

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE Council Chambers B, Keene City Hall May 24, 2023 6:00 PM

A. AGENDA ITEMS

- John Sosnowski Request for Water Abatement and Fee Waiver 251
 Park Avenue
 - Staff Response: 251 Park Avenue Sewer/Water Abatement Request
- 2. Judy Rogers Downtown Infrastructure and Reconstruction Project Bike Infrastructure "Wants vs Needs" and a Potential Model to Handle Community Events on Central Square
- 3. Continued Discussion Downtown Improvement and Reconstruction Project

B. MORE TIME ITEMS

NON PUBLIC SESSION

ADJOURNMENT

5/1/2023

To the Honorable Mayor and City Council:

Thank you for taking the time to consider what I strongly believe is a mistake in the water billing for 251 Park Ave in Keene. I would like start by commending Kurt Blomquist and the entire water revenue staff for their patience in working with me on this problem. I'm hoping we can resolve this today.

I'm asking that the following bills be adjusted to the next highest bill in 2022 for 251 Park Ave.

Bill Date	Amount Billed	Request bills be adjusted to next highest bill in 2022: 9/1/2022 for \$336.34	Credit Requested
9/1/21	\$565.75	\$336.34	\$229.41
12/1/21	\$517.94	\$336.34	\$181.60
3/1/22	\$835.74	\$336.34	\$499.40
6/1/22	\$1,584.84	\$336.34	\$1,248.50
Total	\$3,504.27	\$1,345.36	\$2,158.91
Total Credit Requested re usage bills			\$2,158.91
Additional Request for \$170 fee waiver for meter Replacement			\$170.00 Credit to waive fee for meter replacement

I am attaching the billing going back to 2016 for 251 Park Ave. This is not related to the two other properties I own in Keene which are also listed in the attachment. As a side note, this summary shows that I pay the water bills on time for my other two properties, and it was only in reaction to these extremely high bills that I have had an issue.

The average water bill for each year for 251 Park is as follows:

2016 - \$147.00

2017 - \$219.00

2018 - \$265.00

2019 - \$237.00

2020 - \$247.00

In my opinion, as shown above, the billing was incorrect beginning with the bill on 9/1/21 with a bill of \$565.75. This bill is higher than any other bill received in the previous 5 years. This continues with additional incorrect billing for the next 3 bills ending with 6/1/22 for \$1,584.84.

I know these bills are significantly higher than the actual usage for the following reasons:

- I have stable long-term tenants in the two units. There has not been any change in the water usage.
- There is no active garden and no one is using additional water over what was used in the past.
- After many inspections by my property manager, often with someone from the water department, it is clear there was no leak.
- I asked for quite some time to have the meter replaced as this is the only way to really know if the meter is giving accurate readings. This was done and, according to the tests, there was no problem with the meter. However, the high bills tell a story of there being some kind of problem whether it was the meter or some other issue with the billing. As I understand from Kurt Blomquist, occasionally there may be issues with a glitch in the billing software. Unfortunately, there is no process to evaluate if the problem is in the software.

So, I'm left with making the case based on asking the City Council to please look at this from a simple common sense perspective and help me with bills that are clearly some kind of mistake.

I can understand that bills in the \$350.00 range are valid, although these bills are roughly \$100.00 higher than the previous highest annual average of \$247.00. As I said before, it just doesn't pass the common sense test for a private home with two tenants who have been there for years and haven't changed their water usage AND there has been no leak, for the bills to jump up like this and, then, just as mysteriously, come back down again as of the 9/1/21 bill of \$336.00.

As stated above, I'm asking that the bills from 9/1/21 when if first increased up to \$500,00 or more be adjusted to the next highest bill in 2022 which is 9/1/22 in the amount of \$336.34.

