



Minutes of August 5, 2025

A meeting of the Wausau Water Works Commission was called to order at 11:00 a.m. in City Hall on Tuesday, August 5, 2025. In compliance with Wisconsin Statutes, this meeting was posted and receipted by the Wausau Daily Herald on August 1, 2025.

Members Present: Commissioners Watson, Hadley, Gelhar

Excused Members: President Diny, Force

Others Present: Eric Lindman, Scott Boers, Ben Brooks, MaryAnne Groat, Lisa Nowak, Susan Wojtkiewicz/Donohue, Tonia Westphal/ClarkDietz

1) Approve Minutes of July 8, 2025 Meetings.

Watson motioned to approve minutes. Seconded by Hadley.

Motion carried 3-0.

2) Director's Report on Utility Operations.

Lindman highlighted the 2025 funding and loan is closing, tentatively scheduled for September. Proposed 2026 funding attached page 10 of packet, Community Infrastructure Partners is presenting at next week's August 12 council meeting to provide 2025 updates and what we're projecting for 2026 possible funding for the city council to consider in the budget process for loans and principal forgiveness. In 2026, we're getting about \$12 million in principal forgiveness, \$7 million in loans, those are decisions coming forward which the commission would be involved in. Force was asking about energy audits, he's not here today but I haven't seen any grants for doing energy audits. Focus on Energy was involved in both our water and wastewater treatment plant during construction with types of equipment installed to ensure the utility received rebates and our design engineers reviewed products regarding efficiency. Our facilities are new and running with equipment that's efficient but as we move through operations, there will be some operational efficiencies that the operators may find in the next couple of years.

Watson questioned in missing out on the ARPA funding with the solar array project, if there were any other fundings since the neighborhood landed on a good compromise?

Lindman replied the solar project was proposed in the capital budget for 2026, the tax credit is still available between 30%- 50% depending on what the city is eligible for at the time the work is constructed, we don't know future of those but in 2025 they're in place, we'll know more at end of fiscal year for the feds if those tax credits are going to carry through and for how long. What we proposed in 2026 budget was cost for design and engineering and bidding of that project for 2027 construction, anticipating 12-16-week lag time once we order panels. CIP committees were positive about budgeting for this.

Hadley questioned if we've always contracted projects or if we did most of our work internally and what rock homes were?

Lindman replied it depended on the project complexity, we don't do lift stations in house, we contract out the design of those, the design engineer covers the inspection and submittals as they're familiar with the specifications. Projects we do in house are all our street projects, water

and sewer, distribution and collection projects but a lot of the specialty projects with facilities and pumps/hydraulics we don't have staff that specializes so it's contracted out. Rock homes are locations where there's shallow rock needing to be removed that adds cost to the project, we either blast, use rock hammers or rock drilling to get through.

Director's Report Placed on File.

3) Discussion and Possible Action Approving Contract Amendment with Clark Dietz for the Final Design, Bidding and Construction Oversight of the Crocker Street Lift Station Upgrade for 2026.

Lindman summarized Crocker Street lift station is next in line for construction. Clark Dietz brought these projects to 90% design and as we budget for funding on the construction and relocation/rehab of them, we'll work with Clark Dietz for the rest of that project to fruition. This is an amendment to their existing contract, total cost of \$140,800, final engineering \$21,500, bidding services \$5,400 and construction management observation \$113,900.

Hadley motioned to approve the Crocker St. lift station design completion by Clark Dietz contract. Seconded by Gelhar.

Motion carried 3-0.

4) Discussion and Update on Recruiting, Retention and Related Staffing Information.

Lindman began this is the continuation of last month's information. Through discussion with HR director, we've put together potential risks and results for the utility of not having adequate staffing, not being able to retain, consequences and risks, why it's important to keep this at the forefront to find options and decisions to make improvements. I've included some budget information from 2022, both the budget impacts for addressing our current staff and the addition of staff moving into 2026, each utility has their own enterprise fund, so that's broken out to drinking water and wastewater. These are estimated numbers at this point but it gives the idea of the impacts to the budget moving forward, so about 1% for reclassifications and 1.5% for adding staff. I would like to bring some recommendations forward in September for the commission to act on as it relates to these, it's something that would be effective immediately, then we'd budget accordingly for the 2026 budget. These will be updated and will work with HR Director if there's any additional questions or items you'd like to see.

