

**UTILITIES COMMISSION MINUTES**  
**August 26, 2019**

A regular meeting of the City of Jackson Utilities Commission was held in the Council Chambers of City Hall at 4:00 p.m. on August 26, 2019 with the following persons present: Utilities Commission Chairperson Gayl Berkner, Vice-Chairperson Kevin Siepker, Matt Madden, Mike Schwartz and Mike Thurmer. Also in attendance were City Administrator Matt Skaret, MRES Jackson Distribution Maintenance Foreman Jeremy Boogerd, Water/Wastewater Superintendent Tony Oxborough, Street Superintendent Phil Markman, City Finance Officer Deb Mitchell and Recording Secretary Dave Maschoff. (Utilities Commission member Joe Marthaler was absent.) (A quorum of the Utilities Commission was present.)

**CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER**

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Chairperson Gayl Berkner called the Utilities Commission to order and noted there was a quorum present.

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE JULY 29, 2019 MEETING**

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Consideration was given to the minutes from the July 29, 2019 Utilities Commission meeting. Hearing no additions or corrections, Chairperson Berkner declared the minutes approved as mailed.

**DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS**

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**Electric Department**

MRES Jackson Electric Distribution Maintenance Foreman Jeremy Boogerd reported Castrejon is a little over half way completed with the pipe installation and not quite half-way with the wire installation for the underground electric conversion project. Boogerd said the Electric Department is terminating right behind Castrejon and are almost caught all the way up to them.

Boogerd said he would anticipate that in a couple of days the Electric Department will be ready to start cutting people's electric service over to the underground electric system.

Regarding South Highway, Boogerd said the Electric Department is done with their work electrically except for the street lights. He said they can't put in the street lights until the curb is installed. Boogerd noted that's going to be quite a while. He said they have completed all of their underground electric conversions along South Highway. Boogerd said the Electric Department has all their crossings deep enough and in pipe now along South Highway as well.

Other than that, Boogerd said the Electric Department has been busy with maintenance, street lights and utility locates. He said the projects keep the Electric Department busy. Boogerd said there have been a few services to trench in and about ten new utility poles to set. He said the underground electric project is completed going up North Highway and now they will start going south from North Highway through backyards. Boogerd said hopefully in six weeks all the pipe will be in the ground and the Electric Department will be able to pull the wire through.

Berkner commented it looks so amazing when there's not a bunch of electrical wires hanging from poles. She said it looks so great.

Thurmer said he had spoken with former Jackson Mayor Dr. Dave Fell who commented how nice it looks to have all the City's electric wires underground.

Berkner also noted Dr. Fell called her following one of the storms and said "thank-you" for the underground electric service.

## **Water Department**

Water/Wastewater Superintendent Tony Oxborough reported the water ground storage project is moving forward. He said the footings are scheduled to be installed on Thursday, August 29th. Oxborough said after that, the contractor's job is just to fill the middle of the footings up with sand and then from there the tank supplier will build the tank itself. He noted the floor for the tank is being built and is expected to be arriving right on schedule to be installed.

At the lagoon ponds, Oxborough said the rocks around the lagoons are being sprayed for weeds.

Oxborough said there is no water main work currently being done on the South Highway Project. He said water main work will be occurring during one of the next stretches of construction on that project. Oxborough said the Water Department will then need to go and flush everyone's houses along South Highway because otherwise they will get dirty water as soon as air gets into the water line. He said the water meter will need to be removed and flushed hard.

Regarding Lift Stations, Oxborough said there are a couple projects the Water Department wants to do. He noted he was going to be gone next week so they are holding off on anything major until he gets back to work.

Otherwise, Oxborough said the Water Department has just been keeping up with projects.

## **Street Department**

Street Superintendent Phil Markman said the Street Department is still patching streets when then can. He explained this year has been different because the asphalt plant in Worthington is only open on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday which kind of hinders things. Markman said there are a few more bad areas of streets that the Street Department is going to take care of yet in the Strube and Homedale Additions along with a stretch on Sherman Street up on the hill by the vocational school.

Markman said at the end of this week, the Street Department will begin painting crosswalks in Jackson starting with North Highway before school starts. He said the painting depends on the weather.

Markman said the Street Department has been busy keeping up with locating utilities for the South Highway Project and the Electric Department's underground electric project. He said the locating has been going quite well. Markman noted there have been a couple minor utility strikes, but they have been repaired.