Credit requested: \$2,158.91

In addition, I'm asking that the \$170.00 I was charged for replacing the meter be waived. As I said before, the water revenue staff has been terrific in trying to help resolve this issue. However, in this case I wasn't told in advance there would be a charge and, more importantly, I don't feel I should pay whether the meter is the problem or not. There is clearly some type of billing issue and replacing the meter is a logical step in trying to isolate the problem. In my opinion, this is not something I should be charged for doing. The total credit I'm asking for is 2,158.91 plus waiving the \$170.00 charge.

Separate from the \$170.00 meter replacement charge, I have a current outstanding usage bill of 4,526.57. Kurt Blomquist was gracious in letting me know this is not in collections while we try to work out this problem. If I am granted the above credit and meter replacement waiver, this will result in an adjusted usage bill for \$2,367.66 which I will pay immediately. This assumes the separate \$170.00 charge for meter replacement is waived as well. This will bring me current through and including the last bill on 3/1/23.

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Thank you for your consideration.

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John Sosnowski, Owner, 251 Park Ave, Keene, NH.

Utility Billing 8.1 DATE: 04/28/2023 TIME: 11:17:29 ACCOUNT NUMBER 05101-03 CUSTOMER NAME SOSNOWSKI, JOHN SERVICE ADDRESS 251 PARK AVE

CITY OF KEENE, NH CUSTOMER HISTORY REPORT

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PAGE NUMBER: 1 MODULE : histfun

Utility Billing 8.1 DATE: 04/28/2023 TIME: 11:17:29

CITY OF KEENE, NH CUSTOMER HISTORY REPORT

ACCOUNT NUMBER 05101-03 CUSTOMER NAME SOSNOWSKI, JOHN SERVICE ADDRESS 251 PARK AVE TRANSACTION DATE POST DATE TYPE

06/01/2015 BILLED 04/16/2015 PAYMENT 03/01/2015 BILLED

06/30/2015 04/17/2015 03/19/2015

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PAGE NUMBER: 2 MODULE : histfun

Utility Billing 8.1 DATE: 04/28/2023 TIME: 11:21:02

CITY OF KEENE, NH CONSUMPTION ANALYSIS

PAGE NUMBER: 1
MODULE : CUST_RPT 8
BY ACCOUNT NUMBER

SELECTION CRITERIA: cubaccount.cust_no='05101' and cubaccount.cust_ser=3

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Utility Billing 8.1
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TIME: 11:32:55

ACCOUNT NUMBER 03570-03
CUSTOMER NAME SOSNOWSKI,
SERVICE ADDRESS 14-16 COBB

JOHN

CITY OF KEENE, NH CUSTOMER HISTORY REPORT

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PAGE NUMBER: 1

Utility Billing 8.1
DATE: 04/28/2023
TIME: 11:32:55
ACCOUNT NUMBER 03570-03
CUSTOMER NAME SOSNOWSKI, JOHN
SERVICE ADDRESS 14-16 COBB ST

CITY OF KEENE, NH CUSTOMER HISTORY REPORT

220,47 68.33 68.33	STANDARD BILLING PAYMENT STANDARD BILLING	02/01/2015 BILLED 12/17/2014 PAYMENT 11/01/2014 BILLED	02/24/2015 12/18/2014 11/20/2014
499.74 279.27	FAIMENI STANDARD BILLING	07/27/2015 FAIREN	05/20/2015
210.67	STANDARD BILLING		08/27/2015
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338.07	PAYMENT		12/08/2015
258.18	STANDARD BILLING		02/23/2016
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295.54	PAYMENT		06/14/2016
174.12	STANDARD BILLING		08/16/2016
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353.04	STANDARD BILLING		02/15/2017
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382.14	STANDARD BILLING		05/30/2017
382.14	PAYMENT		06/28/2017
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Utility Billing 8.1 DATE: 04/28/2023 TIME: 11:27:25

CITY OF KEENE, NH CONSUMPTION ANALYSIS

PAGE NUMBER: 1
MODULE : CUST_RPT 8
BY ACCOUNT NUMBER

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DATE: 04/28/2023
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CITY OF KEENE, NH CUSTOMER HISTORY REPORT

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CITY OF KEENE, NH CUSTOMER HISTORY REPORT

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Utility Billing 8.1 DATE: 04/28/2023 TIME: 11:32:08

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REPORT TOTAL

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CITY OF KEENE NEW HAMPSHIRE

Meeting Date: May 24, 2023

To: Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee

From: Kurt Blomquist, ACM/Public Works Director

Through: Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager

Subject: Staff Response: 251 Park Avenue Sewer/Water Abatement Request

Recommendation:

Accept the memorandum as informational.

