

UTILITIES COMMISSION MEETING
April 24, 2023

A regular meeting of the City of Jackson Utilities Commission was held in the Council Chambers of City Hall at 4 p.m. on Monday, April 24, 2023 with the following persons present: Utilities Commission Vice-Chairman Mike Schwartz and Commission members Dennis Hunwardsen, Jenna Schwartz, Sara Mix and Sandy Phillips. Also attending were City Administrator Matt Skaret, City Finance Officer Deb Mitchell, Water/Wastewater Superintendent Tony Oxborough, MRES Jackson Distribution Maintenance Foreman Tony Nitchals and Recording Secretary Dave Maschoff. (Utilities Commission members, Chairman Kevin Siepker and Joe Marthaler were absent.) (A quorum of the Utilities Commission was present.)

OPEN THE MEETING

In the absence of Chairman Kevin Siepker, Vice-Chairman Mike Schwartz called the regular meeting of the Utilities Commission to order. Schwartz noted a quorum of the Utilities Commission was present.

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

Electric Department

MRES Jackson Distribution Maintenance Foreman Tony Nitchals reported the Electric Department personnel have been working on Emily Street in preparation for the street work scheduled to take place this year. He said they have also been busy with work associated with the Downtown Alley Project.

Nitchals reported a couple of aluminum street light poles have been set on White Street with more aluminum poles scheduled to be installed on that street.

Water Department

Water/Wastewater Superintendent Tony Oxborough reported pre-discharge samples have been taken twice from the City's Lagoon ponds in preparation for dumping the ponds. He said prior to the discharging, the Water Department will have a company come in and use a sonar boat to register how much of a sludge layer there is in the secondary lagoon pond. Oxborough said he anticipates there's quite a bit of sludge in the secondary pond, but they will find out after the sonar boat is used to measure the sludge layer.

Oxborough said the Water Plant's Media Filter Rehabilitation Project pre-bid meeting will be held on April 25th. He said contractors will attend to find out or clarify information prior to bidding on the project.

Oxborough said work will begin on a project at the City's lagoon ponds when things start to dry up. He said they're going to take care of some of the rip-rap around the edges of the ponds.

Oxborough reported the Water Department staff will be starting on a new schedule because his duties will change as part of upcoming City staff changes.

Skaret noted the City Council created a new position of Public Works Director to oversee both the Street and Water/Wastewater Departments. He said the City advertised for applicants and conducted several interviews. Skaret said Oxborough will be the City's new Public Works Director starting on May 1st.

Utilities Commission members congratulated Oxborough.

Oxborough thanked Commission members.

Skaret explained with the creation of the position of Public Works Director, the City is eliminating the position of Water/Wastewater Superintendent and eliminating the position of Street Superintendent. Skaret said former Street Superintendent Phil Markman will be moving to a position known as a Senior Equipment Operator. He said Jared Spaeth who was the Assistant Street Superintendent will also be moving into a Senior Equipment Operator position.

Skaret said to start with, Oxborough will be the immediate supervisor for both the Water/Wastewater and Street Departments plus he will also be overseeing the Parks Department as well. He said the City has a Parks Coordinator, Neal Carlson. Skaret said Carlson will be the immediate supervisor of the seasonal park employees. He said the seasonal staff has been hired for the Street and Parks Departments so things are ready to roll for the summer season.

Skaret said the City is currently going through the transition with the positions and so far, everything has been going smoothly.

Oxborough said he's excited, but he's also realistic, on the amount of work moving ahead. He said he's been asking people a lot of questions. He said he's excited.

BACKFLOW PREVENTION PROPOSAL INFORMATION

Oxborough explained Backflow Prevention is basically making sure the City's water can't be contaminated. He said it's a double-check for a back-siphoning piece of equipment. He explained, for example, if there was a water main break outside and a hose was in your sink full of water, the backflow prevention device would prevent a vacuum from being created and water being sucked back into the City's water system. Oxborough noted that's obviously an extreme scenario. He pointed out a real-life example of a car wash in another community where the pump for the soap overpowered the water system. Oxborough said when the water was turned on in the spring at the City's parks, nothing but soap came out of the facets. He said backflow prevention basically stops something like that occurring. Oxborough said it isolates either the business or the house from allowing their system to over-pressurize and pump back in or creating a vacuum outside if there's a water main break and allowing water to siphon back into the water system.

Oxborough said the Backflow Prevention is a regulated program through the State of Minnesota's Plumbing Code. He said it was updated in 2016 and went through the City's Utilities Commission and City Council who approved to pay an outside company to inspect 30 businesses in Jackson. Oxborough said the company that was going to do the inspections never showed up.

Oxborough said what he wants to do is bring the Backflow Prevention Project back up again. He said Schwickert's reached out last week to the City of Jackson. Oxborough said he thought Schwickert's would be a good company to use for the Backflow Prevention Program. He noted the City currently uses Schwickert's for their backflow inspections at City Hall, the Splashpad and the Water Plant. Oxborough explained water is used to cool the generators at the Water Plant for backup emergency power. He pointed out the water used to cool the generators can't go back into the City's water system. Oxborough said the City has businesses that need to be inspected and Schwickert's is a company that could come in and take care of those inspections. He said Schwickert's would conduct the inspections free of charge. Oxborough said it would be up to the City to send out literature to the businesses informing them that Schwickert's will be reaching out to them to conduct inspections at no cost. He said if the business wants to move forward with Schwickert's and agrees that they need backflow prevention or need to be inspected, then that would be an option for them.

Skaret said the reason Schwickert's would do the backflow inspections for free is because of the potential of future work for them from businesses who need backflow protection.

Oxborough said having Schwickert's available to do the inspections would provide the opportunity for businesses to become compliant or become informed on what they should be doing regarding backflow prevention. He said all the documentation from the inspections would be provided to the City's Water Department.

Oxborough said he was looking for approval from the Utilities Commission to move forward with Schwickert's and compile a list of 30 businesses that the City is going to help promote get inspected and then move forward to be compliant.

Skaret asked what types of businesses would be inspected for backflow prevention.

Oxborough said those businesses would include restaurants, car washes and dentist's offices.

Jenna Schwartz asked if the hospital and nursing home would also be included in the inspections.

Oxborough said the hospital and nursing home are both up to date compliant. He said the City probably has 30 current inspections around town. He noted locations include the gas company south of town, the City has three locations, car washes and restaurants would be the businesses that would need to be inspected.

Phillips asked to be compliant, does a business have to be inspected, or to be compliant do they need to have backflow prevention.

Oxborough said it's dual purpose. He said there would be an inspection to see if the business even needs backflow prevention and if they do need backflow prevention or have a current system, Schwickert's would come back once a year to inspect it.

Mix said she thinks it's good to be proactive. She said she thinks the Backflow Inspection Program is a good idea.

Oxborough said Schwickert's is enthusiastic about doing the backflow inspection program in Jackson. He noted there would be no cost to the businesses or to the City for Schwickert's to conduct the inspections.

JENNA SCHWARTZ/SANDY PHILLIPS moved and it was unanimously carried for the City of Jackson and Schwickert's to move forward with a Backflow Prevention Program.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, Vice-Chairman Mike Schwartz asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

SANDY PHILLIPS/JENNA SCHWARTZ moved and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the Utilities Commission meeting at 4:19 p.m.

Mike Schwartz thanked everyone for attending.

Considering the next regular Utilities Commission meeting date would fall on Memorial Day, May 29th, it was the consensus of Commission members to hold their May meeting on Monday, May 22nd if there were items for an agenda.

David A. Maschoff, Recording Secretary