Markman said three out of the four seasonal park employees have returned to college. He said the one person remaining will be on board until the funding for that seasonal position runs out.

Regarding the Memorial Park Project, Markman said the contractor is waiting for pavers to arrive to work on the trail.

Markman said the Street Department has been busy.

## **ELECTRIC SOCKET REMOVALS – HOUSE SIDING PROJECTS**

Boogerd said the Electric Department is looking for some ideas. He explained currently when someone is residing their house; they call and ask the Electric Department to take the electric socket off the house. Boogerd said they have always done that in the past but there was one week where they were slammed with six or seven requests to remove sockets.

Boogerd said he talked with some other communities regarding electric socket removals for house siding projects. He said some communities charge \$30 to remove the sockets and some don't charge. Boogerd explained it's really not the City's property. He said it's owned by the customer so who's liable if the Electric Department takes the electric socket off and there is damage or something occurs. Boogerd said the Electric Department is looking for some clarification of what we want to do as a City as far as going forward regarding when there is a request to remove an electric socket for a house siding project.

Berkner asked what size community charges \$30 to remove an electric socket for a house siding project.

Boogerd said Estherville charges \$30. He said the City of Olivia does not charge.

Boogerd explained right now the problem is that the Electric Department goes and removes the electric socket for a siding project and then two weeks later, when the siding project is completed; the contractor calls and wants the electric socket put back into place.

Boogerd said he would like to see it where the Electric Department will come and remove the electric socket and within a half hour the siding contractor will need to have the siding piece behind the electric socket ready and the Electric Department will put the socket back in place and be done instead of having to return in three weeks. He said it would clean up the work order and be done with. Boogerd said when someone calls City Hall to request removing an electric socket for a siding project, the people working in the office can inform the caller that the Electric Department will do that and here's the rules. He said whether the City wants to charge or not is up to the Utilities Commission.

Boogerd said when the contractor has completed the siding project they will call City Hall and ask for the Electric Department to come right away and put the electric socket back onto the house. He said sometimes when those calls come in the Electric Department cannot come up to the house right away because they are in the middle of another project.

Madden suggested a policy where the Electric Department would remove an electric socket if the contractor called ahead of time. He said the policy could be if the contractor finished what needed to be done behind the socket and the meter socket could be put in place at the same time, there would be no charge. However, Madden said there would be a \$30 charge if the Electric Department had to return in a couple of days to remount the electric socket.

Mitchell said some residents don't need to have the electric sockets moved when they side a house because their electric meters are on a pole. She said such situations don't usually occur in multiples.

Boogerd said it just happened to be one week when there were six or seven requests and the Electric Department was running around trying to accommodate everyone.

Mitchell noted sometimes it can easily be a month without anyone calling to request moving an electric socket. She said now is a busy time of the year as people are rushing to complete their projects.

Boogerd said removing or remounting an electric socket only takes five or ten minutes, but it poses a difficulty when the contractor calls and says they need to have it done right now for them to continue. He said it would be better if there was coordination so when the Electric Department came to remove the electric socket, the contractor would be ready to put the new piece behind the socket and the socket could then be immediately remounted during the same visit.

Madden said it would be good to have a policy instead of dealing with each situation on a case by case basis. He noted some contractors can get pushy.

Boogerd said if the Electric Department shows up and the contractor is not ready to finish the area behind the meter, the Electric Department is not going to take the electric socket off. He said he thinks that would be a fair thing. Boogerd said he doesn't know if it necessarily has to be a policy, but a general rule that's adopted. He said if he comes upon the next situation where the contractor is not ready and the Electric Department refuses to take the electric socket off and the contractor says they're going to the Utilities Commission to complain, there will be a rule that's been adopted.

Madden noted if the City started charging a fee when the contractor is not ready, it would probably require a written policy to be approved.

Skaret said it would require having a fee included in the City's fee schedule if the City was going to charge.

Boogerd said he thinks a fee of \$25 or \$30 is fine. He said the only thing he doesn't want to happen is a contractor trying to save \$25 and remount the electric socket themselves and causing more problems. Boogerd said if the Electric Department can remove and remount all in one trip there will be no charge. But he said if the Electric Department has to come back a second time to remount the electric socket there will be a \$30 charge.

