

Norwalk Utility Advisory Commission – Special Meeting
April 17, 2017 5:30 pm
Public Works Facility

The special meeting of the Utility Advisory Commission was called to order at 5:30 pm on April 17, 2017 by chair Newton Standridge. Members present at roll call: Newton Standridge, Tim Kalvig, Ric Graves, Dan Merriman and Aaron Uhl.

Staff present: Tim Hoskins, Public Works Director; Joseph Ballard, Assistant Director Public Works; Shelley Stravers, Administrative Coordinator and Luke Nelson, City Manager.

Council Liaison Erika Isley was also present.

Agenda

Motion by Graves & seconded by Merriman to approve amended Agenda of the as presented. Approved 5-0.

Minutes

A motion was made by Kalvig & seconded by Merriman to approve the minutes of the March 13, 2017 meeting. Approved 5-0.

Old Business:

Swearing in of Merriman -

In October of 2016, Merriman was appointed by City Council to serve another term on the Utility Advisory Commission.

Merriman was sworn in by Standridge.

Water bill dispute policy – discussion/recommendation

Hoskins reported that this item was discussed at the last meeting and sent to City Council with a recommendation. City Council has asked the Commission to reconsider the policy. The issue that surfaced was the Council did not want to place additional responsibilities on the City Manager, but instead place that back on the Commission. The Commission is better versed with this issue.

The question was raised that since the Utility Advisory Commission is just an advisory group, they were concern as to whether the resolution would allow the Commission the ability make a decision in this situation. Mr. Nelson advised that he would confirm with the City Attorney, but he felt this resolution gave the Commission the ability to be a deciding body in this situation.

Mr. Nelson explained a program that could be an option in the future for the City. It's a leak protection program where residents would contribute \$.50 a month (or could possibly be less depending on several factors) to the program. If they have a leak or a problem and have a high water bill, they have to bring in receipts to show that they fixed the leak, the resident pays the first \$100 of their high bill and the program pays for the rest of that bill. Without participation in the program, residents are not eligible for

any type of a waiver on their water bill. Residents who choose not to participate in the program would be required to sign a document stating so.

Graves lives in the older area in Norwalk and feels the City would have a hard time communicating a program such as this to those residents that are not tech savvy, which would result in a challenge getting participation with those residents. He does not think the City needs to be a quasi-insurance agent for water customers and is not in favor of the program.

Nelson noted that the City does not currently have enough disputes that it would prompt the level of complexity that this program would require. This is something that could be looked at later if there were more disputes going to the UAC and City Council.

The Commission was in agreement that they would have to meet as needed for these disputes so customers didn't have to wait long periods of time before coming to a resolution on their issue. They also agreed that the 30 day time period should be taken out of step 2 in the policy.

Isley asked what type of information the Commission would like to see from staff in order to make decisions on these disputes. Commission would like staff to provide account information, including past and current usage, steps that were taken in resolving issue with the customer to that point, what steps the public works/water staff took to investigate and their findings.

Ballard noted that staff is always glad to go out and help residents look at their homes, to try and help resolve where the problem lies. Many times this is all it takes for them to realize where the problem is and that they actually do owe the money.

Hoskins added that many times if the water didn't actually go into the sewer, and it can be proven, then we can waive the sewer portion of the bill. He also said that newer meters can be removed from homes and taken to Des Moines Water Works to test them. If the results show there were no issues, then the customer must pay for the testing, which can run \$45-50. If the meter is older, then we can think about replacing it. The meters depreciate in about 12 years. Once a meter gets to 15 years, it's a good option to replace them and get them out of the system. It is much more cost effective to test a newer meter than replace it.

Motion by Graves and seconded by Uhl to approve water bill dispute policy with noted changes. Approved 5-0.

New Business:

Irrigation water rates - discussion

Hoskins reported that as we become more concerned with our water availability with regard to available water volume and our water purchase capacity, we look for ways to curtail the waste of water. In several of the newer developments we are seeing irrigation systems becoming the norm for many of the homes. Possibly raising the

irrigation water rates will encourage people to not use water unnecessarily. Our neighboring communities have irrigation rates significantly higher than Norwalk.

