



**TOWN OF BLANDFORD
WATER DEPARTMENT**

1 Russell Stage Rd
Blandford, MA 01008
413.848.4279 x 304

Water Commissioners

Brad Curry
Michael Keier
Peter Thayer

Water Superintendent

Gordon Avery

**MEETING MINUTES
BLANDFORD WATER COMMISSION
MAY 11, 2023
4:30 P.M.**

1. OPEN SESSION:

Meeting Opened at 4:37 P.M.

In Attendance: B. Curry, Chairman, M. Keier, Member, P. Thayer, Member,
G. Avery, Water Superintendent, Chris Dunn, Town Administrator, Dave Waldron,
Highway Superintendent, K. Shaw, Administrative Assistant.

2. EXAMINATION OF RECORDS OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS:

a. Review of Meeting Minutes of April 13, 2023.

MOTION: B. Curry made a motion to approve the Minutes of April 13, 2023.

M. Keier Seconded.

All in Favor.

3. ACTION ITEMS:

a. No Action Items.

4. UNFINISHED BUSINESS FROM PRIOR MEETINGS:

a. FY 24 Budget Recap

The Town Administrator discussed indirect costs as part of the budget recap.

b. Metered Water Billing Project Update

K. Shaw briefed the Water Commission on the status of the project to have all residences read by the water meter equipment so the Town can convert to metered water billing versus a flat rate. There are many discrepancies that are

being studied, some with the actual meters and some with the serial numbers of the readers in the software and inconsistent meter numbers on the MXU error report. Water usage is read by the electronic hand held reader and at present a large percentage of them are not being read. Karen has created a spreadsheet and it will be compared every month with what is actually being read to see if after changes there is an increase of read meters.

b. Valley Opportunity Council Water Assistance Program Update

K. Shaw gave a status report on the water assistance that will be provided to those who have received fuel assistance. Those receiving fuel assistance are eligible to receive \$450 to be applied to their water billing. She is working with the Valley Opportunity Council to get this program up and running.

d. Email to Town Administrator Re: Shared Water Operator MOU

The Town Administrator brought to the forefront the Chester Water Commission would like the Blandford Water Commission to revisit the shared services proposal. An email was received from Lyle Snide, Chair, Chester Water Commission, specifically requesting this and was brought to this meeting. After the last Commission meeting K. Shaw sent an email directed to the Town Administrator advising of the Commission's reluctance to enter into the Agreement and listed the Commissioners' concerns. This was forwarded to Ira Brezinsky prompting a request to address Blandford's concerns. There is a great deal of confusion relative to the grant. It was Blandford's understanding the Town could still have the grant without going forward with the intermunicipal agreement but has learned if there is no agreement, the grant will have to be returned as it is specifically earmarked for the regionalization of services. The Blandford Water Commission did not have that understanding.

Because new information has been revealed to the Commission they are open to a discussion with the Chester Water Commission to perhaps hammer out an agreement that works for both towns. There appears to be management and workflow differences that may be too cumbersome to overcome. The general opinion is to make an effort to come up with a working plan and should this not be successful, then to institute the back out clause.

G. Avery advised Chester is entertaining hiring an intern with no experience which can be trained and this is a major concern for Blandford. A great deal of discussion relative to what it was understood the shared services were to be and what is actually transpiring to lay the groundwork and implement this program.

It was decided to have further discussion with the Chester Water Commission to determine if both towns can reach an agreement on how best to institute the shared service. The Town of Chester will be invited to the next Water

Commission meeting which will take place at 4:30 on June 1, 2023 in the Town of Blandford Water Department. Karen will contact Chester to initiate the invitation.

