



## Minutes of July 8, 2025

A meeting of the Wausau Water Works Commission was called to order at 11:00 a.m. in City Hall on Tuesday, July 8, 2025. In compliance with Wisconsin Statutes, this meeting was posted and receipted for by the Wausau Daily Herald on July 1, 2025.

Members Present: President Diny, Commissioners Force, Watson, Hadley, Gelhar  
Others Present: John Robinson, Eric Lindman, Scott Boers, Ben Brooks, MaryAnne Groat, Lisa Nowak, Susan Wojtkiewicz/Donohue, Eric Jones/CIP, Joe Kafczynski/ BecherHoppe

### 1) Approve Minutes of June 3, 2025 Meetings.

Watson motioned to approve minutes. Seconded by Hadley.

Force questioned if there were any more criminal activity, if that were resolved, the Baker Tilly report progress/recommendations and if we made any headway on energy savings?

Boers replied nothing notable in the last month, young individuals turned themselves in, Police are taking it from there.

Lindman replied there's a memo regarding the progress report, made 2 contacts, 1 with the Sustainability Committee who gave a presentation about funding options for solar, the 2<sup>nd</sup> one was with our consultant for the solar to get additional information, will contact focus on energy if still viable option and could try to contact them.

Motion carried 5-0.

### 2) Recognition and Appreciation of John Robinson's Service on the Wausau Water Works Commission. Welcome Peter Gelhar, New Member of the Wausau Water Works Commission.

Diny presented John Robinson with a plaque, honoring 5 years of service to the city and to the Wausau Water Works Commission.

Robinson thanked the Mayor, Staff and Commissioners with the significant issues we've faced relative to PFAS in our water system, we've become a national model in how to address, deal with that on a permanent and protective basis, he was not going away, just changing roles and would continue to be active on PFAS issues tracking and issues relative to leachate influent effluent and biosolids, great staff with a lot of expertise and wished everyone well.

Diny introduced Commissioner Peter Gelhar/Business Services Director for the Northcentral Workforce Development Board, and he stated this was an opportunity for him to give back to the community.

No Action Taken.

### 3) Director's Report on Utility Operations.

Lindman began director's report is put together monthly to provide updates on operations and projects and if at any point you have questions or want anything brought up, he'd be happy to include that and do some background. Update on water/wastewater, it's all spelled out, updates on

recruitment in our drinking water division and updates on our street reconstruction projects as they also deal with our water/sewer.

Force questioned the 1,333 meters replaced and percentage left to replace?

Boers replied the 1,300 puts us about half, we have 8,000 meters to replace yet, at the rate we are going, about 3 years or better. If we stay at the same rate we're going right now, we should double that, we are putting a priority on meters but keeping up with responsibilities and required duties, it's going to be hard to maintain that number.

Director's Report Placed on File.

#### **4) Discussion and Update on the 2024 Annual PSC Report and Financials.**

Lindman began the Public Service Commission (PSC) Report and Financials go hand in hand, but this is an annual report required by the PSC because they regulate and establish our rates on the drinking water side, the financials are put together, finance is a big part of preparing this report from operations financials to utility assets.

Groat summarized the report in the packet pages 13- 101. See [Video](#) at 10:41.

Force questioned if the PSC made any judgements on well-being or the numbers, or if they had opinions if we're doing a fair, good or poor job and Moody's standards for utility financial operations or if there were discussions about changing that and if we paid any interest on principal forgiveness?

Groat replied they do not give opinions, typically, Moody's will come in and look at our financials to issue credit rating even if we don't ask for one. If we don't ask for one, they won't charge us for it but they could ask that of us at any time. We don't pay any interest to the principal forgiveness. PSC report is available for everyone and includes all municipalities.

Lindman doesn't recall coming across changes for Moody's standards but there was a report card that came out from an entity in Madison I believe connected to the UW system that had informal information they were pulling off the annual PSC reports for municipalities statewide. He thinks it came out in the news because Green Bay received an F on their distribution lines but there haven't been any changes.