Nowak summarized her philosophy on compensation. The compensation part from a monetary perspective is important but looking at the numbers this morning, when we speak about formal recommendations, one thing to focus on is employee experience and tacit knowledge that has historically ran out the door when people leave. Tacit knowledge refers to the kind of knowledge that's difficult to transfer to another person by means of writing or verbalizing. Looking at the overall tenure distribution of the utility, not in your packet but will be in the recommendation that we'll formally give, all our most tenured employees are approaching retirement age, we have a big group of people making up the bulk of our employees, their tenure averages 5 years when looking at the upper edge scale of 20 years. As people leave, we lose that knowledge. We've paid over \$67,000 in overtime, it's about 1,600 hours, if you extrapolate to the end of the year, it's about \$130,000 paid in overtime and 3,200 hours, if you think of supplementing that with the employees it would be more for the overhead but the one thing you're getting with adding FTE's is that tacit knowledge. The people ready to retire could pass that baton and start building that middle management that we are missing today. My recommendation would be to support additional FTE's and increase the compensation amount from an hourly basis and we don't know what that number is just yet but wanted you to understand when we meet next month. If you have questions, I'm here, send me an email, we'll be working together to solve this issue.

Hadley requested copy of operating budget.

Linman replied yes, we'll put that together with Finance and send it out.
No Action Taken.

5) Discussion and Possible Action on Setting PFAS Target Levels and GAC Replacement Schedule.

Lindman provided background when PFAS came to light, there are different rules in place between Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Department of Health Services (DHS), there's 3 different set values which is part of the struggle for municipalities. We installed a treatment process, Granular Activated Carbon (GAC), for PFAS removal that removes it to non-detect levels but at a cost. Depending on what level of PFAS is tolerable in the water will depend on the cost and how often we must replace that GAC. The EPA has a recommendation of 4 parts per trillion (ppt) but that's not enforceable until 2031. The DNR has an enforcement level of 70ppt, the DHS with the State has a recommended level of 20ppt. Depending on what you're looking at, these numbers have been bouncing around. We're bringing this forward, Wojtkiewicz from Donohue is here to present but we're looking for the commission to consider what levels we should be looking for that would trigger the utility to change out of the GAC that is about \$1 million every time we change it. It's been in place for 9 months but we are starting to see breakthrough on the carbon. We're still at non-detect levels; we have a lead bank and lag bank but the lead bank is bleeding out, we may start seeing some breakthrough into the distribution system.

Wojtkiewicz presented slides in packet starting page 19, see [Video](#) at 18:50.

Lindman summarized because it's such a significant cost, we want the commission involved in determining what triggers a GAC change. When we were going through this initially, there was significant public input, people were nervous, it caused anxiety in the public, a lot of this was the uncertainty of where these levels were going to fall, where regulatory agencies were going to require us to be. It was challenging trying to determine which type of process to design and install. With all the discussions we've had, we followed the right process, it's just our operating costs if we start replacing this more than once a year, it becomes very significant. Because this is new, we're kind of leading this effort on the change outs, I'll preface this as well, a decision doesn't have to be made today and next month we could revisit this but we'll need a decision so that we know from our operations what we need to plan for.

Boers stated the plant operates in a lead/lag configuration and current staffing levels would probably allow 1 vessel a month for GAC replacement, that will give us security for getting safe samples. That's where we'd run into issues, the initial startup had 1 vessel that came back unsafe and there's an extensive process with a caustic soak to sanitize the vessel, this would give us leeway cushion as far as getting it scheduled, handled efficiently, so if we're looking at 6 months, we're looking at being at 4ppt in the next 3 to 4 months.

Wojtkiewicz reiterated for a couple of the vessels, looking at 5 and 6 seem to be the mass transfer zone because it's moving through them most quickly or they've gotten the most loading. We're looking at 2 to 3 months for the 2nd vessel.

Boers advised the commission that operationally we've split these vessels into 3 groups into 1,2,3,4,5, and 6. Different volumes of water in the groups will keep steady numbers as we're changing those over. If we start in 2 to 3 months, we should start looking at this now and how we want to bid this out, work on those bid documents and get the best numbers from a supplier. When we hit the 4ppt on either 5 or 6, then start that process if that's what the commission wants to do, our recommendation would be to go to that 4ppt because we're going to be regulated at 4ppt so that's probably going to be the best information we can get as to how long it takes us to get there. We'll want to look at staying under 20ppt, that is the only commitment that we made with the commission, if we load lead and lag at 20ppt we're going to have to replace both of those

to get down to that 4ppt again so a little savings now might cost us more in the future.

Wojtkiewicz reiterated you could get to a point where your lag bed is fully loaded with PFOA/PFAS if you let it go too long, then you'd end up replacing both vessels in the pair at the same time because you've lost the treatment capacity from it, you're not necessarily saving anything right now by waiting because you'll have to replace it eventually.

