



Utilities Commission
Commission Meeting

Minutes

September 7, 2023
8:30 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Brian Ball	City Engineer	Present	
Mike Miller		Absent	
Aaron Reinhart		Present	
Jason West		Absent	
Jessi Busenburg	Alternative Member	Present	

Others in attendance: Maureen Hall, Recording Secretary; Rob Broeren, City Law Director; Jessi Busenburg, Alternate Commission Member; Brad Cook, Utility Administration Manager; April Brady, Customer Support Specialist I; John Ruckman, City Council Member; Representatives from Eastern Star.

MINUTES APPROVAL

August 3, 2023

- Motion to approve minutes of the August 3, 2023 Utilities Commission.

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Aaron Reinhart
SECONDER:	Jessi Busenburg, Alternative Member
AYES:	Ball, Reinhart, Busenburg
ABSENT:	Miller, West

ADJUSTMENT JOURNAL

August Adjustment Journal

- Motion to approve the August Adjustment Journal.

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Aaron Reinhart
SECONDER:	Jessi Busenburg, Alternative Member
AYES:	Ball, Reinhart, Busenburg
ABSENT:	Miller, West

NEW BUSINESS***Fairgrounds Road Water and Sewer ARPA and OPWC***

Mr. Ball summarizes the Clintonville project status. Continues to discuss hydrant flushing and it's effects on this neighborhood. Mr. Ball suggests water line extension in partner with the county and township to remedy this situation. In addition Mr. Ball mentions that the county is interested in making improvements to the road and the storm water systems.

Mr. Ball proposes joint project for roughly \$3 million dollars in partnership between the county engineer and potentially the township, the township is not a necessary party. Step 1 we are going to ask city council to authorize us to apply for a Ohio Public Works commission funding for the joint project. Later we will be putting our share of the project into the city budget.

Mr. Ball asked for questions and continued to describe the condition of the water lines in the affected area. He also mentioned that we believe the area was developed before the city annexed it into the city. The neighborhood did not have stormwater services and water line quality is poor.

Mr. Ruckman asked what the water line material was.

Mr. Ball explained it was ductile, but was in poor condition. We have had far more cracks in the line than usual with ductile water line.

Mrs. Busenburg asked for more detail on the funding process.

Mr. Ball explains the funding process including county and township contributions.

Mr. Ball offered an alternate option of a Phased project in lieu of funding.

Mr. Ball mentioned ARPA funding may also be applied to the project.

Mr. Ruckman asked if completing the project in one Phase if it could offer a savings to the city,

Mr. Ball states yes it would save money, but if we don't have the money we have to do it in Phases.

Mr. Ball also explains that eventually all roads will be affected by this project, and we can't close them all at once. And it's not just based on money.

- move the Fairgrounds Road water and sewer project on to city council.

RESULT:	ACCEPTED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Aaron Reinhart
SECONDER:	Jessi Busenburg, Alternative Member
AYES:	Ball, Reinhart, Busenburg
ABSENT:	Miller, West

Mansfield Avenue waterline

Mr. Ball explains this project is related to the Fairgrounds Road water and sewer project. Due to some project design updates two culverts will need replaced just south of Fairgrounds Road. The culvert projects may affect where the water lines are located. To obtain some cost savings it may be advisable to add this project to the Fairgrounds Road water and sewer project.

Mr. Ball asks if the commission would be amicable to getting a price from our contractor to replace the water line from Fairgrounds Road to Grange Ave as part of the project starting this fall. This option would also avoid installing temporary water lines for customers during the project.

Mr. Ball asks for questions.

- adding the water line project from Grange to Fairgrounds Road on for the project to get pricing.

RESULT:	ACCEPTED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Jessi Busenburg, Alternative Member
SECONDER:	Aaron Reinhart
AYES:	Ball, Reinhart, Busenburg
ABSENT:	Miller, West

Receiving FOG at WWTP

Mr. Reinhart explains that our Fats Oils and Grease program (FOG) will create the need for a place to dispose of FOG materials. The current closest disposal is in Newark. Accepting FOG at the Mount Vernon Wastewater Plant (WWTP) would create a substantial savings for FOG solution providers.

Mr. Ball explains what FOG is and where it comes from as well as how the WWTP would handle it. He states we don't allow FOG into our sewer collection system, but the plant can treat it with anaerobic processes before adding it to the normal process flow. The city is responsible for enforcing the rules that if you have a restaurant or church that produces enough food you must meet these specifications. Mr. Ball further explains that we understand the burden that disposing of this material creates for the customer. Offering a place to dispose locally would help reduce this burden. This solution is also a potential revenue source for the utility.

Mr. Reinhart states that we could use the carbon produced by this process to aid in the reduction of phosphorus. Without this process we would need to purchase additional carbon to treat phosphorus.

Mr. Ruckman asked how many potential customers would use this option.

Mr. Ball states the current records are in poor condition and we are working on calculating the potential volume.

