



Minutes of April 8, 2025

A meeting of the Wausau Water Works Commission was called to order at 11:05 a.m. in City Hall on Tuesday, April 8, 2025. In compliance with Wisconsin Statutes, this meeting was posted and receipted for by the Wausau Daily Herald on April 4, 2025.

Members Present: President Diny, Commissioners Robinson, Gehin, Force, Watson

Others Present: Eric Lindman, Scott Boers, Ben Brooks

1) Approve Minutes of March 4, 2025 Meetings.

Robinson motioned to approve minutes subject to editing/maintenance of minutes to reflect Gehin's question regarding release of hydrogen sulfide- page 2, item#5. Seconded by Gehin.

Motion carried 5-0.

2) Director's Report on Utility Operations.

Lindman highlighted updates on federal funding allocations, funding for lead service line from the DNR (Department of Natural Resources) and discussion of an asset management software for the utility and possibly placing it in the capital budget for 2026 and make the commission aware that our CIP process and capital budget process would be beginning in the next couple of weeks.

Robinson questioned the timing of the payments through the safe drinking water act allocation to see if there was an ITA (intent to apply) with those funds? The applications are awarded, is it the sequential processing of things in timely manner and to what level have we've raised this to within the agency?

Lindman replied we supplied them with an ITA for the lead service lines we did and our applications are due at the end of June. It's the closing of the loans. In 2023, we applied for 2024 funding for lead service line, the funding list came out September/October 2023 where we were awarded or obligated some funds and finalized our documents at that point and still have not seen those 2024 funds yet or a closing date for the loan, so the city is carrying those costs and we'll continue to carry those costs but that project's been completed since late November 2024. Mayor has been in touch with State Senator and State Representative. Both their offices have reached out to DNR and I've reached out to DNR leadership directly but keep getting pushed off week to week, being told the schedule will be ready next week. Last contact was Friday but this is a real problem, this year (2025) we are asking for \$15 million. \$6 million of it is loan, we're already moving ahead with the project and have about \$400,000 in work that's done already for 2025, I don't even have a closing for 2024 and when asked about 2025, they haven't even started working on them yet. When we get into construction starting in the next couple of weeks, you're looking at about \$1 million a month of work being done, that's going to be a problem for the city to carry those costs. It's been raised up to finance, there's still no DNR Secretary. Everybody up in leadership is aware of issues, we've escalated to the State to put pressure on them and have been in contact with the governor's office trying to get consultation with them to get things moving as well but this is a significant problem and puts in the question of their ability to manage these funds and

these projects as we move forward. It's a statewide issue, there are other municipalities who don't have their 2024 funding, we're down to less than a handful and we are one of them. We have all our paperwork in for 2025, we just need DNR's staff to start reviewing all the documentation and get us that closing date for 2025 as well, it's a concern.

Diny stated we are at a decision point, we will not be able to sustain \$1 million, \$1.2 million or \$1.3 million a month in 2025 if we don't have some resolution soon. We just don't have it and they know that. We are not the only city having the issues. The last 2 weeks we've been burning up the phones trying to get as much attention as we can and work within the system.

Gehin questioned if we received any payments. The original contract signed had an objection from the DNR which was then amended by city council that was fully executed end of December early January.

Lindman replied we haven't received anything but when we get a closing scheduled, it would be 6-8 weeks before we close on those loans. The contract was a 10-month process back and forth with the DNR to get the language to their preference. We brought that forward to city council to move that forward so that agreement and language will be not only for 2024 but moving forward, there shouldn't be any more amendments to that, for the DNR leadership to approve.

Force questioned if we were getting any response from our legislators since we've reached out to Mr. Scheider and Mr. Tomczyk?

Diny replied yes, they are coming up to speed, we gave them a packet and timeline so they have something to go in and talk about, last spoke with Mr. Tomczyk's office yesterday and awaiting feedback from the DNR.

Force questioned if we plan to go ahead with the rain barrels this year?

Lindman replied we talked about every other year and we did that last year, I anticipate that next year and we'll have to start that process around February for advertising and handed out before Memorial Day weekend.