5. NEW/OTHER BUSINESS:

a. SCADA Bids

Not reviewed at this meeting.

b. Discussion of Indirect Costs and VADAR Software by Town Administrator

The Town Administrator has worked with the Treasurer and Accounting Departments to best come up with something that is more straightforward relating to Indirect Costs being paid by the Water Department. He distributed a handout and explained in detail each entry. Several members of the Commission and the Water Superintendent still felt some of the line items needed further review. Several issues were raised and while some were explained others were still unclear. Chris will take another look at the issues that were brought up as not being clear. Specifically he will check the amount for Assessors, retirement insurance, stipends and re-present figures. The Commissioners have requested a copy of the audit to determine what they may need to do, or not do to adhere to best practices.

The Town Administrator left the meeting and the Commissioners reviewed in depth the line items in the indirect costs and will await further figures from the Town Administrator as it isn't adding up for them.

c. Water Superintendent Update

Water Superintendent reported issues with lead and copper reporting. It was submitted to the DEP in February and they stated it wasn't received. Ultimately, they did find it and requested the information be typed. It has been done and resubmitted today and an acknowledgement from the DEP has been requested.

The site plan has been approved and testing will have to be done for the next 3 years. If all goes smoothly, it will drop down to every 3 years.

Mowing time has been cut in half with the new equipment (zero turn mower). Karen will contact the DMV to register the trailer which will be used to transport the mower to various locations.

Next budget there will be some tree work initiated as there are several trees that need to be removed.

An invoice was received by M & M Site Services directed to the Town in the amount of \$250.00 for a turn off of water at the Historical Society which is not a Water Department expense. There is a procedure in place published on the town website for the shutting off and turning on of water which was not adhered to. It is not a Town bill but rather a bill for the Historical Society as the procedure was not followed by them.

The Water Department will need to work with the Highway Department to get the gravel and the situation cleaned up by the shed. It was suggested that Tonlino & Sons be used to bring the stone and topsoil in.

The valve at the pump house was located during the visit by John Tibbits. One was paved over and another was badly damaged. Should an emergency occur the pump house cannot be placed off line. This will need to be remedied so the pump house can be isolated if needed.

d. Employee Contract for Bernie St. Martin

Superintendent suggests a contract be drawn with Bernie St. Martin to allow a smooth transition to another plant operator once he retires. While it is not certain a contract is required it is suggested the Commission request that Bernie attend a Water Commission meeting to discuss his timetable for retiring and the training a new employee. The invitation will be extended for the July meeting which has not yet been set.

e. Update and Discussion for Highway of Highway/Water Matters

It is proposed the Highway truck will be shared with the Water Department until the Highway Department receives their new vehicle at which time the truck will become a Water Department vehicle. The truck is presently at Sarat Ford undergoing repairs. It was discussed whether there should be a line item in the Water budget for the vehicle to fall under Maintenance. G. Avery mentioned the vehicle should be equipped with certain equipment/tools with perhaps a removable tool box.

On another Highway matter, inquiry was made on the status of Chester Road which morphed into the size of the water lines in various sections of the road. It is determined there is a shut off under the road. Relative to the piping, it is estimated the cost to change it is around one million dollars a mile. Considerable discussion resulted relative to possible renovations and strategies to update and improve the area.

Gordon made a request for the use of the Highway Department tractor to perform a bit of clearing and related projects and arrangements will be made

for that. Would like use of the Highway Department dump truck as well for heavy transport of gravel and topsoil.

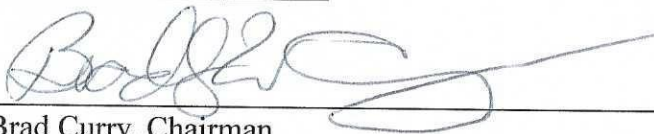
6. MEETING ADJOURNED

Meeting Adjourned at 6:49 p.m.

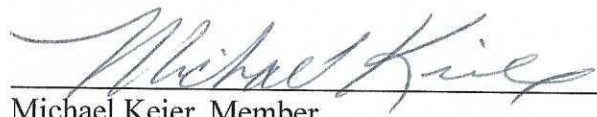
Respectfully Submitted,

Karen Shaw, Administrative Assistant
Water Department

WATER COMMISSION



Brad Curry, Chairman



Michael Keier, Member

Peter Thayer, Member