Mr. Ball states the next step will be entering a design contract with this included and will bring more information as brought forward.

Staffing

Mr. Reinhart explains the current staffing at the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP). He recommends an additional position of chief operator to fill the void between the assistant director and operators. This position would manage and oversee the operators with scheduling and educating for future progression with the city.

Mr. Ball states this new position would also oversee the FOG program. Our current organization lacks continuity and redundancy.

Mr. Ball compares utility structure to the fire department's structure and why it's important.

Mr. Reinhart also speaks of redundancy as well as EPA regulations, requirements, and the importance of cross training.

Mr. Ball continues speaking of the meter department and its structure. He explains that loss of experienced meter department personnel has put a strain on the process as we seen with the issue at 307 W Burgess St. As well as the transfer of tribal knowledge.

Mr. Ball recommends adding a third meter position to the meter department as well as adding a crew chief level position.

Mr. Reinhart mentions that the crew chief level would have additional responsibilities and be more technically inclined to handle meter issues.

Mr. Ball quotes Terry Scott (City Auditor), explains how the billing office and the meter department are crucial to the income for the utility.

Mr. Cook explains the importance of the manpower and the knowledge of the meter department and how it affects the billing office.

Mr. Reinhart brought up the fact that the meter department are sometimes the only people from the water department that customers see, therefore they represent the utility.

Mr. Ball explains that we are behind on collections year to date and this is billed based on meter readings.

Mr. Ball makes a point that a meter position is considered a senior level position that it would likely be filled by a knowledgeable person from the utility.

Mr. Ruckman mentions that promoting within will open up additional junior positions within the utility.

Mr. Reinhart states this will give the whole department a place to advance.

Mr. Ruckman asks if this will be part of the chiefs responsibility to insure succession.

Mr. Reinhart confirms succession is a function of the chiefs responsibility.

Mr. Ball explains the new union contract allows for people to move around the utility without having to change job positions.

Mr. Broeren describes previous contract situations where union members were not allowed to be moved to different departments to flex manpower.

Mr. Reinhart also explains he would like to match the Wastewater Treatment Plant manpower structure at the Water Treatment Plant.

Mr. Ball explains how the lack of structure and manpower creates challenges for not just the utility but also for the engineering office.

OES request for penalty removal

Darcy Bussard from Ohio Eastern Star at 1451 Gambier Rd, paid over \$1,000 last month in penalties due to a new person in the A/P position didn't realize the urgency of the utility bills to be paid to avoid late fees, so they are asking for penalties to be waived.

Mr. Ball questioned if this was on all accounts.

Ms. Bussard verified there are four accounts and two under \$500 had already been waived, and is asking for the two over \$500 to be waived as well.

Mr. Cook verified the two under \$500 were waived by the billing office and their account is normally in good standing without penalties.

- waive the penalties.

RESULT:	ACCEPTED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Jessi Busenburg, Alternative Member
SECONDER:	Aaron Reinhart
AYES:	Ball, Reinhart, Busenburg
ABSENT:	Miller, West

Water Spigot Charges

Mr. Cook presents a letter from Amy Allen on Sugar Street requesting a credit because a spigot was maliciously left running while they were out of town. No other evidence was provided.

Mr. Reinhart asked if we had the meter reading and if it showed the water consumption.

Mr. Cook provided data from the billing office regarding the consumption.

Mr. Reinhart clarifies the water did not get returned to the sewer and the customer was requesting credit for the sewer charges.

Mr. Ball asks if we verified that there was an outdoor spigot on the house.

Mr. Cook said we did not verify the spigot.

Mr. Ball recommended that we verify they have an outdoor spigot.

Mr. Broeren recommended that we require additional evidence for example a written statement from the witness that discovered the spigot left running. He mentioned the lack of details in their request.

Mrs. Busenburg recalls us receiving a police report to corroborate the claim before a credit was approved.

Mr. Ball recommends requesting additional information before approving a credit for Amy Allen. Additional information will be reviewed in Octobers committee meeting.

Credit requests

Melissa Harding resident at 307 W Burgess Street, states she got her high usage letter due to a water leak, August 23 she was made aware from the water department then received her high usage letter on August 24. Landlord called billing office for more information on the \$2,200 water bill. Billing office informed the landlord that the meter had not been reading for

18 months. On Tuesday, September 5 Melissa came into the billing office to request payment options because of the high bill.

Mr. Ball explained to Melissa that the billing office is only authorized to make adjustments up to \$500, and that Melissa Harding did the right thing by coming to the Utilities Commission meeting today. Mr. Ball asked Melissa if she was to locate the cause of the high consumption.

Melissa stated her toilet had started a massive leak the day the water department came out to make her aware of the high usage. She states the toilet had been repaired the water department came out the next day to verify the meter had slowed to expected consumption.

Melissa states she has never had any issues with her water bill in over the last 5 years.

Mr. Ball request to have Mr. Cook to speak on behalf of the billing office.

Mr. Ball explained the difference between a meter reading and a remote reading.