Hadley questioned who determines what standards we're utilizing, who decides that? We're well under the PFAS level, how did we get to this with \$1 million/year to change out this carbon when we're still within their criteria and who decides with these 3 entities? These are all independent agencies so EPA can't tell DNR can't tell State, everyone has their own opinion on what's clean.

Lindman replied yes, this is all in our operating budget, we have a grant from the EPA for our 1st change out and a portion left for a 2nd change out, we have \$1.7 million considering \$1 million for the 1st change out and the remaining for the 2nd.

Boers provided more background, at one point DHS suggested to DNR that they should set their levels at 20ppt. DNR didn't adopt that 20ppt, they adopted 70ppt but DNR was having municipal water systems send out letters and publicly notifying if they were over 20ppt. Right now, that's what we are asking of the commission. The EPA rule was going to go in place in 2027 and that was when compliance was going to be required but with the change in EPA, they decided to move that out to 2031. We were at 30 to 40ppt in our wells, our raw water and that's where we struggled with the 70ppt for the State and then DHS' recommendation of 20ppt because we were between these numbers, so we were under that State level but over on the notification level by DHS, then EPA came out recommending 4ppt, we were never going to meet that.

Lindman advised the commissioners that the drinking water is regulated by 3 entities, the EPA, DNR and PSC, in the realm of this situation, the DNR has stated if you exceed the 20ppt, you'll have to provide public notice, we'll want to avoid that because it creates anxiety in the public but we know that at some point in the future, we're likely going to be regulated at 4ppt. The EPA has extended that but they are likely going to adopt that. Then the DNR will in turn have to adopt that. The idea is, if we wait until there is 4ppt in the distribution system, we don't have to notify anyone but that would be our internal trigger limit to say we need to schedule the replacement of the carbon, if we never want to reach the 4ppt then we'll have to replace sooner which will be more replacements at a cost. It would be beneficial for us to gather that data over time for when we are reaching that 4ppt, if that's going to be our regulatory Maximum Contaminant Limit (MCL) that will help us in the future in determining when we replace the carbon in these vessels. These are some of the challenges that we go back and forth on, if there's nothing established in place, that becomes the frustrating point, which numbers we are going to effectively use at this point in time. The \$1.7 million was provided through congressionally directed spending, that's ours, it's not going away but it's a 1x thing. We're building that in our operating budget, that \$1.7 million gives us the opportunity to do that but I don't want to give you the impression that over the next 2 to 3 years we aren't going to be looking at the rates again as everything's going up and that's just the reality, it's just a matter of how much and hopefully we're able to mitigate much of that.

Hadley questioned Fluoro-sorb.

Wojtkiewicz mentioned the alternative media was Fluoro-sorb, it's not approved and has not been used in Wisconsin but that's something that could be examined and we'll have to figure cost savings, everything seen so far indicates it's less expensive. It's bentonite clay and mined in the US and some of the carbon comes from overseas so it makes a difference in costs. The reactivated carbon cost savings is reflected by not bringing in new carbon, you're reusing it. Next month, we'll have additional data and we can also refine some cost estimates if that would be helpful. With Fluoro-sorb, we'd probably have to pilot test and that takes about a year. The other

options mentioned, slightly different carbon would have a different formulation but if it's approved by the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF), we could use it.

Watson requested time to absorb this data and discuss an acceptable level at the next meeting. She questioned whether testing was started on alternatives or anything else that we could substitute into our vessels and how long testing takes or if we could use that if it's potentially saving costs.

Lindman stated we could start piloting if you'd like but it's not approved for use yet. If it did get approved for use then we would at least know that it works with our water chemistry, maybe we'll have discussions on when they'll consider approval.

Brooks stated one thing to keep in mind, Wastewater will be receiving their WPDES Discharge permit soon. Within that new permit term, the first 2 years we'll be doing PFAS testing on the effluent discharged into the Wisconsin river, if we don't replace the GAC and go upwards of that 20ppt, it may impact our test results and throw us into a minimization plan, we have to keep that in mind when determining those numbers on the water side.

Gelhar appreciated the information and time to review what's been provided and requested to tour the facility in person.

Boers replied we'll work out a date that would work for you guys, we'd have to notify for a possible quorum but I'd appreciate that. Lindman replied, "we'll reach out to you."

No Action Taken.

6) Adjourn.

Watson motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Hadley.

Motion carried 3-0.

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

Gina Vang, Recording Secretary

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