Diny recalled last year's total loss as a percentage of net water supply of 17%, we improved and are down to 13% and can attribute that to the new meters and other things but that's a good sign, it's not single digit yet but it's one piece of good news. Water net revenue water as a percentage of water supplied that's pumped, not billed, there's always going to be some shrinkage, leakage, flushing, water loss, thefts that come into play and that target is 10%. We know 17% is too high, 13% is moving in the right direction.

No Action Taken.

#### **5) Discussion Relating to Options for Ongoing Staffing Shortages, Recruitment, Retention and Wage Issues for the Utility.**

Lindman began this has been discussed here on numerous occasions in the past 4 years and there hasn't been action taken to move anything forward from the commission. The memo in packet was to provide a history of discussions, what's happened over this period of time, we had 3<sup>rd</sup> party study come in that the commission approved us to do, to establish and review staffing assessment of both water and wastewater division that came back with good information. Of those observations by Baker Tilly that came out at the end of 2022 and presented, he took those observations and tried to highlight what's been done, things we're still working on and decisions that we needed from the commission as well moving forward. Looking at recruitment and retention that are two very critical things that we haven't been doing very well, some of that has to do with wages, not being able to have staff available to distribute the work appropriately, there are a lot of things that go into it. He anticipates in the next couple of months that we'll be breaking down into some more details and making recommendations for commission action to move

forward or correct the direction we're going because we are in a critical position right now with staffing; both with retention and recruitment so we really have to make some corrections here in short order. We can't have the utility fail; that's just not an option for the City of Wausau, it's too critical, our infrastructure, he's been working with our HR Director Lisa Nowak and she's been very helpful with staff regarding steps we have to take from job descriptions to identifying risks if we don't take action that will be highlighted in the next coming meetings, but this is the start of that discussion.

Hadley voiced that there seemed to be a struggle between the commission and HR on who was going to decide on all of this. Her concern was the cost part, there's definitely a need and it's been delayed but a cost part so we could see and Baker Tilly's three recommendations that she didn't see any confirmations on it, the 3 and the 2 so 5 total between the utilities, not sure if that's what was said here and without knowing the cost, how do we proceed and knowing your current budget moving forward? I think the commission should be acting on it and there's obviously issues but she hasn't been here long.

Lindman replied in the past, we've presented to the commission potential numbers for wages, impacts on annual basis not only for adding new staff but also for addressing some competitive wages internally, we will have to update those but there's still some work that needs to be done upon my discussion with Nowak to bring those numbers in the next month or two when we'll have much more details, it's easier to say if we are going to add staff, we could estimate those numbers quickly, the idea of reestablishing current wages, paygrades and reclassifications appropriately, that's going to take a little bit more work for what that immediate impact would be.

Hadley added job descriptions seem imperative and to just back down the job description and have a person that's not qualified, that's interesting personnel. In the past, has the commission made the personnel decisions or made additions to staff or why is there an issue here between should it be personnel or HR or this commission? It would be interesting to know the costs of the technology you're asking for to streamline the efforts that you're doing here, mapping, hardware, laptops and everything. Was it a money issue with AT&T when you moved providers because AT&T was a better provider?

Lindman stated reducing job description qualifications was an approach and obviously it did not work.

Diny added we probably haven't updated our job descriptions and we have 2 state of the art plants, we should be marketing to be an attractant and getting the job descriptions to match what they currently do in our new plants, what's the most important thing to them on how we set those wages and market them so we have people signing up for jobs they want.

