



Minutes of March 8, 2022

A meeting of the Joint Wausau Water Works Commission & Finance Committee was called to order at 5:46 p.m. in City Hall on Tuesday, March 8th, 2022. In compliance with Wisconsin Statutes, this meeting was posted and receipted for by the Wausau Daily Herald on March 4th, 2022.

Members Present: President Rosenberg, Commissioners Herbst, Gehin, Force, Robinson
Finance Committee Members: Lisa Rasmussen, Michael Martens, Dawn Herbst, Sarah Watson via WebEx: Deb Ryan

Others Present: Eric Lindman, Scott Boers, Ben Brooks, Valerie Swanborg, Maryanne Groat, Toni Vanderbom, Tom Kilian, Becky McElhaney, Stephen Opatik/ Becher-Hoppe, Susan Wojtkiewicz/ Donohue, Mike Gerbitz/ Donohue

1) Discussion and Possible Action on Options for Potential Rapid Response Solutions and Long-Term Strategies to Address Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) compounds in Wausau's Drinking Water and Funding for Same.

Rasmussen began that the Committee and Commission working together on issues of mutual interest is good because the Finance Committee has flexibility and latitude with certain fund sources to approve things faster than what the Commission can do using utility and rate payer revenue so we can work through some action plans and have the right combination for filter/treatment process of PFAS at the new plant when it opens. Both Water and Finance Committee support a pilot study research which is going to the Council tonight. We do need to look at something interim that they can employ separate from bottled water to reduce the level of PFAS. At the faucet level we are about a 30 ppt. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) board adopted 70 ppt with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) but there is an expectation that the EPA may reduce the level but the further we are ahead of that requirement, the better position the utility will be to meet requirements.

Lindman started that staff has been asked to prepare potential scenarios for immediate/interim response to PFAS results in the drinking water: 1) Pilot Study 2) Purchasing/make available bottled water & filter pitchers for in-home use 3) Establish reverse osmosis filling stations around the city 4) Set up/deploy a large filtration system for all distributed water at the existing treatment facility but the cost and timing may present challenges.

Rasmussen stated that the Committee of the Whole had some interest in option 4 in attaching mobile units to the existing plant but the cost would be somewhere around \$2,000,000. We have to look at the cost to benefit analysis and where are we at as far as the logistics for this solution.

Lindman replied the biggest hurdles would be the timelines for approvals by the DNR and Public Service Commission (PSC) because those take about 3-4 months plus the timing for set ups. Donohue is here for specific questions. Approvals take a lot of time because when we start

touching the drinking water system, we start changing the water chemistry and we could have other problems potentially downstream like compromising the corrosion control, disinfection and other things that could cause an actual health risk to the public.

Rosenberg stated the importance of the downstream effects but in speaking with DNR, they have advised they could expedite the approval through the PSC and DNR on these rapid response strategies if needed but she didn't know exact timelines but anticipates that it would not be as long as 2 months.

Watson questioned if option 4 could be accelerated and what the timeline looked like with the estimation of 6 weeks for approval from the DNR.

Gerbitz replied that the ranges in the Memo from Donohue on Page 3 showed from 16-23 weeks which entailed authorization to commissioning. This was assuming best case scenarios with DNR/PSC process we have to work through. The blue bar is the procurement timeline from getting materials from the shop, piping and then installing. It doesn't mean that it would be 14 weeks but could be in the range of 16-23 weeks assuming the DNR/PSC doesn't slow it down.

Watson stated she is concerned about the chemistry testing because if we inject something into the drinking water that impacts corrosion control but brings up higher lead levels, then there's a bigger problem. She questioned if the 16-23 weeks or 4-6 months have a chem testing included or if it was just for approvals.

Gerbitz stated it was independent of the approvals. The blue bars are independent of any testing, it's the amount of time with the supply shortage. The 16 weeks estimates getting the material in contractors' hands and fabrication then it goes out in field to get it installed.

Rasmussen stated it was the most expensive option, people want a reasonable solution and much quicker option than that time frame.

Watson questioned if this would be for all the wells and if we need all the wells to run to feed all the utility customers?

Gerbitz replied it would be one system that goes into the front yard of the existing water treatment facility before it goes out into the water distribution system. It would be like a supplemental treatment before it goes out into the system.

Robinson questioned if the granular activated carbon (GAC) vessels were looked at and if this was for the vessels or media and why would it take 3-5 weeks.