Mr. Cook clarified that the meter was reading but it was not sending the value remotely. Once noticed the meter department was able to repair the radio read issue. Once the reading was being received we noticed the high usage. Because of the severity of the usage, we asked the meter tech to knock on the door and notify the customer in person.

Mr. Cook explained that the high usage had been going on for the past 18 months. The high usage was noted at an average of 6 hundred cubic feet per day. Due to the fact that the meter was not communicating the billing office had already adjusted their usage for the first 17 months.

Mr. Ball asked if we have verified that the high usage has stopped.

Mr. Cook explained that the meter department had verified and double checked totally 3 visits to the location.

Mr. Ball asked for verification of 6 hundred cubic feet per day of usage.

Mr. Cook clarified and explained that it was 186 hundred cubic feet per month.

Mr. Broeren asked for a minimum water charge for 1 month.

Mr. Ball stated the minimum charges for water is 4 hundred cubic feet per month.

Mr. Broeren mentioned that a minimum bill would be somewhere around \$60 per month.

Mr. Cook passed out a breakdown of the usage and charges.

Mr. Broeren asked if he could ask questions.

Mr. Ball says yes and opened up for discussion.

Mr. Broeren asked how do we know these charges go back 18 months.

Mr. Cook responds with 18 months ago is when the billing office implemented their new billing software. Mr. Cook also explained the breakdown included all the information since the last read 18 months ago.

Mr. Broeren asked if the meter had been measuring water correctly even though it was not remotely reading.

Mr. Cook explained that the meter was measuring water correctly but was not remotely sending the reading to the billing office. He further explains that when a reading is not received at the billing office the system will automatically estimates the consumption. The estimation for this account has been zero because the meter has not communicated remotely since the new system was implemented. Because of the utilities minimum charge of 4 hundred cubic feet per month the customer did not realize that the consumption was not being calculated.

Mr. Broeren asked why it wasn't noticed in the billing office.

Mr. Cook explained the loss of experienced manpower which ultimately held up standard practices. Because of this no one realized these tasks were not being completed. Once the issue became apparent the billing office started the long process of correcting the issue. This is currently an ongoing project.

Mr. Ball asked for clarification on the total consumption over the 18 months.

Mr. Cook pointed out the information on the breakdown sheet.

Mr. Ball verified calculation numbers.

Mr. Ball asked if the 4 units charged to each month were deducted from the total consumption.

Mr. Cook explains he did not credit the 4 hundred cubic feet from the estimated bills. He offered to recalculate which would ultimately reduce the total consumption by only 4 hundred cubic feet because the previous 17 months had already been adjusted.

Mr. Ball asked for clarification.

Mr. Broeren and Mr. Cook explained that the consumption had already been adjusted, ultimately crediting more than 4 hundred cubic feet for each month.

Mr. Cook explained that the water was actually consumed and that 17 months of 186 hundred cubic feet per month had already been adjusted, totaling roughly \$42,000.

Mr. Ball asked if any one else has other questions.

Mr. Broeren if we could expect to see more similar situations.

Mr. Cook potentially.

Mr. Ball asked how many accounts were identified in your project with this issue?

Mr. Cook says the first round showed us 181 meters with radio issues, not all of those are expected to have a similar leak situation.

Mr. Ball asked what was the usage after the repair was made.

Mr. Broeren asked what date the MXU was repaired

Mr. Cook stated he did not have the exact date, but it was the beginning of August.

Mr. Ball asked what is the usage after the toilet and MXU repairs were made.

Mr. Cook estimate's that her current usage will be below the minimum of 4 hundred cubic feet. It appears the leak has been corrected.

Mr. Ball called Melissa Harding back to the podium.

Melissa Harding recapped the timeline which matched Mr. Cooks statement. She was not aware of the leak prior to the city reaching out to her.

Mr. Ball asked for final questions. He recommended we adjust the current bill to minimum usage due to the fact that it was an error on the City's billing system.

Mrs. Busenburg questioned if we had handled previous situations in the same manner with regards to meter read issues.

Mr. Cook confirmed this is how we handled recent situations, the only difference is the leak. The first 17 months were handled in the same manner as previous meter communication issues. The 18th month was calculated similarly to a leak situation without a meter communication issue.

- 307 W Burgess St to credit back to the minimum bill for the period of discussion of approximately \$2,200.

RESULT:	ACCEPTED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Jessi Busenburg, Alternative Member
SECONDER:	Aaron Reinhart
AYES:	Ball, Reinhart, Busenburg
ABSENT:	Miller, West

OLD BUSINESS**OTHER****ADJOURN****- Adjourn Motion**

Mr. Reinhart made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Busenburg, second and the meeting was adjourned at 9:40 a.m.

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Aaron Reinhart
SECONDER:	Jessi Busenburg, Alternative Member
AYES:	Ball, Reinhart, Busenburg
ABSENT:	Miller, West

Rick Dzik, Chairman

Kristen Goldner, Recording Secretary