

Approved Minutes – October 13, 2020  
Utilities Commission Meeting

- I. Call to Order – Chairman Kent Carson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Activities Room of the George L. Gordon, Jr. Government Center, 1300 Courthouse Road, Stafford, VA
- II. Roll Call – Mr. Moses Bouldin, Sr. and Ms. Nancy Sullivan were absent, all other members present
- III. Approval of Meeting Minutes – Mr. Tignor motioned, seconded by Ms. Kwiatkowski, to approve the July 14, 2020 meeting minutes as presented. The motion passed by a vote of 5 – 0.
- IV. Presentations by the Public – there were no members of the public present at the meeting.
- V. Reports by Commission Members – Mr. Tignor spoke about a vendor who contacted him regarding the use of solar power to operate wastewater treatment plants. Mr. Chris Edwards, Deputy Director of Public Works, Field Operations, replied that the wastewater treatments plants have a too small footprint and it would not be viable. However, Mr. Edwards and staff are meeting with the vendor to view a one-hour presentation. Mr. Carson mentioned that he, too, was contacted by the same vendor.

Mr. Tignor said he read an article in the Free Lance-Star regarding COVID-19 testing being done at Stafford's wastewater treatment plants. Mr. Towery said that the County was working with a company called BioBot, out of Boston, Massachusetts. They test samples for genetic fragments of COVID-19 in wastewater. Wastewater epidemiology can also check for other viruses. Mr. Tignor asked why there was a higher concentration of COVID-19 being discovered at Aquia vs. Little Falls Run and where were the samples coming from (what area of the County). Mr. Towery said that they were not at that level of granularity yet but more residents in the northern portion of the County tended to commute, including Marine Corps Base Quantico, which could account for the difference in the numbers.

Ms. Kwiatkowski asked how the County got involved in the study. Mr. Towery said it came about in March/April and the County being concerned for its employees so they began doing research. As a result, Stafford was asked to participate in a larger study and is two of 100 plats participating including Loudoun, Fairfax, Alexandria, and others. Smart City, partnering with CIT is tracking the trends and monitoring for potential outbreaks. Stafford is signed up to participate through the end of the year. Mr. Tignor wondered if Aquia's higher numbers were impacted by its proximity to Stafford Hospital.

- VI. Director's Report – Mr. Towery provided an overview of agenda materials on the Board's 10/20/2020 meeting agenda including contracts for on-call water and sewer maintenance, repairs, and construction; a contract for transport and disposal of bio-solids from Little Falls Run; a contract for water and wastewater treatment chemicals and authorization to advertise a public hearing to consider a deed of water tower lease with Cellco Partnership (on the Stone River tank). A public hearing was initially scheduled regarding vacating of easements originally acquired for the now defunct Truslow Road Neighborhood Sewer Project. However, the County Attorney's Office advised that the public hearing advertisement did not include specifics needed to be considered a legal advertisement. The public hearing has been rescheduled for 11/17/2020 and will be readvertised with the appropriate text in the FL-S on Tuesday, 11/10/2020.

Mr. Towery then reviewed Customer Service numbers including the increased number of walk-in visitors to the office since its relocation to the Government Center and the increased numbers of e-mails and live chats. Currently, there are only two requests for delayed payments due to COVID-19 and even though the State has ended its "compassionate payment policy," the County continues to work with its residents who are experiencing difficulties due to the pandemic. He said it was not having a huge impact on the County and staff would continue to track it. Delinquencies have not risen much due to COVID-19; the County is working with the United Way and CARES ACT funding to provide financial relief. Deidre Jett, Finance and Budget Manager, said that Stafford was in better shape than some localities and most residents are paying current bills. Mr. Towery said he proposed a new position (either full or part-time) to work exclusively on delinquencies but with the onset of the pandemic, the Board of Supervisors chose to restrict hiring. Mr. Towery continues to work with the Treasurer's Office to see if they may be able to provide any assistance in recouping delinquencies.

- A. Utilities Fund FY2020 Year-End Review and 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Report – Ms. Jett reported that overall operating revenues were 99% of budget estimates or \$521k under FY2020 budget projections. Water and sewer fees were \$1.6 Million below budget but interest revenues exceeded budget by \$1.1 Million. On a year-to-year basis, operating revenues increased 5.3% based on a 1.5% rate increase, growth in the system, and strong fourth quarter water and sewer revenues. She noted that a robust housing market and cautious spending were responsible for the positive numbers. Mr. Tignor asked about rental fees on cell towers. Mr. Towery said it was \$2400-\$2500/month and seven towers currently had leases on them. Ms. Kwiatkowski said that seemed too low; Ms. Jett replied that last year the Department took in \$60k in tower rentals. Ms. Kwiatkowski asked about encumbrances. Ms. Jett said there was \$14 Million, which would be carried over to the next fiscal year and put to good use. Operating expenditures were 89% of budget, due to debt service savings as revenue bonds were not issued in FY2020.