Gerbitz stated we didn't look at the universe of strategies we are showing the ion exchange because the six vessels are sitting at the warehouse ready to go right now. If you decide tonight it would be 3-5 weeks largely for the piping. One contractor said they can get stainless steel piping in 8 weeks and a couple of weeks to fabricate it, another contractor said nickel went up 250% and there's a huge shortage, another contractor stated if you are in a hurry, rather than use stainless steel you could use carbon steel and coat the interior to satisfy the drinking water requirement. We weren't able to find any GAC in short order that was in stock ready to go.

Gehin wanted a description of how it would be connected at the plant, would we have enough flow or do we do bypass in the event of an emergency. Do we have to do any additional pilot?

Gerbitz replied the 3rd figure shows where it comes up and goes through the building. We do have 60 year old pipes, but the information suggests that those pumps would get the flow through these vessels in series because there would be less pressure loss. If the City moved forward with this, we suggest field testing of those pumps to look for the amp draws and performance at different back pressures. The probability looks good from a flow capacity standpoint. The maximum flow would be 6.8 million gallons a day.

Wojtkiewicz replied to Gehin's question and stated they've been working with the DNR and in an emergency they would approve ion exchange or GAC technology without pilot

testing.

Gerbitz clarified this was not the universe of temporary solutions but the thing driving the schedule is all the interconnections/piping and not the regulatory process. The construction is what's taking the time. The effort was to give you a realistic understanding and quickly procure for a 5-7 million gallon a day system. The cost given defines the brackets from ceiling to the floor but the cost could fall somewhere in between there.

Rosenberg stated if we could use the mobile GAC that stated they could roll in a week?

Gerbitz stated we could talk with them to see how they were going to connect it. We are working with Evoqua and 2 large contractors who gave us the 16-week timeframe.

Force questioned the status of the pilot study approved a week ago and if we did any tests at various taps regarding the 30 ppt? Do we know the PFAS levels coming out of our homes and business?

Gerbitz stated we were waiting on council approval but materials have been ordered. The folks providing the equipment are looking forward to providing material once we submit a Purchase Order (PO).

Wojtkiewicz added they have already submitted the pilot test protocol to DNR who provided review questions that her colleague was working on the answers this evening and should be expecting DNR approval this week. Will be getting initial results within a month of beginning the pilot, not final answer but will have information.

Lindman replied testing was done at the points where the finished water enters the distribution system after the treatment facility. We do not know the level of PFAS in homes/business but we are not losing PFAS out in the system anywhere.

Rasmussen stated if it leaves the plant at 30 then there's a reasonable assumption that it arrives at the house at 30. We could look at option 3- multiple reverse osmosis filling station around the city.

McElhaney stated the urgency to do something now, she's hearing from her residences that they don't believe the water is safe. Since the Water Advisory, she's gotten calls from residents she's never heard from. The landlord at the Job Center turned off all the water, how many businesses have turned off water and people are trying to find bottled water to take in for work. Someone went into a restaurant and was asked if they wanted poison water or soda. This is what's happening around the City. With the portable system we talked about a month ago, I didn't understand that, you did or didn't look at it?

Rasmussen stated that was what we were just talking about, the mobile filtration system that attaches to the existing water plant but that was the 16 weeks. It sounds like the residents are not willing to wait 4 months. They love that it's an equitable solution, but is there an array of options that we could put out more sooner?

Force stated it would be option 1- bottled water. His research was that other people had volunteers help load the water into the cars and had multiple pick up locations. If we are talking about spending \$1.5- \$2 million to wait 16 weeks to hook up, are we not better off expanding the bottled water effort and spending the money there?

Rasmussen stated that would be the question we are discussing but option 2- bottled water and filter pitcher on the memo would be an option and option 1 was for the pilot study in which we already approved but if the council approves that then its already in progress. If we want to skip to item 2 we could.

Waston wanted to hear option 3- multiple reverse osmosis filling stations within the city.

Lindman stated this is another option, we would be serving more than 25 individuals so we would need approval with DNR maybe not the PSC but challenges would be disinfection with these units, the reverse osmosis removes the disinfection from the water in the storage unit. The taps can also get infected as well, we also have installation time at various locations along

with ordering them and their availability.

Boers replied cost would be \$25-\$35 thousand per unit and would be between 30-60 days depending on what company and what they have available at the time of order.