Diny replied if anyone is looking for one, there's a handful left but we are not running the promotion that we were.

Robinson updated that discussion with DNR leadership relative to the whole issue of leachate biosolids and other things that Bart Sponser has committed to sitting down and trying to get it resolved but it's post budget so it's not going to help the new WPDES permit but there's been a commitment to address it globally this summer.

Lindman questioned if this was post state budget and if Robinson knew who was going to be involved in those discussions?

Robinson replied it was post state budget and he has a suspicion but not sure of who would be involved in those discussions but Secretary Karen Hyun was in Maine looking at their PFAS Treatment Plant and the issue was raised at that time.

Director's Report Placed on File.

3) Discussion and Possible Action Approving the Amended 2025 CIP Budget for Water and Wastewater Utility.

Lindman began bids started coming in for this year's projects, some came in favorable so adjustments were made on our CIP (Capital Improvement Project) request for year 2025. Those are highlighted in the memo and the projects we're talking about are highlighted on the spreadsheets. One of the things brought up was the Cherry Street lift station, we budgeted \$1.7 million and we show \$200,000. There's an additional of \$800,000 of ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) that was obligated to that, that's not shown on the chart but that project is about \$1 million.

Force questioned what it means when it shows up as zero? When the budget is \$221,293 and the actual is \$0 for the 2nd Street/Dekalb?

Lindman replied, what happens there is that funding is coming from a TID (Tax Incremental District), the council approved TID to do that work. The staircase and catwalk went to \$0 because that's included in our headworks project that was approved.

Gehin questioned if we were concerned about the existing force main because he sees that there's a plan to put in a parallel force main, there's a way to bypass that existing pipe.

Lindman replied that was a force main that was on our schedule and we'll have to evaluate that again but the existing force main was cleaned and that made significant improvements. The parallel force main proposed over the years has been pushed and was moved to 2028 but not sure if that project is going to be needed. The bypass works, we've had to use it periodically, but it's the size of that line and the capacity it can handle but in emerging situations it has been working just fine.

Force questioned if we were resurfacing Fulton and 7th and if we had any discussion if Aspirus was paying for part of that since the closure of McIndoe generated additional traffic on Fulton. The Solar Array project was pushed to 2026, would we still be looking into this because this also demonstrates the city's commitment to green energy which also has value.

Lindman replied it would be a full reconstruction set to begin in the next couple of weeks and Aspirus will not be paying for that. Solar Array would be presented in the 2026 budget, we have some concepts and some preliminary numbers that are worthwhile looking at. We're going to have to figure out if the RREA (Rural Renewable Energy Assistance) funding and tax credits would still be available, there's a little uncertainty there, but last word I had was that they were still viable but it would depend on whether that project is viable economically and if those things are still in place.

Robinson clarified, we are continuing these projects but just shifting the funding source so we're amending the borrowing portion of the capital plan and not the entire capital plan because we're using TID and ARPA funds to supplement this.

Lindman replied yes, we budgeted higher than with some of the bids that came in, so the projects are remaining.

Diny clarified it's not a budget amendment, it's a plan amendment.

Gehin motioned to approve the amended 2025 CIP budget as discussed and highlighted. Seconded by Robinson.

Motion carried 5-0.

4) Discussion and Possible Action Approving the Submission of a \$150,000 Grant to the WDNR for Lead Service Line Replacement Community Outreach.

Lindman began couple years ago, city council requested that staff or departments that apply for grant dollars go through appropriate committee commission for approval before we step into those. This one doesn't require any match from us and would help supplement community outreach for this program. CIP has done a lot of assisting in preparing documentation and information, this is due end of April, we'll be submitting this soon.

Force commented he'd been advocating improved community outreach and was very pleased with what he saw here and the plan was very comprehensive.

Diny added last Friday met with Eric Jones with Community Infrastructure Partners to do video outreach that highlighted the link to Equiflow from our website so homeowners could see if they are on the map or to schedule a visit for service line determinations and outreach with door hangers.

Robinson stated he was contacted late last year and provided a photo and just received follow-up notification yesterday, hopefully, they are doing a lot to address that back log. Some things were lost in the queue but the importance of communication is planning but also stressed the importance of being timely relative to responses and in getting back to citizens.

