

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, August 24, 2016

6:00 PM

Council Chambers

Members Present:

Janis O. Manwaring, Chair
Randy L. Filiault, Vice-Chair
Robert J. O'Connor
Stephen L. Hooper
Gary P. Lamoureux

Staff Present:

Medard Kopczynski, City Manager
Thomas Mullins, City Attorney
Elizabeth Fox, Assistant City Manager
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works Director
Steve Thornton, Finance Director
Donna Hanscom, Public Works Assistant
Director
Tara Kessler, Planner

Members Not Present:

Chair Manwaring called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and explained the procedures of the meeting.

1) Letter of Support for Marlboro Street Corridor Improvement Transportation Alternatives Program Grant – Planning Department

Tara Kessler, Planner, stated that she is here to seek the MSFI Committee's recommendation to have the Mayor send a letter of support for the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Grant. She continued it is a grant program that the Federal Department of Transportation (DOT) administers on a competitive basis to school districts that want funding for transportation infrastructure improvements or studies to enhance safe passage for pedestrians or cyclists. The City of Keene is currently a recipient of TAP funds for the Cheshire Rail Trail Phase II corridor and City staff is seeking to apply for \$784,000 of Federal funds to leverage the existing \$195,000 the City has allocated in its Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for improvements to the Marlboro Street corridor. Those improvements are specifically trying to increase pedestrians' ability to cross and bicyclists' ability to travel on the Marlboro Street corridor, and to enhance connections to the rail trail from the neighborhood south of Marlboro Street to the rail trail that connects to downtown. The project total is \$980,000. This grant is very competitive at the state level. The City is trying to get as many letters of support as possible. The grant application requires a letter of support from the City

Council, stating that they are dedicated to allocating the necessary funds, which has already been done in CIP, representing the 20% match requirement.

Chair Manwaring asked for questions. Councilor Lamoureux asked what the timing is. Ms. Kessler replied that September 2, 2016 is the deadline to submit the grant application. She continued that the City Council meets the day before. Chair Manwaring stated that the Southeast Keene Neighborhood Group and Pathways for Keene have both written letters of support. She continued that they are excited about this possibility. Ms. Kessler added that the reason staff is bringing this request to them now is because the City Council had a break in August, and staff was not aware until August 10th of the grant application's requirement for this letter.

Chair Manwaring asked if any members of the public had questions or comments. Hearing none, she asked for a motion.

Councilor Lamoureux made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Filiault.

On a vote of 5-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends the Mayor be authorized to sign a letter of support on behalf of the City Council expressing the City's support for the Marlboro Street Corridor Improvement project and its application for funding from the Transportation Alternatives Program.

2) Request for Abatement of Water Shut-off Fee – 25 American Avenue – Finance Department

Steve Thornton, Finance Director, stated that a customer recently had their water shut off due to non-payment of the water bill. He continued that they requested an abatement of the water shutoff fee. The fee to turn the water back on at a residence or business during business hours is \$90. If it is outside of business hours there is a minimum charge due to the use of a vehicle and to have City staff report to work. That fee is \$219.50 in this case. In this instance, the customer wants that fee abated. Mr. Thornton asked if he should provide the particulars, which are in his memorandum. Chair Manwaring replied yes.

Mr. Thornton reported that the City received a communication from the owner of 25 American Avenue and 22 Spruce Street regarding the water being shut off. He continued that this person owns both properties, but resides at American Avenue. The Finance Department has 22 Spruce Street as the mailing address on the account, so that is the address they use to correspond with the customer. The customer has owned 22 Spruce Street since 2001 and 25 American Avenue since 2007. The water bills for both properties have always been mailed to 22 Spruce Street. On June 7, 2016 the customer requested the mailing address change to 25 American Avenue. The City's billing process is to send two bills, covering about nine months of service, and then the third, and if there has been no activity for the two prior bills the customer get a shut off notice. That is what happened. The notice was sent to the customer on May 24, two days before the water was

to be shut off, and a phone message was left at the number on file for the account, and there was no response. After the water was shut off the Revenue Department received a call from the customer. The City explained that water was shut off because no payment was given since August 2015, and a shut off notice had been issued and a phone message was left. Mr. Thornton continued that the customer replied that he did not get the phone notice and he checks his voicemail every few days. He said he waits for the shut off notice before he pays the bill. He called back and asked what it would cost to turn the water back on. He was informed that the balance due was \$756. They told him that if he chose to have the water turned on that day it would be an additional \$219 because it was after 3:00 PM, or he could wait until 7:30 AM the next morning and it would be \$90. He asked for it to be turned on right away, so it was.

Chair Manwaring asked if committee members had questions or comments. Councilor Lamoureux stated that Mr. Thornton said it was typical for the customer to wait for the shut off notice before they paid the bill. He asked if all the notices were sent to 22 Spruce Street in the past. Mr. Thornton replied yes, as that was the address they had on file for many years, so yes, for all of the other times the customer waited for the shut off notice and then he came in and paid the bill.