Attachments:

None

Background:

The City of Keene has approximately 6,000 sewer and water accounts. These accounts are read four (4) times a year, generating approximately 24,000 bills per year. Per City of Keene Code of Ordinance, Section 98-514. - Abatement and posting (a), Generally. The city council shall have the sole authority, unless otherwise delegated to one of its standing committees, to abate, reduce or otherwise forgive any bill or assessment for any rate, roll or charge which may be or which may become legally due to the city, on account of water or sewer service, except as otherwise specifically provided under subsection (b) of this section. Per City of Keene Code of Ordinance Section 98-514. - Abatement and posting, (b), Correction of errors by director. The director shall, immediately upon detection, correct any error in any account showing any rate, roll or charge made by the department, whether it is paid or unpaid, and shall adjust such account accordingly and show on his records the exact method by which such adjustment was made.

When a customer has a concern about a high sewer/water bill, they contact the City for review of the account. The Public Works Department has standard operating guidelines for reviewing high bill concerns. An appointment is made with the customer to review their property. The Water/Sewer Division's Meter staff meets with the customer. They follow a High Bill Checklist form that includes performing an electronic read of the property and a visual manual read of the meter. They perform a walkthrough of the property with the property owner noting any issues or concerns. If an issue is found, the customer is asked to take corrective action and then contact the Public Works Department. The Meter staff will monitor the account for several weeks to determine if the corrective action had an effect. If no issue is found on the day of the review, the Meter staff will monitor the property for three weeks, providing feedback to the property owner.

Per City Code Section 98-514. - Abatement and posting. (a), Generally, if the customer still questions whether they owe the bill, they may request to have the meter removed and tested. The meter is tested in accordance with City Code Section 98-122 Testing, "When the accuracy of registration of

any water meter is challenged by any consumer, such meter shall be tested in accordance with public works department standard practice. If the test shows the meter to be within two percent of a possible 100 percent accuracy, the amounts billed shall be deemed accurate." The Department has a Standard Operating Guideline for testing of water meters. Meters are placed on a test bench and a known flow rate of water is flowed through the meter at three rates; slow (3/4 gpm), medium (2 GPM) and high (15 GPM). An overnight test is also conducted. Comparing the known quantity of water against the meter, if readings meet the established threshold, the meter is deemed accurate. Per Section 98-122 Testing, if the meter is within the established accuracy thresholds, the customer is responsible for the cost of the test.

For an adjustment/abatement, the standard that is used by the Public Works Director is that if the water has gone through the meter an adjustment/abatement to the water component is not granted. This is because the City has expended resources on making the water. An adjustment/abatement may be granted to the sewer portion of the bill if the water does not return to the wastewater system. This is because the City has not expended any resources on treating the water.

As the Director, I look at the circumstances of the request. If I can find anything with the reading system, I will make the adjustment. If the customer shows, as the result of the issue, that water did not return to the wastewater system, an adjustment/abatement will be made to the sewer portion of the bill.

The owner of 251 Park Avenue contacted the Department about a high sewer/water bill for the bill received in June 2022. This bill covers the months of March/April/May. The property is a multi-family building. The Water Meter staff was contacted by a representative of the property owner. A walk through of the property was conducted on May 9, 2022. At that walk through, no issues were identified. The Water Meter staff monitored the property for the next three (3) weeks with readings indicating that usage had returned to normal. The property owner representative contacted the Department and requested that the meter be replaced. The meter was removed and replaced on August 24, 2022.