Lindman replied the commission has been given full authority to set wages for the utility, that's been clarified but when the last wage study was done with the city, it was the idea to have it all done together. The wage study done was not comprehensive, so when you're trying to compare different jobs, there's uniqueness to different divisions, departments within the city, when you look at Police Department and what they do versus the utility and what they do, these duties need to be looked at independently. We've made some improvements; we switched over from Cellcom to AT&T this Spring, not only did we save money monthly but we were able to add devices and get more people on the network. We are also on FirstNet for the entire department, which is the emergency response that is a great improvement. The other one is asset management, which you'll see in the budgets coming up. We had that budgeted a couple of years ago but because of the implementation of Workday, our HR and financial software wasn't fully operational and took longer than anticipated, we decided to hold off on that but it's going to be about a \$500,000-\$600,000 investment up front for us to move that forward with the utility. It's going to be a large investment to put all our assets in and do all our maintenance. AT&T was a better provider but they also have FirstNet, which is for emergencies, so during emergencies, we'll still have service

and communication capability.

Force questioned the last paragraph of the memo on how it was written as it described the reluctance of the commission to address the issues directly. We had an HR Director stand before us months before his departure and told us the wage scale was competitive, then we had staff saying they weren't comparable, then you put the commissioners in a position of listening to one side or the other and expect the commission to make decisions with input from the HR Director. He stated it was impossible to make decisions in those conditions, so he refuted this accusation, if the commission is being asked to establish salary ranges and compensation for various positions in the future, he'd be happy to do that but was not aware we were asked to do that in the past, this statement is inaccurate as far as he's concerned. He's unaware this commission was asked to set a salary at or set a particular job classification range at, irrespective of HR Director at that time. Let's have a meeting with the new HR Director and come up with recommendations that are beneficial to the utility.

Lindman stated it was not a statement to reflect negatively on the commission; it's meant to explain some of the conflicts that have happened in the past. He tried to do that as tactically as possible; it's not as a detriment to the commission, He believed the commission was very active in discussing this over the course of years and also realizes the information brought forward was conflicting from one department to the other.

Hadley questioned if Nowak was looking at job descriptions and wage comparability?

Nowak stated that we are starting with job descriptions, however, that's just the beginning, compensation is just a piece of the total reward package, it's not what motivates everybody, it's not what drives everybody to leave. That was the thing she loved about Baker Tilly study, it provided some anecdotal information which is a great augmentation for all the quantitative data that we've received from comp studies. Comp-studies are just data; you have to put this anecdotal information with it to make it information for you. This is systemic throughout the city, in my 10 weeks here, it's not just one thing that has caused a lot of these issues, so it's not one little thing to fix it. Looking at past practice from the previous HR Directors, there's a lot of opportunities to bring positive changes and provide some real HR acumen into the city. Business partnership is the first thing we need to focus on and that's relationship building so that the last sentence Mr. Force referenced will not happen underneath my watch. Lindman and I have a great relationship and with all the department heads, the partnership I have with everyone is meant to drive the city forward and not put HR in a black or white standard, we must operate within the gray and that's what I'm hoping to accomplish. Right now, I have a very robust workload and have not been able to prioritize this, this requires a lot of focus and attention, I will be asking for more HR associates so that we could provide the HR support that has been truly lacking citywide, there's a lot of great service that HR can provide, we just haven't had the bandwidth to do so. I'm excited to bring forth new job descriptions, I'm here for Directors but management needs some help and guidance that has not been provided in the past through HR, so I'm excited to bring that to management. We are at the crux of build versus buy in many arenas throughout the city, but safety and risk management is one of those we're buying, we might be at a point to start building internally and start centralizing some of those systems resources instead of having multiple departments paying and no vendor management, we could save a lot of money and get more on the process of improvement track and project management.

Hadley stated she liked how Nowak used comparable and it's not the end all but it's part of the whole picture which is really important and they've both spoken to their needs to find someone qualified and wants to stay but in the meantime, were there things we could approach that doesn't need a job description like the technical piece here and that a written contract is irrelevant; it's the service that you're getting.