Councilor O'Connor stated that the memorandum says the balance is current at both locations. He asked if that is correct. Mr. Thornton replied that the balance for 22 Spruce Street is \$610, and includes the May 2016 bill, due July 19, and the February bill, due on April 19. He continued that those are still both outstanding. The account will be billed again this month. If the City does not get payment another shut off notice will go out for this month.

Councilor O'Connor asked if the City has put in place a practice of sending the notices to both addresses. Mr. Thornton replied that the customer asked for the mailing address to be changed to 25 American Avenue in June.

Chair Manwaring asked for public comment. Hearing none, she asked what staff recommends. Mr. Thornton replied that staff recommends that the MSFI Committee deny the request for an abatement.

Councilor Filiault made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Lamoureux.

On a vote of 5-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends denying the request for abatement of the water shut off fee in the amount of \$219.15 for the service at 25 American Avenue.

3) Request for Water and Sewer Abatement – 169 Church Street

Gary Carpenter, of 169 Church Street, stated that the MSFI Committee members have already seen the material he gave them. He continued that he spoke with the Public Works Director Kürt Blomquist today and Mr. Blomquist has a recommendation as a

result of their conversation. Mr. Carpenter replied that he is willing to abide by that recommendation. He does not have the numbers, but Mr. Blomquist does. Chair Manwaring asked Mr. Blomquist to comment.

Mr. Blomquist stated that at the last meeting he spoke to the MSFI Committee about this topic. He continued that currently there is a \$5,412 outstanding water/sewer bill. This amount has been generated over time. He looked back at the billing records and found that Mr. Carpenter has owned the property since 2007, and over time, there were times when Mr. Carpenter got behind with payments. Previously, he has made arrangements with the City and was able to keep up with those arrangements, but then something would happen and he would fall behind again.

Mr. Blomquist continued that he has thoughts to offer for the Committee's consideration. The water was shut off in May 2016. By that point, whatever arrangements Mr. Carpenter had been making were ones he was unable to keep up with. Staff had done all they could and the water was shut off. Staff recommended the removal of the meter. As long as a person has a meter they owe a surcharge of about \$60 (per bill). Each quarter Mr. Carpenter has been billed for the meter, which was not removed. He and staff would have suggested to him to have the meter pulled. Mr. Carpenter had a fire in the property and other flood damages and he was trying to repair it. The property was unoccupied. They could abate that \$318 meter fee because it was unoccupied and there was no consumption.

The Director continued the July 2014 bill was very high, about \$1,300. He noted he asked Mr. Carpenter about that. Mr. Carpenter had some tenants in the property that caused damage, allowing water to run and not communicating with him about it. Staff has worked with property owners in the past about this - if water spilled out and was not returned to the sewer system, the thought was the City did not spend energy treating it, so they could look at abating that sewer portion. For Mr. Carpenter that sewer portion was \$792. Those two items add up to about \$1,110.95, which could be considered for abatement, because water did not return to the sewer and because if they had been able to communicate with Mr. Carpenter they would have recommended that the meter be removed to avoid the meter fees.

Mr. Blomquist continued that that leaves \$4,301 left on the account. He noted that he normally does not recommend turning someone's water back on until they pay at least 25% of the outstanding bill, but he is willing to work out an arrangement. Mr. Carpenter plans to have occupancy by November and then he will be receiving rental income. Mr. Carpenter was requested to make that 25% payment between now and November and he said he would be willing to do that. That 25% would be \$1,100. This would allow the department to turn the water back on. That would leave about \$3,200 left on the bill. They talked about repayment by December 2017 at the latest, although Mr. Carpenter could pay it off sooner. This is also contingent on Mr. Carpenter remaining current on his current billing, once the water goes back on. Mr. Blomquist continued that he talked with the water/sewer billing person in Revenue Collection office and found that the City has no other account in this type of situation. Many times it is businesses that do not pay

until they get the shut off notices. Mr. Blomquist concluded that those are his thoughts, and if the MSFI Committee concurs with supporting Mr. Carpenter, the end remedy is: if Mr. Carpenter does not keep up with this arrangement, and the water gets shut off again, the City will not turn it back on until the balance is 100% paid off.

Chair Manwaring asked if Mr. Carpenter understands. Mr. Carpenter replied yes, and he thinks it is very fair. Councilor Lamoureux thanked Mr. Carpenter and thanked staff. He continued that they understand it is a tough time and they appreciate staff for helping out. Mr. Carpenter thanked Mr. Blomquist and the MSFI Committee. He continued that they have done a great job. Councilor Hooper stated that he echoes Councilor Lamoureux and wants to see this on the front page of the Sentinel that the City sometimes goes out of its way to help the citizens of Keene and this is good news.

Assistant City Manager Elizabeth Fox asked if Mr. Blomquist has a recommended motion. Mr. Blomquist replied yes and gave it to her and the City Attorney to read. Ms. Fox suggested wording for a motion.

Councilor O'Connor made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Filiault.

