vice Chair Daniel Rawlins, Members Mo Rasheed, Steed Robinson, Barry Weston, and Commissioner Meaghun Darab

Absent: Member Grace Beeler

Staff: Environmental Engineering Supervisor Bryant Green; Civil Engineering Technician Tyler Freeman

1. Call to order and welcome of guests

Chair Jenn Sykes called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. She took roll and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

2. Agenda changes and approval

There were no changes to the agenda

Motion: Member Barry Weston moved approval of the agenda with no changes. Member Mo Rasheed seconded.

Vote: 5-0.

3. Minutes review and approval

Minutes from regular meeting on Feb 1, 2024.

Motion: Weston moved to approve the Feb 1, 2024, minutes as submitted. Vice Chair Daniel Rawlins seconded.

Vote: 5-0.

4. Updates

A. Utilities status report highlights

Environmental Engineering Supervisor Bryant Green presented the utilities status report. Topics presented included:

- Status of supplies for the raw water pump rebuild.
- A new assessment for the possibility of switching from chlorine gas to aqueous chlorine as a primary form of disinfection.
- Status of grinder pump in the wastewater treatment plant.
- Upcoming tour of the wastewater treatment plant.
- The reservoir at West Fork on the Eno is spilling over, meaning we have a two-year supply of raw water.
- Tour visits to the reservoir for dam safety event and an upcoming international design conference.
- Status of ongoing developments.

- Flow monitoring to reduce inflow and infiltration.
- Inventory of lead service lines to comply with the EPA revised lead and copper rule. Information will be documented and made public.
- Fiber installation and locate ticket requests.
- Job opening and staffing updates within Utilities Department.
- National funding update.
- Water and Sewer Advisory Committee's two out-of-town vacancies.

B. Bill format and language

Green reported that staff recently received data for the bill format and that he hoped to have something to show at the next meeting. He said that staff have found some limitations due to working with a third-party vendor.

C. Backflow cross connection

An update was given about the backflow reimbursement process. Six of the eligible seven homeowners have submitted for reimbursement. One person has not responded. One other person who was not eligible submitted a request for reimbursement, which was denied.

D. Out of town vacancies

There are two out-of-town vacancies on the committee.

E. Budget update

The updated utilities rate proposal is on the May Board of Commissioners meeting agenda. Staff are working on the rate model and internal budget forecasting. It will be another austerity budget, with at least a 5% cut, and tough decisions will have to be made about what gets removed. Staff are aware of how regressive increased rates plus an austerity budget can be among low-income communities.

5. Discussion

A. Joint meeting with BOC discussion items

There was discussion about whether joint meetings with the Board of Commissioners is needed for anything beyond regulatory review. Sykes asked for requests for topics to cover at future joint meetings.

It was generally agreed that the two entities already stay in touch by attending each other's meetings, and that the joint meetings do not seem to be necessary. It was suggested that the Board of Commissioners send some direction for what they would like the Water and Sewer Advisory Committee to consider. However, the commissioners expressed that even when they put time and effort into considerations, it seems that the committee's opinion tends to differ from the commissioners' and their recommendations do not lead to action by the board. The committee requested that the Board of Commissioners provide topics to review by June, otherwise they recommend canceling the joint August meeting.

B. Last Fridays Outreach

There was discussion of the Last Fridays outreach program, the most recent one of which was held around Halloween.

There was general consensus that the timing of Last Fridays is difficult and there was not much enthusiasm among the committee members for the program. Members expressed that they did not get the impression that it was effective. They agreed that a program of that sort might be useful once in a while but does not need to take place on a regular basis. It was suggested that a program could take place at a weekend event such as a half-marathon, 5k race, or a concert.

There was discussion of the purpose of outreach at public events. It was observed that members of the public do not typically attend Water and Sewer Advisory Committee meetings, but that members of the public do have a lot of questions about utilities.

It was suggested that committee members email Sykes about public events where outreach could happen, and the committee can draft a schedule in June.

6. Reports from February/March Board of Commissioners meetings

A. Meeting from Feb. 12

Sykes reported that Aldi and the new car dealership had their water requests accepted. There was also discussion of cross connection and whether joint sessions between the board and the Water and Sewer Advisory Committee are needed.

B. Meeting from Feb. 26

Member Steed Robinson reported that he had watched the discussion between the Board of Commissioners and Renee Price and Graig Meyer about legislative priorities for the short session: Water and sewer were at the top of the list for long-term funding. Meyer said tax cuts are already having an impact on revenue at state level, and steady funding is available for ongoing programs, but there is no additional funding for special water and sewer projects. Price encouraged working together as league of cities in the face of a dwindling pool of federal funds. There was concern of regionalism expressed by Kathleen Ferguson about limiting autonomy at a local level to focus on the region.

C. Meeting from March 11

Rawlins reported that there were lots of people at the meeting. He said the issue was discussed of the person who applies for reimbursement for the backflow installation but was ineligible. He said there was also discussion of the development at Corbinton Commons.

D. Meeting from March 25

Rasheed reported that there was discussion about the impact of pet waste on water systems. There was also discussion of regionalization, during which it was noted that Orange Water and Sewer Authority pulls from a different basin and Durham is too far and expensive to pull from.

7. Assignments for Board of Commissioners meetings

1. Meeting April 8 (Weston/Sykes)
2. Meeting April 22 (Sykes/Rawlins)
3. Meeting May 13 (Robinson/Rasheed)
4. Meeting May 28 (Rawlins/Weston)
5. Meeting June 3 (Rasheed/Beeler)

8. Future agenda items

There was discussion of revising the split of in-town versus out-of-town representation on the board since there seems to be interest from people who live in town but very little interest from out-of-town residents. Green noted that the split was suggested but not required, and staff chose to pursue it because the population was split half and half. The committee members requested data on the current proportions of in-town and out-of-town customers. There was also support of including commercial representation on the committee.

Motion: Weston moved to advertise the current vacancies as being available for both in-town and out-of-town residents, and to add that commercial representation is also welcome. Robinson seconded.

Vote: 5-0.

There was a discussion about pursuing capital funding opportunities. Green confirmed that staff track funding opportunities, assess whether the town is a good candidate based on the criteria, and they always pursue them when the candidacy assessment seems positive.

9. Adjournment

Motion: Weston moved to adjourn the meeting. Rawlins seconded.

Sykes adjourned the meeting at 8:02 p.m. without a vote.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyler Freeman", written in a cursive style.

Tyler Freeman
Civil Engineering Technician
Staff support to the Water and Sewer Advisory Committee

Approved: June 6, 2024