Regarding the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of FY2021, Ms. Jett said that operating revenues and expenditures were on target with budget estimates; that robust capital spending was anticipated as the County completes its ongoing projects and focuses on 3R (repair, replace, rehabilitate) needs.

- B. Future Rate Increases/Connection Fees – Ms. Jett said that in March 2020, the Utilities Commission recommended a 1.5% user fee increase to water/sewer rates. This recommendation was presented to the Board as part of the FY2021 budget process. Due to COVID-19, the Board decided against any rate increase in FY2020. Ms. Kwiatkowski asked if staff was considering doubling up on its next request that the Board raise user fee rates. Ms. Jett said staff would be working with the County’s rate consultant before deciding on a percentage of increase. Mr. Towery said that due to the lack of hiring in FY2021, staff would be making a larger hiring request in the FY2022 budget. Ms. Kwiatkowski asked about retirements and retirement payouts. Mr. Towery said that the Department was managing that pretty well and spoke about the classification and compensation study and Operations having trouble keeping personnel.

Regarding connection fees, Ms. Jett said that applicants’ request for connection to County water and sewer amounted to fees of \$1,450 (water) and \$2,100 (sewer), which is less than the actual cost for the connection. Staff is working on a proposed adjustment to those fees so they match more closely the actual connection cost.

- C. Updates on Capital Construction Projects – Deputy Director, Mr. Bryon Counsell, introduced Mr. Gary McCollum who was hired when Mr. Dale Allen retired. He said that Mr. McCollum had a great grasp on how water and sewer systems work and came to the County with 40+ years’ experience as a consultant. Mr. McCollum gave a Power Point presentation and updated members on capital projects in the County including the Claiborne Run Parallel Force Main, Phase 1A, which has been delayed due to the contractor filing for bankruptcy and having to go after surety bonds to complete the project. The piping is complete, site restoration is underway with work anticipated to resume later in October with completion in December 2020. The Claiborne Run Parallel Fore Main, Phase 1B, is an extension of Phase 1A. It will be going to bid in December or January with a prospective completion date in spring, 2022. The design alignment is almost complete; discussion continues with VDOT regarding the final alignment along Route 3 as well as discussion with private property owners along Route 3 and in George Washington Square.

The next project discussed by Mr. McCollum was the Falls Run Force Main (3<sup>rd</sup> segment), which will permit flow to connect with the Claiborne Run, Phase 1B, and eliminate the need for the Claiborne Run Pump Station. There are challenges working with the National Park Service but staff is working on creative ways to save the County a significant amount of money on this project.

Mr. Carson acknowledged the difficulty in working with (or around) the National Park Service.

Mr. McCollum detailed the Falls Run Gravity Interceptor Sewer Phase 2 saying that construction would begin in FY2022, surveying and geotechnical was underway and right-of-way/easement acquisition identification has begun on an anticipated 10 acquisitions. An existing DEQ consent order on Claiborne Run will be released when this project is complete. Design completion is scheduled for spring 2021 and is at 50% completion currently.

Steady progress is being made on the Lower Accokeek Gravity Force Main and Pump Station project. Construction of the access road for the pump station is complete and preparations are underway for a bore under Route 1 near the Regional Jail and Courthouse Road. This project when complete will allow for connections to one pump station, down from the four pump stations in use at present. Mr. McCollum noted that residents along Jumping Brand Road are particularly interested and anxious to be connect to County water and sewer.

Facility and Regulatory Upgrades to the Little Falls Run Wastewater Treatment Plant in the preliminary engineering stage. Preliminary designs will be reviewed in mid-October, with bids considered in fall 2021 and anticipated completion after a one to two-year construction period. This project will provide significant plant upgrades, 3R work and permit adaptation to new regulatory regulation due to the Plant's proximity to the Rappahannock River. DEQ will provide \$3.1 Million in funds toward the cost of these upgrades.

Construction is 80-90% complete on the 342 Pressure Zone Upgrades (342-05) project. This is part of a multi-phased project that will continue the extension of roughly 6,500 linear feet of transmission pipeline from Old Forge Drive to Truslow Road as part of the overall distribution and storage system from the Lake Mooney Water Treatment Plant. The 42" bore under Route 17 is complete; pipe crews are currently working along Beagle Road; and staff continues to work with residents in the immediate area.