Robinson motioned to approve the submission of a \$150,000 Grant to the WDNR for lead service line replacement community outreach. Seconded by Watson.

Motion carried 5-0.

5) Update on Water Meter Purchases and Replacements.

Gehin questioned the total number of meter replacements and the failed meter accuracy of 90%, there's a low, medium and high flow test? When it's low flow, does that test at 1 gallon a minute? When it's less than 90%, was it 88% or 87%? Have people noticed they are getting higher bills and are saying what happened?

Boers replied 8,203 meters replaced, we still got 7,700 to go. Most of them fail at the low flow tests so the mechanical meters will wear out and not move with the low flow going through them. Most of them are failing at the low flow side, these numbers are kind of skewed because we're chasing meters that are failing so the zero reads or the ones that are having trouble reading. We'll get more of a section once we get into the lead service line replacements when we do 1500 meters in the next couple of months. They run 10 cubic feet through it at 15% rate but I would have to look at the gallons per minute. Most of them are 0 at low flow and are on a spreadsheet that categorizes all the test rates. Yes, we have been getting those calls.

Lindman stated, we are getting lots of those calls. We have people where their meter wasn't reading at all, the PSC (Public Service Commission) allows us to go back 2 years to bill and we haven't been doing that, but we've gone back 1 or 2 quarters on the recent fails. People that are changing out used to have low water reading, now they are paying for the water they are using, it's a shock for some of them.

Force stated it makes it fair for the rest of the community. He questioned Boers if the meter was replaced when it failed.

Boers replied yes when we find them but there were also problems with gaining access but we've adjusted some of our processes and are getting in to change these out.

Diny recapped Force's question on what priority of effort meant, when billing department sees zero usage, that triggers there's a problem or somebody's reading at 50%, we would never know that until we replace it and that'll become more apparent once we get into the 1500 lead service lines, some of those may not be that old but they'll be replaced with that installation.

No Action Taken.

6) Wausau Wastewater Awarded the 2024 Facility of the Year.

Diny began with a congratulatory to the Wastewater Department and team for the award they received.

Lindman: Shout out to the Wastewater Staff, we approached this endeavor back in 2016 with the new wastewater treatment facility planning all the way through construction. During that time, it was very disruptive taking down some of those processes but they maintained compliance through all of that and working through that, it was very intensive, I wish I could give you a break but it's 24/7, 365, water continues to flow. This is a good award statewide and good recognition for the city.

Force stated we filled some positions in wastewater and wanted to see if we learned any lessons or what the secret was to achieve it and if we've augmented or changed our training approach?

Brooks replied there was no clear way but we've had to adjust our job descriptions to fit with today's market. We've had to hire individuals with little to no experience and we've been

training a lot to get these people on board and up to par to learn different systems on both the collection and wastewater side. We've stepped it down to a learning at their level and it's been a learning experience to teach them in a way that they could comprehend with what needs to be done on the collection system, the new tv van, training, and all that has been a challenge.

Lindman stated when looking at these positions within our pay scale, we're not able to hire people that have experience or this type of training, we're hiring people based on their aptitude to learn with other skills that they do have. We've learned, we must meet them at their level and it's been a challenge for some of our staff who are trained but we've had a significant turnover at both water and sewer utilities. Our workforce are younger, less experienced but both groups have done well adapting to that and moving us forward. Hopefully, we'll continue to see that advance, we'll train them but now it's a discussion about retention and hopefully they stay with us and learn.

Diny stated there was a video highlighting the water crew on one of the many main breaks we had this year, like the one on Grant St./4th St., it was midnight and those guys were out there in 16 below zero for 5 hours getting that water back on, so tremendous effort. We have workers who respond to the calls and they need to be recognized. I saw them out there so many times, less snow with severe dips in the weather causes more breaks than we're normally accustomed. With no further comments- May 6th is our next scheduled meeting.

No Action Taken.

7) Adjourn.

Force motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Robinson.

Motion carried 5-0.

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

Gina Vang, Recording Secretary

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