On a vote of 5-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends the abatement of \$1,110.95 for 169 Church Street and to authorize the City Manager to negotiate and execute an agreement with the owner of the property for the remaining amount due over the next 12 months.

4) Impact of 2016 Drought Conditions on Keene's Drinking Water Supply – Public Works Department

Donna Hanscom, Public Works Assistant Director, stated that they are hearing of all the towns around Keene declaring drought conditions and talking about the drought's impact on water supplies, so this is a good time to talk about the City's water. She continued that the City has three distinct water supplies – reservoirs in Roxbury, a wellfield on Court Street, and a wellfield on West Street. Normally the users require 2.1 million gallons per day. That has been the yearly average for the past few years; however, things are changing quickly with temperature changes. When she wrote this memorandum two weeks ago the demand was about 20% higher, with people doing extra laundry, taking more showers, watering lawns, and so on and so forth. The highest day was August 1, when 2.9 million gallons were used. At that point, about 70% of the water was taken from the reservoirs, and about .8 million gallons was pumped from the West Street wellfield. She noted the department turns the West Street wellfield on in the summer time, and the rest of the year, they just use the reservoirs. They do not routinely need to use the Court Street well and have not used it full time since 2007. It has a lot of water in reserve.

Ms. Hanscom continued that they routinely check the amount of water in the reservoirs. They get information based on consumption and they are able to determine how many

gallons are in the reservoir. As of last Friday the reservoirs had between 350 and 400 million gallons. If they were taking out 2.9 million gallons per day they would have about half of that left in reserve. They do not know how much is lost due to evaporation. They allow a buffer of 10 to 20% when they look at how far they could draw them down. Last Monday they decided to open the Court Street well. It can produce about a million of gallons of water a day, which will about double the amount of days of water left in Roxbury. It extends the supply for about 4 months, even if we had no rain at all. The demand was down a little this week to 2.3 million gallons; which suggests that people were using less water as the temperature cooled off. Yesterday was the first full day using the Court Street wellfield and they took about half a million gallons from the reservoir in Babbidge, about .8 million gallons from the West Street wellfield, and about a million from the Court Street wellfield. They looked at reservoir levels today. Between the two, there are approximately 330 million gallons. If they take out half a million gallons per day there is plenty, even with a good buffer. When the two reservoirs are full, which they are often, they have about 630 million gallons in storage. They can take a million gallons per day from the Court Street wellfield and almost as much from the West Street one. The City is fortunate in terms of having options to choose from in the water supplies.

Ms. Hanscom continued that she wanted to review options available to the City Council if they did not have this much storage. A few years ago they set up a water supply shortage ordinance. The City Council can declare a water conservation alert when there is an available raw water volume of 120 calendar days or less. The City Council can choose what they want that to mean. They did not put specifics in the City Code. The City Council can ask people to reduce their water usage. The alert can be increased to a water storage watch if there are 90 days left – the City Council can give mandatory requirements, like a ban on outdoor watering, directions to reduce water consumption by 20%, etc. There are options. If the storage is less than 30 days they can require up to a 50% water reduction per day. They are not even close to being there. They will probably have a dry fall but they still have more than 500 days of water left in the reservoirs at this particular demand. Demand goes down as winter starts.

Ms. Hanscom continued that after they have this discussion tonight, staff will look at doing a PSA about conserving water. They will prepare a flyer to spread around the city, with information about ways to reduce water usage, how much water you lose from a leak from a drip, and websites that talk about water conservation. They will put it out to people as an option, not because they are in trouble. It is just a good message to send generally. The State issued a statewide announcement about the dry conditions, asking people to just pay attention to water use – not to stop water use, but to pay attention, check on leaks, etc.

Chair Manwaring asked for questions. Mr. Blomquist stated that he cannot say enough good words about the staff. He continued that this is something they have been working on, keeping him and the City Manager up to date. It is a very active program. They are making sure the community is getting what it needs. The long term forecast is for dry

weather through October. He thanked Ms. Hanscom and her staff for their work and for keeping them abreast of the situation.

Councilor O'Connor asked if the Court Street wellfield is Goose Pond. Ms. Hanscom replied no, there is an aquifer at the end of the street – there are two layers of water underground, an upper layer and a lower layer, separated by clay. She continued that the lower layer is about 50 to 75 feet deep. The good news is there is not as much influence from surface water. It takes longer to recharge, though, if you stress it by using it a lot. They are in good shape with that now. They have a number of monitoring wells not far from the drinking water wells. For the last 15 to 20 years they have been measuring the depth about three times a year. They know what they expect to see there on any given year. This year you would not know it but based on the water level there is no drought. The aquifer looks good. The state has a well they monitor the level in, somewhere along Route 10 between West Street and Route 101, and they, too, found that it is in the normal range for this time of year. If the drought continues for three to five years it might be a different story, but right now it looks good.

Councilor Hooper made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor O'Connor.

On a vote of 5-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends that the report on the 2016 drought conditions' impact on Keene's water supply be accepted as informational.

5) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Manwaring adjourned the meeting at 6:38 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker