



Minutes of August 2nd, 2022

A meeting of the Wausau Water Works Commission was called to order at 1:30 p.m. in City Hall on Tuesday, August 2nd, 2022. In compliance with Wisconsin Statutes, this meeting was posted and receipted for by the Wausau Daily Herald on July 28, 2022.

Members Present: President Rosenberg, Commissioners Herbst, Gehin, Robinson

Others Present: Eric Lindman, Scott Boers, Ben Brooks, Anne Jacobson, Allen Wesolowski, Stephen Opatik/ Becher-Hoppe, Susan Wojtkiewicz/Donohue

Via WebEx: Evan Thomas/Wood

1) Approve Minutes of July 12th 2022 Meeting.

Herbst motioned to approve minutes. Seconded by Gehin.

Motion carried 4-0.

2) Director's Report on Utility Operations.

Robinson questioned the higher take rate on the Lead Service Lines.

Boers replied that everyone was concerned about the possible mandatory ordinance from watching the Commission meetings or from neighbors talking about it and people are asking when they call about it.

Director's Report Placed on File.

3) Discussion and Possible Action Approving a Minimum COLA of 3% for the 2023 Budget.

Lindman began over the past year, wages have been coming back to the Commission. We have talked about it at ten separate commission meetings over the past 12-months but no action is ever taken. A meeting was held with Finance, HR and Mayor and a proposed cost of living of 3% is being proposed for the 2023 budget that would be a step in the right direction for our employees to try and close the gap and get our staff competitive with other municipalities. The market study being done in 2023 may have a large gap once it comes to the City Council for approval and we might be told that we can't afford it again, so we would be right back to where we were in 2018-2019.

Robinson questioned if we needed 17 steps in the pay scale and stressed that we need to be able to position ourselves and have a long-term strategy and if we were looking to be at market level or above market level and costs.

Boers reiterated the importance of acting now because a 3% COLA seems like a slap in the face because they are showing anywhere from \$1 to \$12 behind and we are going to give them .60 or .70 cents 6 months from now. What is going to happen is that we will fall out of DNR compliance, water outages, or boil water orders, we need to move faster than this. We are doing staffing need assessments but we need to add wage assessments.

Gehin agreed that we need to do something because staff needs to know that we are serious about this. Minimally increase at 3% but I'd like to motion a 5% but I want to be realistic, we

could do another increment halfway through the year. Motion died on floor.

Herbst questioned Boers what level staff should be?

Boers replied that we are 19th largest in the State, we should be at or above that. We should be attracting employees and not losing them to smaller communities around us like Merrill, Schofield and Rothschild. We shouldn't be the training facility.

Gehin wanted staff to know we are serious about this and can't act on our own, maybe staff can get information from the smaller communities and continue to have this on the Agenda.

Brooks added that he liked the 3% approach, but it has been a challenge since he came on. If we lose those skilled operators that are training, we will be in big trouble.

Lindman emphasized the City moves slow, every 5 years for a market study. The Commission, (through State Statue) has the authority to do this, the City Council permits the Commission to take quicker action. If the City does not advance wages consistently between market study's to increase wage rates we will continue to fall behind and lose skilled staff, then the market study will once again be determined by the city to be unaffordable. The utility is at high risk currently and if wages to not begin to increase then we will be back to this situation where Commission needs to decide on wages separate from the City. We have not been making progress on this, there are additional significant wage increases that need to happen over the next year.

Rosenberg stated this discussion will need to happen at the City's HR and Finance Committee meeting and any other affected Committees.

Robinson motioned to approve minimum of 3% COLA for the 2023 Budget and begin to develop a budgeting strategy on how to accommodate increases going forward. Seconded by Herbst.

Motion carried 4-0.

4) Discussion and Possible Action Continuing the Ongoing Pilot Study with Modifications for PFAS Treatment.

Lindman began that we are still collecting very important data from the pilot study and upon discussions with DNR and Engineering, staff is recommending we continue the pilot study. We need the continuation of the pilot study to gather better data to determine life-cycle costs and media life expectancy for the new treatment facility.

Robinson questioned the significance of continuing the pilot study along with the funding source and if we would be monitoring for PFAS with the new system.