The existing meter was tested per the Department's Standard Operating Guidelines with the following results:

Fast 100 Median 101 Slow 94

Overnight Test – Passed

The existing meter fell within the established parameters and is determined to be accurate.

The property owner of 251 Park Avenue is requesting the City Council adjust their June Sewer/Water Bill to the typical for that period and forgive the meter testing charges.





CITY OF KEENE NEW HAMPSHIRE

Meeting Date: May 24, 2023

To: Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee

From: Judy Rogers

Through: Patricia Little, City Clerk

Subject: Judy Rogers - Downtown Infrastructure and Reconstruction Project - Bike

Infrastructure "Wants vs Needs" and a Potential Model to Handle

Community Events on Central Square

Recommendation:

Attachments:

1. Communication_Rogers

Background:

Ms. Rogers is sharing her thoughts regarding comments made at the special MSFI Committee on the downtown infrastructure and reconstruction project.

Dear Mayor Hansel and Keene City Council Members,

I appreciate all that the City of Keene is doing to inform and receive input from the public on the imminent downtown infrastructure project. I have attended many of the public sessions trying to stay informed on the options and progress of this project and to give input as a stakeholder. After attending the special meeting of the MSFI on Monday evening, and making public comments on a couple of topics, I felt I should reiterate and expand on my points in writing as comments were kept short during the meeting in respect of everyone's time.

I am a life-long resident of Keene. I have taken an active part in every community visioning project undertaken by the City since becoming a Main Street business owner in 1988. Many of us expended a great amount of thought, energy and time to the master planning process completed in 2010. Keene's Comprehensive Master Plan is the brilliant result of all that hard work. We are tasked with using this document as our guide in planning and development. I know you are all well informed on the contents of the master plan but after Monday's meeting I was left wondering if our representatives would be acting in accordance with its directives. We only need to read the Community Vision synopsis on page 18 to see that multimodal infrastructure improvements are one of the key takeaways of the master plan.

Our built environment consists of mixed-use development and appropriate density within the city limits; public gathering spaces that allow for interaction between people; well-designed, safe, and maintained neighborhoods with affordable housing and neighborhood amenities; clean and efficient public transportation that connects us to our community, the region, and beyond; pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure that is present throughout our community and that places import on people rather than automobiles; and a well-developed trail system that provides connections between neighborhoods, open spaces, and other communities while simultaneously supporting a healthy lifestyle.

During the special meeting I heard references to Needs vs Wants. Main Street bicycle infrastructure was put into the Wants category more than a few times, referring to bike usage in a recreational context. For many people bicycles are a primary means of transportation, with infrastructure improvements we will likely see an increase in bike usage. Heck ya, I want more bike traffic downtown! Quieter vehicles, cleaner air, more capacity and easier parking for customers.

There were several great points made during the meeting in favor of bike infrastructure being an economic catalyst for communities and for multimodal planning projects having a leg up for a range of infrastructure grants. I hope those community members who gave shortened public comments on those subjects follow up with more information for the council.

A quick word on Central Square.

As someone who has been involved in holding events in downtown Keene for decades, I would point out that since 9/11, finding ways to keep our community members safe during events is a challenge, with a pretty high price tag for city services to go with it. Walls of jersey barriers and large municipal vehicles are the most common ways we currently handle the safety challenges, but with some forethought in planning I think we could greatly improve on this model. There was mention of a hybrid plan of the Common that had a travel lane and parking to the north, an area that could be easily secured for safe public access to the Common during events. That sounds like a compromise solution that could address a variety of issues.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judy Rogers

Residence - 50 Woodbury St Keene, NH

Owner - Prime Roast Coffee Co. 16 Main St Keene

"Ultimately, it is the responsibility of all stakeholders involved in creating this plan to ensure that future projects and programs are consistent with it." - Keene's Master Plan