Ryan stated she has been using the Berkey filter system. PFAS is priority but we still have a lot of Lead. She questioned if we have a definitive filter that is best to buy in bulk and give options to neighbors instead of lugging water around?

Rasmussen stated that Boers did some research but there are a lot of filtration devices. The question is if these filtration devices work because some that we see sold in the stores were more about the water tasting and not water quality, some filter certain substances but they don't all filter PFAS. This is the fastest option, but if there is a pitcher that works, is it something we could source? Starting with a smaller quantity and see the demand. Is there an item we could get 1500 and distribute those items, then place another order once we run low.

Boers replied he contacted 3 companies and proposed 1,000 per unit. 1) Berkey- which has a travel size of 1.5 gallon, for \$241/unit and could ship 250 units every 6-8 weeks. 2) Hydroviv- goes under the sink filter but only lasts 6 months, online price is a little over \$200, they would knock it down to \$105/unit for a 1,000 order and could deliver us 1000 in 30 days. 3) Aquasana- is a countertop unit which is good for 450 gallons and could sell us 1,000 for \$61/unit and could be delivered in 90 days.

Rosenberg stated she didn't like the idea of waiting 18-22 weeks to fix something and doesn't love the idea of people installing something in their home but questioned what are the needs, what do we want to spend and how quickly could we fix this?

Force stated he agreed we needed to move quickly and couldn't sit around. He advocated that bottled water be made available and in more places.

Watson stated she was disappointed of the 3 months wait time but would also like it to be more user friendly.

Rasmussen questioned if the Berkey really filtered both PFOA and PFOS?

Boers replied they sent certification for both PFOA and PFOS.

Rasmussen stated if we estimate 90 days with Aquasana, and under counter systems may be cumbersome for people to install, we are looking at \$105 thousand dollars approximately.

Robinson requested that we look at bottled water for an interim solution but asked if we could look at emergency management to see if there was a way we could access piping and vessels quicker for emergency situation where they may have the ability to accelerate the delivery of vessels and/or piping? He was concerned about in-home solutions because there are about 17 thousand housing units. If it were something under sink, would landlords let you in, would they have plumbers who know how to do it, let's see if emergency management could get us some assistance.

Kilian agreed that more bottled water is useful. There's a Drinking Water Advisory from the State, how many people would want bottled water. Regulators were able to intervene because there was no middle organization at those private wells but in this case it is the Commission so in action is not an option anymore, bottled water doesn't seem to work out mathematically but a portfolio with a mix and match may bring up some solutions of scale.

Rasmussen questioned if the Aquasana was a pitcher or a countertop unit?

Rosenberg replied countertop and it attaches through the sink.

Rasmussen questioned the concern last time was because it may not fit everyone's faucet properly. It seems to be a practical solution for those who are concerned. It would be easier if we had supply of filters that people could come down to City Hall to obtain. All of these units, have a slow delivery. We approved a purchase of bottled water up to \$13,200 from a water source that could get us pure water the fastest. This buys us about 2 months but it wouldn't give us enough time to roll out the Aquasana system. If you purchased 1000 Aquasanas that's

\$61,000, that's a reasonable price vs \$100-\$250 thousand. The plant is on schedule to open late Summer, if we have the right mix, we really have about a 5 month problem.

Watson questioned if GAC filters were investigated for their small sized pitchers.

Boers stated we didn't look at the single or short term use pitchers because there didn't seem to be much interest in those at the Committee of the Whole, typically pricing ranges around \$40-\$60 per unit.

Rasmussen stated stores in this area were out but she researched and discovered that most of the big store filters off the shelves don't filter PFAS. They are readily available at Steven's Point but not in Wausau. That weekend, she went to Sam's Club and every other cart had bottled water so there is a widespread concern. We need to address those concerns with an interim palatable solution. We don't have 4-6 months to do it and if we could do it for less than \$2 million all the better. She'd like to see an interim solution but not take 4-6 months to roll out and if there's an item we could distribute whether it be a countertop or a pitcher that would allay some of these fears between now and the opening date. The advisory is about consumption, it's not about laundry or showering, it's about drinking water. We want a practical solution that could come a little quicker.

Watson stated most of the options she sees are interim but not really rapid because rapid would be within 1-2 weeks. Maybe the rapid solution would be to have these filters for pick up or bottled water distribution. She questioned what could we do now?