Lindman replied the continuation of the pilot study will show breakthrough with current media and we would understand the breakthrough timelines as we move forward. This would help us determine the life-cycle cost. We can't have accurate lifecycle cost without adequate data. It would give us the knowledge and timeline on what we need to budget for the activated carbon.

Boers stated if the knowledge of when breakthrough occurs saves us 6 samplings for PFAS it will pay for the \$30,000 pilot study. If we could skip a sample every month for the first 6 months, it will pay for itself. We are stepping over dollars to pick up pennies. With the lead lag set up, it would be robust, we wouldn't have to double monitor but we wouldn't know short chain breakthrough and the pilot would help us determine this timeline and then DNR would allow us to reduce sampling later. This would be our system so we are not sure DNR would be interested in funding this.

Lindman stated he would like to keep the pilot study going for at least a month and continue to pursue funding. The data that we are collecting would be important in the long run. We could also look at other costs that we could mitigate and bring back some options for that. We could have conversations with Wood, Donohue, Beecher Hoppe and others with the service agreements we currently have in place.

Clarification in minutes: The Pilot Study contract is between the City and Donohue & Associates.

Gehin motioned to continue the pilot study. Seconded by Herbst.

Robinson motioned to amend the pilot study continuation extension for one month while we review the alternative funding sources. Seconded by Gehin.

Motion carried 4-0.

5) Discussion and Possible Action Establishing a Policy for Budgeting Water/Sewer Costs for Subdivision Development and Recovering Costs in the Future Through Connection Fees as Established in the Wausau Municipal Code.

Lindman began that there are 3 subdivision developers that came to us. They wanted to develop within the City but the costs were too much. Currently in our subdivision ordinance, the infrastructure costs are borne by the developer. In the past Utility has extended water/sewer mains to different areas for potential development in the future, but the Utility had to carry those costs until the properties get annexed or developed and they recoup those costs through connection fees established in the ordinance. Would the Commission be open to take a look at a concept where the Utility upfronts the cost for water/sewer main with the thought that they would have to carry those costs until those communities are developed property by property and a connection fee is billed back on each property. The disadvantage would be that we would have to budget that and borrow the money until those properties are developed. We haven't had a subdivision within the City since early 2000's. When subdivisions get developed on the outskirts of the City, we will see those when their septic and wells fail, they would want water/sewer. We could look at this in depth if it's something at the commission is willing to consider in the future and may require a municipal code change which we will discuss with Legal.

Gehin questioned the size of the sites.

Wesolowski replied one of the sites were Fountain Hills, they couldn't extend some of those services for sewer/water, there's about 40 lots in there. Up on 48th Ave and one over by Eastbay, looking for assistance to annex that in, that one was about an 80 acres subdivision. He decided he was going to go with the Town for septic and wells after hearing there would be no cost sharing with the City.

Gehin stated he is supportive of staff looking into this but if we participate, we need a time frame so we can gain on the property quicker so they don't sit on the lot. Like a 10-year payback type of incentive.

Robinson stated the City has a housing task force and questioned if there was a way for them to be the conduit and the way we approach developers, road, park, utility policy and how we get those developed.

Rosenberg recapped that we do not have to vote but we all agree that we would want more information.

No Action Taken.

6) Discussion and Possible Action Approving a 5-year Sewer Agreement with the Town of Stettin.

Gehin began that he remembered the Town of Stettin had about 600 homes and businesses annexed to the City and lions share of the Sanitary district was now in the City and the remnant had to be the responsibility of the City. We should do more research before we work out an agreement. I was led to believe all the infrastructure was our responsibility and not the Towns.

Lindman replied, these home are billed directly, we bill Schofield and then they bill their residents directly. This is where they City bills the town residents connected to our sanitary directly. We have a DNR audit this month and this came up.

Rosenberg questioned if this would come before us again.

Jacobsen replied we had one with Schofield and we have one with Stettin which was signed 1/15/1968 and is still ongoing but this will supersede that one to bring a lot of it up to date. This first term is through 12/31/2026, then combining with Schofield and then it would run the same period of renewal of 5 years. We will investigate for changes if need be and bring it back.

No Action Taken.

7) Adjourn.

Motion to adjourn by Robinson. Seconded by Herbst.

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

Gina Vang, Recording Secretary

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