



Town of Lee Board of Public Works
MEETING MINUTES of January 22, 2024
Town Hall Courtroom

Members Present: David Forrest, Robert Wright, Jim Ethier, Ashley Shepardson, Patrick Rooney
Others Present: Superintendent Lenny Tisdale, Town Administrator Chris Brittain, Highway Supervisor Zach Sorrentino

Chairman Dave Forrest called the meeting to order at 1:00pm.

Patrick Rooney was welcomed to the Board as the new alternate member.

Jim Ethier made a motion to approve the minutes of November 13, 2023 meeting. It was seconded by Ashley Shepardson and was passed by all members present at the meeting (4-1-0).

Wastewater

Waterworth

Calvin Coles is a representative of Waterworth, a company completing a rate analysis on the wastewater rates for utility bills. His presentation included:

He started with the financial numbers of FY2021 leading up until FY2024, showing that the waste water operating expenses are peaking over 1 million dollars, which will increase with inflation. The current debt service is surpassing the current operating expenses but will be paid off by FY2027. There is a current capital plan that shows projects that need to be completed over the next few years as well as long term capital reinvestment budgets. He stated that it essentially shows that the revenue requirements are not providing financial stability. Currently, the rates do not support the wastewater department's needs and by FY2027, it will be in a negative cash position. He gave examples of increasing rates at 3% and 5% and how that would affect the bottom line of the department. This would be a one-time rate hike of 5%. He included that after the debt service is paid off, the Town may be able to reduce rates up to 40% for FY2028.

Chairman Dave Forrest asked Town Administrator Chris Brittain if the rate isn't reduced by 40%, what would happen to the surplus funds after FY2027. TA Brittain explained that the Town can have retained earnings which are typically put back into capital which can be used to purchase a new wastewater department truck, etc.

Rob Wright brought up the MVP Grant that may be awarded for I&I. It was explained that the Town would apply for the contributing grant, the Town would have to come up with 10% and the grant would fund 90%. Town Administrator Chris Brittain provided the example that if the Town raised \$20,000.00, \$200,000.00 would be received.

The Board discussed the possible 5% rate increase. Chairman Forrest asked when the last time the Town had a rate increase for water/sewer bills. The last rate increase was in 2016, 8 years ago. Admin Assistant Samantha Lovett explained that the 5% would affect the average household \$5-\$10 per quarter.

Chairman Forrest asked the status of the Water Department funds. TA Brittain stated that the Water Department is in a much better position due to low interest loans being paid at staggered times.

The Board agreed that the rate increase should be put in place as soon as possible. Admin Assistant Lovett explained that it might be possible for the April billing cycle, but due to software restrictions, it might not be available until July.

Comparatively, Lee is on the lower end of rates when looking to other towns in Berkshire County. Multiple towns are looking to update or build new wastewater plants which will drive up their rates.

Jim Ethier made the motion to approve a 5% increase on wastewater rates. Rob Wright seconded the motion; it was passed unanimously (5-0).

Highway/Cemetery

Trucks

Chairman Forrest wanted to discuss how the new truck for the Highway Department will be equipped. This truck is pending on approval of appropriation of funds for FY2025. Superintendent Len Tisdale clarified that Highway is requesting \$193,000 for a new sidewalk machine and an additional \$240,000 for a truck with a side wing plow, a sander, and a stainless steel body. Chairman Forrest mentioned that he had spoken with Gary O'Brien who stated that for \$240,000 the Town could get 2 trucks, but including the wing plow requires a truck with central hydraulics. Chairman Forrest said that if the Town got a truck without the wing, but a slide in sander and plow, the Town could get a second truck. He also mentioned that the Highway Department will never be done with equipment, that the current enemy is trucks but next year it could be the loader or the backhoe. Chairman Forrest also said that the Town needs at least one big truck with a wing plow.

Highway Supervisor Zach Sorrentino provided an update on trucks. He said that Truck 8 is doing the same thing that Truck 4 did last year. The exhaust isn't clogged but there is the possibility of a sensor issue due to corrosion in the wiring. Truck 3 had gotten work done last year and the throttle position sensor was replaced and some rewiring was done in which the wiring was overlaid directly to the throttle body. Town Mechanic Patrick Li said that there is a specific harness made to overlay the pedal to the ECM because it is a known problem.

Chairman Forrest asked Supervisor Sorrentino if he is going to move forward with the wing and central hydraulics, he is not opposed. Sorrentino responded that he didn't want to confirm anything at this meeting, but he will talk to the Highway staff to hear their thoughts.

Chairman Forrest asked what the department will do with the remaining \$95,000, but recommended it go towards sandblasting the existing trucks. Supervisor Sorrentino said that the worst trucks should be completed first but that they would also be the most expensive. The last truck that was sandblasted by EastCoast was very expensive due to the body separation on the dome body and the frame. The truck needed to have sections of the body removed by plasma cutter and the steel was removed to stiffen up the body before they even got to the frame.

