

Norwalk Utility Advisory Commission – Regular Meeting
June 12, 2017 6:00 pm
Public Works Facility

The regular meeting of the Utility Advisory Commission was called to order at 6:00 pm on Monday, June 12, 2017 by chair Newton Standridge. Members present at roll call: Newton Standridge, Tim Kalvig, Dan Merriman. Absent: Ric Graves and Aaron Uhl.

Staff present: Tim Hoskins, Public Works Director; Joseph Ballard, Assistant Director Public Works; Shelley Stravers, Administrative Coordinator and Chelle Klootwyk, Utility Billing Clerk.

Council Liaison Erika Isley was also present.

Agenda

Motion by Merriman and seconded by Kalvig to approve Agenda with the addition of Item 7a. Water Shortage Plan. Approved 3-0.

Minutes

A motion was made by Merriman and seconded by Kalvig to approve the minutes of the May 25, 2017 meeting. Approved 3-0.

New Business:

Sewer rates outside the city limits -

Hoskins reported that with the growth that Norwalk is experiencing, some of which is taking place on the fringe of the City, there are areas where we have sewer lines that pass through or are near locations where building is taking place and these residents wish to connect and avoid installation of private systems. In most cases, approval to connect was a stipulation written into easements when the sewer lines were installed.

We currently have three of these circumstances, and we don't have a provision anywhere in the code on what rate to charge them. Staff checked into other metro cities and they were all over the board with how they charged.

Hoskins noted that Warren Rural Water is the water provided, and they use the same meters as the City, which would enable us to read how much water they have used in order to know how much usage to bill for.

Since customers are not residents, staff believes that it is a municipal service that should be applied at an increased rate and recommend 1.5 times the current wastewater rate.

A motion was made by Kalvig and seconded by Merriman to approve the sewer rate to residents outside the City limits at one and one half times the current residential sewer rate. Approved 3-0.

Irrigation rates –

Hoskins informed Commission that staff has been working on assembling data for City Council to provide a good overview of water usage. While performing this research, it seems to be evident that our peak months are consistently in the in the summer months. This information leads us to believe that irrigation during the hot/dry months is the main cause of these peaks. With the City facing decisions on secondary water sources, we know that conserving water during these peaks will be pertinent. Realizing that irrigation is a luxury in an effort to keep yards green, we believe a user fee is the best way to address this issue. Staff requested permission to move to Item 7a to discuss Water Shortage Plan in an effort to explain a little deeper, and then move back to this item.

Water Shortage Plan –

Hoskins explained that in 2014 we adopted a Water Shortage Plan as a result of the summer the City experienced in 2012. In 2012 the entire metro was experiencing a drought and everyone was in a bit of trouble with water. Des Moines Water Works was having trouble with their sources and meeting the demand of their customer. This Water Shortage Plan mirrors their plan. Norwalk's situation is unique with a single feed coming in and branching out for distribution filling the water tower. In 2012 no water was making it to the water tower and the pumps were working over time trying to keep up with the demand.

The City has two pumps, both are rated at 1.4 million gallons per minute. Our water tower measures at about 36 feet when near full. Today staff received a phone call from Des Moines Water Works stating they are concerned. The last 5-7 days both of our pumps are running full force and not getting a break. Usually they are staggered. Our water tower levels have continued to drop and this morning we were at 26 feet. Our system is designed to work with peak usages in the morning as people are getting ready for work, holds steady during the day, and then re-peak when residents are returning home for the evening. Then the tower is able to fill during the night. The tower is not able to fill during the night due to the distribution demand right now, which tells us that people are watering at night.

Commission asked Klootwyk if she has a way to contact all residents with irrigation meters. She said she has emails for almost all of the water residents. She said she would run a report for all irrigation meter customers and could then get a message out to those that she has current emails for.

Isley noted that we need to stay ahead of this. She suggested allowing staff the ability to move through stage 1 and stage 2 until we see the level of the tower properly maintained. Anything beyond stage 2 would require UAC and City Council's approval.

Hoskins noted that we can start with stage 1 and if we don't see any impact on the water tower level, then we can move onto stage 2. Levels will continue to be monitored.

A motion was made by Merriman and seconded by Kalvig to allow staff at its discretion to move through Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the Water Shortage/Conservation Plan, with constant monitoring, until we see the level of the tower maintained. If no improvement

is seen and staff feels further action is necessary, approval from the Utility Advisory Commission and City Council will be needed. Approved 3-0.

Irrigation rates (continued) –

Isley commented that special irrigation rates are not uncommon in the metro area and Hoskins agreed.

Commission agreed that this is necessary to help residents to understand that irrigation is a luxury. The City is experiencing alarming numbers daily and this would be a good message to get to residents so they understand the urgency of our situation.

Klootwyk reported that the current irrigation rate is \$5.64 per thousand gallons and is scheduled to increase to \$5.93 on July 1. Hoskins reported this is the potable rate.

A motion was made by Kalvig and seconded by Merriman to increase the irrigation rate to two times \$5.93 (\$11.86) as soon as possible. Approved 3-0.

Hydrant meter deposit and bulk water/hydrant meter water rate increase –

Hoskins reported that it was brought to our attention that our Agreement for Hydrant Meter Usage needs some updating, along with the deposit that does not reflect the current cost to replace a hydrant meter if it would not be returned. With there being a growing demand for these meters, we probably need to add more this summer, as we only have 5-6 in our supply. Staff recommends jumping the refundable deposit from \$950 to \$1,800, which bring things more in line with the equipment costs.

In addition, Hoskins noted that the rate we charge for the water for those meters is quite low and staff recommends increasing that rate to 1 ½ to 2 times the current rate, which is the same as the irrigation rates, since it is used for similar purposes as irrigation water.

A motion was made by Kalvig and seconded by Merriman to increase the refundable deposit for hydrant meters to \$1,800 and increase the water rate to the same as irrigation rates to two times \$5.93 (\$11.86) as soon as possible. Approved 3-0.

Impervious area calculation corrections ~

Hoskins reported that in January 2010 a formal policy was adopted for calculating a Storm Water Drainage Utility Charge. When this calculation was entered into the billing system the rate was entered incorrectly and some properties have incorrect measurements which affect the amount of the fee. Staff has audited every account and measured the square fee of impervious area of each location, then re-calculated the units billed with the correct rate for each commercial property. The measurement of square feet for each property was provided by Community Development and will

continue to be provided to the Utility Billing Clerk for any new commercial properties. The correct rate also needs to be entered into the utility billing software.

Staff recommends giving customers sufficient notice that the correct rate is going to be applied on January 1, 2018. That would give customers time to make adjustments in their budgets for the following year.

A motion was made by Kalvig and seconded by Merriman to start charging correct rate on January 1, 2018, giving sufficient notice to customers affected. Approved 3-0.

Standridge called the meeting to adjournment at 7:18 pm.

Next Regular Meeting October 9, 2017.

Newton Standridge, Chair

Shelley Stravers,
Administrative Coordinator