The 342 Pressure Zone Upgrades (342-06) project continues the extension of approximately 8,500 linear feet of transmission pipeline to the elevated Enon Road Storage Tank as part of the overall distribution and storage system from the Lake Mooney Water Treatment Plant. Design of this project is 15% complete, alignment is complete, a 42" bore under I-95 is a VDOT/JV betterment as part of the I-95 FredExpress extension project and its completion is being coordinated with the Enon Road Elevated Storage Tank (the Abel Lake ground level tank). Mr. McCollum stated that there may be environmental concerns that could delay this project.

Design and construction of the new 2MG elevated water storage tank, the 342 Pressure Zone Upgrades – Enon Road Elevated Water Storage Tank project is scheduled for late 2022; the design is 95% complete and the site plan is in review by the County's Planning and Zoning Department; the permit application has been submitted to the Virginia Department of Health and project completion is scheduled to coincide with the 342-06 project. Mr. Cox noted that there are corn fields in that area so property acquisition should not be an issue. Mr. McCollum said that people seemed to be very protective of their land; this tank will be right across the street from Hartwood District Supervisor, Gary Snellings' house.

- D. 3R Projects/Facilities Progress Report – Mr. Edwards gave a Power Point presentation on 3R projects in the County. He introduced Mr. Nate Huber, formerly with Capital Construction, now working in Field Operations and on 3R projects. Mr. Edwards said that 3R projects were intended to fix aging portions of the system, all aspects of water and sewer including pump station rehabilitation, water and sewer lines, and Plant condition upgrades. He said that some of the County's infrastructure was from the 1940's and still in use although at the end of its useful life and in need of repair or replacement.

The Chatham Water Line Replacement project initially started to replace a 1500' section of 1950's cast iron water line running from Chatham Heights Road to the Chatham Manor, intended to improve fire flow for the Chatham sprinkler system. The project has evolved into a 4000' replacement and a new water line that will remove dead-end water lines at Chatham and the YMCA and create a loop through Pratt Park. Due the historical significance of the area, a cultural resource specialist must be on site, which is slowing down progress and will take the remainder of the year to complete.

Eventually, in four to five years, the County will replace 3.5 miles of water line servicing several hundred customers in the Ferry Farm area of the County. Mr. Towery said there had been a lot of complaints about water quality due in part to the size of the existing lines that will be replaced. He said that Ferry Farm was an excellent example to a neighborhood project. Mr. Tignor said that Grafton Village was not far behind in needing these upgrades.

In talking about Sewer Line Rehabilitation, Mr. Edwards said that approximately 3 miles of lining has been completed since spring 2020, with the majority of the work being done in Ferry Farm. Sections of Aquia Harbour will be rehabbed in the remainder of FY2021 with sections of Argyle Heights and additional areas of Aquia Harbour will be complete in FY2022. The lining is done using new technology, Electrosan, to determine exact lines that need to be lined. It is hoped that 5 miles of lining will be completed each year.

Manhole coating and rehabilitation started in Boscobel, in the White Oak area of the County off Brooke Road. It will help to preserve the concrete and stop leaks into the sewer system. Approximately 300 manholes are scheduled to be rehabbed in the next two-year period.

Mr. Edwards talked about repairs to the Claiborne Run Pump Station and the Aquia Creek Pump Station as well as replacement of the Hypochlorite Tank at the Smith Lake Water Treatment Plant and concrete upgrades to the Aquia and Little Falls Run Wastewater Treatment Plants. He concluded his presentation talking about system evaluations to help evaluate and build a long-term 3R program including water criticality analysis and tank evaluation. Mr. Cox asked about baseline flow rates and new installations. Mr. Edwards spoke about flow tests on the new lines, fire flow tests and water models vs. in the field and sewer pump draw-downs done yearly.

Ms. Kwiatkowski asked about the cost for the 3 to 5-year plan. Mr. Edwards said \$5 Million was an approximate amount but the larger transmission projects could far exceed that amount. Ms. Kwiatkowski asked about set asides for 3R projects. Ms. Jett replied that the County would be spending three years of set-asides. Mr. Edwards said staff was trying to get ahead of the curve and anticipate future needs with long-term goals 7 to 8 years out. Ms. Jett said that all this would be taken into consideration before requesting a rate increase. Ms. Kwiatkowski said that the public needs to be aware of the needs and the funds it will take to make the undertake the much needed 3R projects.

Mr. Carson thanked staff for the excellent presentations.

- VII. Unfinished Business – there was no unfinished business to be discussed.
- VIII. New Business – Vendor Contact re. Improvements to Sewage Treatment Plants – this item, solar use at wastewater treatment plants, was discussed under Report of Commission members. Ms. Kwiatkowski inquired as to the location of the new Lidl grocery store. Mr. Towery said he would find out and let her know. The new Publix at Embrey Mill was well underway.
- IX. Adjournment – Mr. Carson adjourned the meeting at 8:20 p.m. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, November 10, 2020, location to be determined.