TA Brittain brought the conversation back to FY25 capital purchases explaining that they need a plan for financing and specific purchases. There was more debate about dump trucks versus pickup trucks, TA Brittain reminded that the department is at their limit at \$240,000.

Chairman Forrest summed up the conversation, listing the option of going with a F600 with a wing, a stainless steel body and central hydraulics. Supervisor Sorrentino commented that a Housatonic Plow is still compatible with the truck as opposed to Fisher Headgear. He also stated that there are hundreds of options.

Chairman Forrest stated that it was a big plus to have Mechanic Patrick Li in the garage as well as Sorrentino.

Sorrentino provided an update on the FY24 new truck's arrival. Due to carrier issues, the body has not arrived as it is held up in Minnesota. The Water truck is hung up by a safety recall, all trucks ordered by other municipalities through MHQ have been held up. Chairman Forrest said that O'Brien has bought his fleet at Sarat.

Chairman Forrest asked if it was worth it for the Town to purchase software for Fords. Mechanic Patrick Li said that the last truck was sent to Marchese Ford after he had exhausted all his repairs because they have an ECM. Forrest asked if TA Brittain could talk to the IT Department about purchasing the software. Li reported that it was approximately \$900 a year. Initial costs could be up to \$8,000. Sorrentino brought up the point that currently, the Town has a mechanic that is Ford certified. If Li should choose to go somewhere else, the software could possibly be useless. There is training available structured similarly to a college credit, but to use it effectively a background from Ford would be beneficial. Sorrentino pointed out that he wouldn't be able to use the software beneficially. Superintendent Tisdale asked how many trucks the Town has sent to another dealership to have this process done. So far this year, only one truck has needed it. The software is also restricted to Ford and if different trucks were purchased, it wouldn't be useable.

Advisory Board

Chairman Forrest discussed creating a smaller advisory board that would include 3 members of the board to increase efficiency during the procurement process. The Board members who volunteered are Chairman Dave Forrest, Clerk Rob Wright, and new member Patrick Rooney. Non-Board members include Gary O'Brien.

Cemetery Stone Clarification

Discussed at the last meeting, the Holt family was looking for clarification of headstone installation and sizes in Fairmount Cemetery. Admin Assistant Lovett cleared up remaining questions. The family wishes to install a raised and slanted stone that would be between 2 and 3 feet wide instead of a flush mount marker. Chairman Forrest asked if any of the existing stones would be removed and also the opinion of Sorrentino. The family has no plans to remove any existing stones. Sorrentino wants to move forward with only flush mount markers. Chairman Forrest made a motion to deny any more raised headstones within this family plot. Patrick Rooney seconded the motion; the vote was passed unanimously (5-0).

Water Department

Chairman Forrest asked about the washout on Becket Road. Tisdale reported that LB would be fixing it because the Town lacks the proper equipment. LB plans to extend the culvert 10 feet and do an angle repose with rock. Forrest asked how riprap would hold if the frost doesn't come out of the ground. Tisdale said that there is water in the culvert that would keep frost on the bottom. Forrest asked about the banks, where the stones could slide off. Tisdale replied that it would just be riprap.

The trench that was opened on Washington Mountain Rd will be repaired by the Highway Department because the contractor on the project would not have the time to fix it.

Billing/Radio Update

Water/Sewer Bills are getting picked up by Zip'n Sort on January 23rd. The number of old radios is down into the 70s. With current staffing, Al Zerbato will be assisting with any radio replacements. The new member of Water Distribution does not come with water experience but is used to being on call and very eager to learn. Tighe & Bond will provide a flushing plan by March and there will be hydrant training offered.

Water Tie in 60 Columbia St

Admin Assistant Lovett reported that Superintendent Tisdale had heard from Tighe & Bond and there was no stop on that line. Chairman Forrest said that is as far as the Town will go, we can coordinate with the owner to tap in and the rest would be the responsibility of the homeowner.

Rob Wright asked about a possible leak at the Columbia Mill. Tisdale reported that he went up there with Peter Sorrentino and confirmed that the water has been shut off.

Patrick Rooney raised some questions about the board structure and it was explained that currently, it is a seven member board and four members are needed to make a quorum. But with new legislation, the Board would be brought down to five members. Rooney is an alternate member at this juncture as the sixth member of the Board. Jim Ethier commented that since he has been on the Board, Bob Bartini has only attended one meeting. He asked at what point is Bartini no longer a member. It has been brought up to the Lee Selectboard asking one of the selectmen to approach Bartini about his position. The Board of Public Works agrees that it is unfair to new members of the Board. They are also willing to continue to pass him information for his insight. His tenure on the board exceeds 30 years and is greatly appreciated.

Jim Ethier made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:18pm, Ashley Shepardson seconded, it was passed unanimously (5-0)

Respectfully submitted,

Samantha Lovett