Rasmussen replied stating the Finance Committee has money to spend but we need some type of movement on what people want to buy. If we are going to fund it with the rescue plan funding we have, we could approve that right now if somebody makes a motion to order 1,000 of something. Are we going to sit for 2 more weeks and wait? Indecision is where most of the frustration with the public is coming from and we know we can get the right mixture of filter media and strategy for the new plant but what we do in the meantime because people feel like we are doing a lot of talking and not a lot of acting.

Force questioned the funding for the bottled water because it seemed to come out from the contingency funding. Is that a fund within the City?

Rasmussen replied it was an Emergency Funding but we are talking about the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding which is about \$15 million.

Force stated bottled water is super expensive but for the time being bottled water would make more sense if you wanted to do something within a few days but the Neighbor's place is only open 4 days a week.

Rasmussen stated we approved that order and could look at other avenues for distribution as well.

Force questioned what the budget was or the cost.

Rasmussen stated one of the American Rescue Plan approved uses is clean water projects and whether or not it includes emergency measures, we'd have to ask the Finance Director. Do we want to devote a substantial amount to this project not based on amount we received but if the solutions are between \$61,000-\$250,000, we have that kind of money, we don't want to cheap out on a solution, but we want one that is effective and reasonable that wouldn't break the bank and take long to implement?

Watson requested for more numbers and stated we couldn't keep kicking the can but we don't have enough information either. We could make a decision on spending \$2.5 million on it at the source but it wouldn't be done for another 4 months. Should we schedule another joint meeting for more clear-cut information being timeframe and money.

Rasmussen replied so option 3 of reverse osmosis, we are looking at \$35,000 per unit sold be deployed 30-60 days and how many units?

Lindman stated around 6 units. 3 on each side of river but people would have to bring their

own bottles to fill up.

Gehin questioned those reverse osmosis because we would need someone to man those due to cross contamination.

Lindman replied that the quick response would be the bottled water and then on the interim combining a couple different filters that remove PFAS and ordering from different companies but they would have to be on order, most of the companies are at least 30-60 days out before they are delivered.

Rasmussen stated that Finance is managing the cost of the solution but not designing the solution. As a Committee should we earmark a sum of money to be used on a combination of bottled water and filter solutions to get some of this off the ground.

Rosenberg replied that's a start.

Martens motioned to earmark \$60,000 to be used in any way for immediate mitigation of the PFAS via bottled water or Pitcher. Seconded by Watson.

Rasmussen summarized the motion to earmark/allocate \$60,000 from the ARPA funding to a combination of bottled water and filter devices and the mixture of which to be determined by the professional team.

Watson questioned if we could have a discussion monthly to revisit this because she'd actually like to up the amount.

Lindman requested if we could up the amount to \$150,000, he stated he was not sure what we could find and the availability for purchases but will try to keep it down as much as we could or we could bring an update back if you wanted.

Martens motioned to up the amount from \$60,000 to \$150,000. Seconded by Watson.

Herbst stated she got a chance to do research and found some pitchers with NSF53 filters and there were some really good ones. If we were going to do some combination that would be something to check into but stated she wasn't sure of the time frame for delivery either.

Rasmussen stated the sooner they can place the order and have the funds, the better.

Watson questioned if this could be placed on tonight's City Council Agenda.

Rosenberg stated we could have a special session to act on this.

Groat stated that the resolution for the bottled water for \$13,200 could be amended to change the financing source to ARPA and the dollar amount to \$150,000 to include not just bottled water but a mixture of filters too that could be accomplished tonight.

Rasmussen recapped the motion already seconded on the floor to allocate \$150,000 from the ARPA funding to a combination of solutions outlined in the memo of item 2 which includes in-home filter devices and bottled water. Finance Committee Passed with Motion 5-0.

Rasmussen questioned if the Water Committee needed to act since Finance is doing the funding.

Rosenberg stated if it's the ARPA Funding, we do not have jurisdiction over that.

Rasmussen stated now the money is there, we just need to figure out the ordering and the logistics.

Motion for Finance Committee to adjourn by Watson. Seconded by Herbst.

Motion for Wausau Water Works Committee to adjourn by Gehin. Seconded by Robinson.

Link to view meeting in its entirety: <https://tinyurl.com/wausaucitycouncil>

Gina Vang, Recording Secretary

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