

**Brandon Board of Sewer Commissioners Meeting
July 10, 2023**

NOTE: These are unapproved minutes, subject to amendment and/or approval at the subsequent board meeting.

Board Members In Attendance: Tracy Wyman, Brian Coolidge, Tim Guiles, Cecil Reniche-Smith, Heather Nelson

Others In Attendance: Seth Hopkins, Bill Moore, Bernie Carr, Ralph Ethier, Janet Coolidge, Steven Jupiter, Dorothea Langevin, Doug Bailey, Susan Benedict, Steve Bessette, Matt Funk

Others in Attendance via Zoom: Jack Schneider, Brent Buehler, Marielle Blais, Sue Gage

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:04PM by Tracy Wyman – Board Chair.

a. Agenda Adoption

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Heather Nelson to approve the agenda as presented. **The motion passed unanimously.**

2. Approval of Minutes

***a) Approve Minutes of Board of Sewer Commissioners Meeting
June 12, 2023***

Motion by Brian Coolidge/Cecil Reniche-Smith to approve the minutes of the June 12, 2023, meeting. **The motion passed unanimously.**

3. Public Comment and Participation

There was no public comment.

4. Consider Waiving Interest on Current Sewer Bill

Seth Hopkins reported there was a meeting with Ray Counter, the Fire District and Town Office staff. The 2nd quarter combined water/sewer bill was sent quickly after the 1st billing and the recommendation of the Town Clerk and Town Manager to the Board is to waive the interest on Quarter 2 and 3. The Water District will also make the same recommendation to the Fire District. The September 15th billing would accrue interest. Sue Gage stated the bill is due July 24th and the interest would be August 15th interest for that bill. The next interest would be September 15th and it would provide time to pay without interest. Tim Guiles suggested waiving the interest entirely on this bill as it is a special case with two bills back-to-back in compensation for back-to-back bills as it is not a big economic hit to the Town. Sue Gage advised the Town cannot waive interest on a single bill so that may not be possible. Mr. Hopkins stated the next quarter will be for April 15th through July 15th as the Town is still trying to get caught up. Mr. Guiles stated these penalties hit people with the least ability to pay and he would prefer not to have penalties as this does not cause people to pay bills. Cecil Reniche-Smith asked if there is a way to get caught up more incrementally. Heather Nelson stated the water bills are a lot of money and normally one has three months to come up with the money. Mr. Guiles suggested waiving the interest for 3 or 4 months instead of just 1 month. Ms. Nelson noted it would be helpful to have a note when the next bill will be issued. Mr. Hopkins advised the Town has to get the information from the Water District and there is a lag time of nearly a month. Ms. Gage reported the next billing will mark the last billing for the year for the Town and will also assess an 8% penalty and if the Board would like to be generous it would be good to remove the penalty. Mr. Guiles stated since the Town has been behind in billings, it would be good to explain that the bills are correct but waive the penalties until the billings are caught up. Janet Coolidge questioned why the billings were not sent out two months apart as there would not be a problem with interest and suggested waiting a month or two before sending the next bill. Seth Hopkins advised the Town and the Fire District have ongoing expenses that require user fees and people who are able to pay it without injury

could pay. Mr. Hopkins understands the stability has not been there, but the meeting that was held that discussed the process was very helpful in understanding what happens with collection. Once the meters are read there are misreads that are inaccurate and it involves reviewing historical usage to assure a reasonable meter reading is done. This process takes 3 weeks in a good scenario according to the Water Department. Brent Buehler asked if this is why the Town wants to go to a flat rate. Mr. Hopkins confirmed that was one of the considerations, but he does not think as strongly about that after speaking with Mr. Counter.

Susan Benedict has lived here for 25 years and now pays \$1500 per year as one person which is a lot for water and sewer. Tim Guiles noted very little of the bill is based on consumption and are fixed costs and almost all of it is fixed. One can use a lot of water and not pay anymore because the bill to the Town is based on the number of spigots and not the volume of water.

Motion by Tim Guiles/Heather Nelson to approve waiving the interest on the current sewer bill. **The motion was withdrawn.**

Motion by Tim Guiles to waive penalties and fees for September through December and begin in January with the normal fees. **The motion failed - there was no second to the motion.**

It was noted that the total budgeted interest and penalties is \$15,000. Tim Guiles asked how much it would be for the next 5 months. Sue Gage advised she would have to do research and report back to the Board. Heather Nelson suggested postponing the interest in August and when Ms. Gage provides the information the Board could revisit this, if needed.

Motion by Brian Coolidge/Heather Nelson to wave the interest that would post on August 15th. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Sue Gage advised the Prudential Board will need to approve waiving interest and penalties. She also noted that when billing for water and sewer, an attempt is made to not bill close to when property taxes are due and if the billing had been pushed out, it would have been when the next bill would be due.

5. Discuss Staggered Usage Rates

Heather Nelson suggested an idea of one paying by capacity, with an example when having 2 bedrooms or 5 bedrooms bill by that and when the usage is more than the average usage, that amount is paid by what is beyond expected. The Town then does not pass the extra usage on to other users. Ms. Nelson noted this is something to think about but not necessarily act upon at this point. Cecil Reniche-Smith asked if there could be a way to bill according to underusage. Tracy Wyman noted the Town does not control the water rates and has to consider only the sewer rates. Tim Guiles stated he is an advocate of a consumption-based rate as it encourages people to conserve. Mr. Wyman noted that charges for additional usage would also be charged for sewer and would be a penalty for those uses that do not use the sewer with an example being filling a pool or watering a lawn. Sue Gage stated her interpretation of Ms. Nelson's suggestion is to continue to have metered rates and there would be a consumption charge but would increase with use and create an incentive not to overuse. The staggered rate would create an incentive to use less, but the Town would only control the sewer side. The base rate is per individual meter and the base rate has to do with bonds that are being paid off and does not have to do with usage.

6. Adjournment

Motion by Brian Coolidge/Cecil Reniche-Smith to adjourn the Board of Sewer Commissioners meeting at 7:37PM. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Bryant
Recording Secretary