Isley asked Hoskins if he knew what the rationale was for the higher rates in the neighboring communities. Hoskins did not, but he will find that out and report it back to the group.

Graves was in favor of charging a higher rate in order to stop people from using the water supply that we desperately need for future development. He would like to see the extra money that is generated from the rate increase earmarked for additional water supply and storage (item 8). This would give us a portion of the funding for future development and supply and storage of water.

Standridge asked staff to find out how much is used between now and the end of May in irrigation alone, and report that at the June meeting.

Resident and non-resident sewer fees for customers that are not water customers – discussion/recommendation

Hoskins informed Commission that the City has installed wastewater mains into areas to service as trunk lines as subdivisions continue to pop up. In several cases we have yet to provide water service, which is normally used to bill wastewater. In several cases these sewer mains have passed through property privately owned and both temporary construction easements and permanent easements have been procured. As part of the negotiated easements, connection to these mains by the owner or future owner was part of the easement. Now we are faced with billing these wastewater customers.

Different ways of billing their usage is to seek a copy of their water bill, have the customer provide the water bill, or simply come up with a flat rate. Staff feels the flat rate would be the simplest. This could be figured by using an average customer wastewater bill. Staff would also recommend a higher fee for those outside of the city limits. To keep in line with other departments in the City, staff would recommend the fee be 15% higher.

Mr. Nelson noted that it would be interesting to see what other communities charge in this type of situation. He thought those outside of the corporate limits should be charged a rate 1½ to 2 times more than inside the corporate limits.

Hoskins will look into other communities and what they charge for this type of situation, and how much more they charge for those outside of the city limits.

RFP for the development of a water distribution hydraulic model, review of existing supply & storage – discussion/recommendation

Hoskins explained that Norwalk's water supply is delivered through one 10" water main entering the community along Hwy 28 and assisted with a pressure pumping station along Old Hwy 28 just south of Echo Valley Drive.

Two issues challenge the community. First is that the community is served by only one supply line. Second is that the community is growing at a significant rate requiring growing flows to meet the needs of new development. This study will provide answers to the conveyance capacity of the existing pipelines as well as new, conduct a storage analysis to identify storage deficiencies if they exist, and consider the need of additional distribution needs and secondary supply lines.

Mr. Nelson added that after Dan Klopfer spoke at the City Council work session in March, he offered up assistance to help with reviewing RFP's because he feels it is critical for us to understand what our capacity is in the system (which is different than the purchasing capacity).

Hoskins noted that this would help the City in prioritizing these projects as well as how quickly we need to expedite them. This study would also tell us where our heavy consumption areas are. We have some newer developments that have quite a distance from our storage and source.

Nelson also noted that the City is trying to grow our industrial tax base. In order to do that, we have to make sure we have adequate flow and pressure for their sprinkler systems, and supply them with the water they need, along with maintaining service to the rest of the community.

Hoskins added that this study would be helpful to know what size of mains need to be put into each new area.

Staff assured Commission that Community Development Department would have much input on this study and provide necessary information to help in projecting growth of the City.

Open Forum –

Graves said he would like to discuss the 28E Agreement for North River and Middle River. He asked what we were going to do with our storm water.

Nelson said that the regional watershed authority is an organization that is being put together primarily for the purpose of going after grant funds for helping out with

specialized projects. This organization does not have any authority over us as a City. They will invite us to be a part of any specialized projects, or if there are specialized projects we are interested in, this is another avenue for us to get help with funding.

Graves wants to make sure we include the Warren County Soil and Water Commission with this. Mr. Nelson said he would check into it and see if Warren County was included.

Motion by Graves and seconded by Uhl to adjourn meeting at 7:08 pm. Approved 5-0.

Next Meeting June 12, 2017.

Newton Standridge, Chair

Shelley Stravers,
Administrative Coordinator