Lindman replied there are things on here we could piece together as in our safety training,

we've brought forward 2 or 3 years ago a contract with MEUW, we were going to contract with them to do all our safety training departmentwide, not just the utility. They would put on all the training and coordinate it all and track it all. We brought that forward, the contract wasn't supported by the HR Director at that time or the city Attorney, they wanted us to use CVMIC because they're our insurance carrier and we've tried to do that but it just wasn't working, we're spending more money because they don't conduct all of the training that we need, so we're left to contract out some of that training which actually costs as much if not more than annual contract. That's just one thing we could bring back that this assessment has brought out; there's other things here too and we'll obviously continue to work with Nowak in job descriptions to properly identify responsibilities.

Diny stated this will likely be on our Agenda for August to see our progress.

Hadley reiterated to bring back some of the costs because we'll still be working understaffed and need help now, with the small entity we have, that's substantial, no mentoring, no one was around just you and the people below you are leaving. Normal programs have a mentor program, something that goes on right away that makes a person want to stay because they know you know there'll probably be a job going forward but they haven't done that.

Boers replied we are down about a quarter of our staff and I agree with you.

Diny stated some of these decisions we're starting to talk about will help us start making decisions in a quicker cycle as a utility as opposed to putting into 2026 budget, we could start changes sooner than later, starting is better than waiting, so we are starting.

No Action Taken.

## **6) Discussion and Update on the Lead Service Line Replacement Project.**

Jones presented an update on the Lead Service Line replacement project summarized with packet pages 107-108. See [Video](#) at 46:53.

Force commented they were doing a good job.

Gelhar questioned the goals of the apprenticeship program and where they were recruited from and if they got their certificates?

Jones replied they went to local high schools and LIUNA had several events where they recruit so we partnered with them. Last year, we tabled at the county fair and the kid's event. Everyone came from either local high school, there's a refugee program in Wausau that we worked with where many of our applicants came from this year. The goal is to get them hired, we give them general coursework on labor-based courses like hazmat, confined space and broader but the goal is to get them hired. Once they become a member of LIUNA, they can do all those courses and continue their career from there and get their certification.

Lindman summarized this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> year we've been doing this and we're looking at 1,500 to 1,600 services this year. We have applied for 2026 Funding and looking at another 75% principal forgiveness, the breakdown is somewhere around \$17 million of which \$10 million is principal forgiveness and the rest would be loan for the city. We'll be working with community infrastructure partners to bring that information back to the commission. The reason for bringing this up is we'll have to talk with you and it would be good to have a joint finance/commission meeting to understand that once we run those numbers with Ehlers, our financial consultants, and the finance department. Over the next couple of months coming forward, as most of you know this is a significant project throughout the city, it's a lot of money, but the first 2 years, we've done \$20 million worth of work for \$8 million. The money is available to do this, which will be a requirement in the future that the lead lines will need to be removed and this money will not be

available at that point when those rules go into place so we're trying to be as proactive as we can in this situation.

No Action Taken.

**7) Discussion and Possible Approving the Carry Over Remaining Funds for the TV Truck from the 2024 Budget to 2025 Budget for Wastewater.**

Diny summarized this would be money that we didn't spend in 2024 for 2025.

Watson motioned to approve the carryover remaining funds for the TV Truck from the 2024 Budget to 2025 Budget for Wastewater. Seconded by Force.

Motion carried 5-0.

**8) Discussion and Possible Action Approving Budget Modification Reallocating Funds from the Material Screen Equipment to Purchase a Replacement Vehicle at Drinking Water.**

Diny summarized we're able to purchase the screen equipment with ARPA funding and the budgeted amount for the screening of \$70,000 would be used to buy a much-needed vehicle.

Force questioned who we were purchasing a vehicle from and if it were a local supplier?

Boers replied we were not going to start looking until we had permission to do so and generally would try to find one locally.

Gelhar motioned to approve the budget modification reallocating funds to purchase a replacement vehicle at Drinking Water. Seconded by Hadley.

Motion carried 5-0.

**9) Adjourn.**

Diny stated next meeting, August 5<sup>th</sup> at 11am, same place.

Watson motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Hadley.

Motion carried 5-0.

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

Gina Vang, Recording Secretary

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