Mitchell asked Boogerd if he currently always has to come back a second time.

Boogerd said he does and that's what he's trying to eliminate.

Siepkner asked when contractors usually call to remove the electric box.

Boogerd said usually on the morning the contractor is doing the work. He said sometimes the contractor will have three sides of the house ripped off and then gets around the corner and discovers there's an electric box that has to be moved and wants it done right away.

Berkner said if the contractor is provided the information upfront regarding the removing and remounting of electric boxes then it shouldn't be a problem especially if they're going to save \$30.

Madden asked if there was some way the information pertaining to the removal and remounting of electric meter sockets could be stated in the building permit.

Skaret said the way to do that would just be to update the City's fee ordinance.

Mitchell noted Madden's comment about including the information on the building permit for a siding project.

Boogerd said if there's an electric box that has to be removed for a siding project, the Electric Department will remove and remount it at no charge as long as the contractor has the new piece of siding that will go behind the electric box ready to go so it can be reattached during the same visit. He said if it's not ready to go and the Electric Department has to return at another time, there will be a \$30 assessment.

Maschoff suggested having an informational sheet to go along with the building permit for a siding job that would list what the property owner or contractor needs to know regarding removing and remounting electric boxes.

Berkner said that sounds great.

**SIPEKER/THURMER moved and it was unanimously carried to include an informational sheet with building permits for siding projects that explains if there's an electric socket box that has to be removed for a siding project, the Electric Department will remove it and remount it at no charge as long as the contractor has the new piece of siding that will go behind the electric box ready to go so the electric socket can then be reattached during the same visit. However, if it's not ready to go and the Electric Department has to return a second time to remount the electric socket, there will be an assessment of \$30.**

## **METERS OUTSIDE HOMES**

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Boogerd said he knows of six houses in Jackson where the electric meter is located inside the house.

Boogerd said when the City starts to change meters for the AMI System he would think that the City would want to get those meters located on the outside of the house. He said he wanted to talk about the situation a year in advance.

Boogerd asked how the City wants to enforce getting those electric meters outside the house. He asked does the City want to mandate it or give those people time or not do anything about it.

Skaret said he talked with MMUA to see if there are any State laws or rules governing those situations or what other cities have done. He said the person he spoke with had worked with the City of Marshall. Skaret said the City of Marshall had some similar issues, not when they were converting to AMI, but when they were converting overhead electric wires to underground. Skaret said the City of Marshall ran into that type of situation a lot. He said the City of Marshall made residents move the electric meters to the outside and it was at the City's expense.

Schwartz asked if the City owned the meters.

Boogerd said the City owns the meter itself, but not the stack, socket or the wire.

Schwartz said if the City is upgrading the system, why should the City put the burden on the homeowners.

Schwartz said over the last two weeks, he's heard nothing but negative things about the AMI. He said people just don't like it.

Mitchell said City Hall has received all positive comments about AMI.

Schwartz said he's heard all kinds of negative things. He said he hears comments like "there's big brother watching you again". Schwartz said comments he's heard is that people don't think the AMI is going to work out very well and the City is going to run into a lot of problems.

Boogerd asked what those people think the problems will be.

Schwartz said the negative comments include that the internet will be down and there could be wrong meters and people won't be able to defend themselves if there's an issue because it's all geared towards being computer driven and everything else. He said people are concerned they can't argue and can't show the meter.



Madden said it's actually quite the opposite. He explained if someone has a problem regarding their amount of usage, they can be shown their usage in real time and match the data to that meter.

Schwartz said it's just kind of like the water meters the City currently has where people are asked to read the meter. Schwartz said people in general just have a tough time with the City of Jackson on anything they do.

Boogerd said he hasn't had one person come to him with a negative comment about the AMI system.

Madden said he also hasn't heard any negative comments. He noted the AMI system can detect a water leak right away within a day for a resident. Madden said there is nothing bad that can be said about that. He said he would think that would make up for any negative thoughts a person may have to begin with.

Boogerd pointed out an instance where a customer left their hot tub on for four weeks which caused very high electric usage. He said with the AMI system, after four days it would have been probably noticed and would have been red flagged and checked out.

Madden said in that case you could show the customer when the usage occurred and what happened.

Oxborough said the AMI should catch issues before they become issues. He said there shouldn't be any dispute on the amount of water used because the next day it can be determined there's a leak in the house and it needs to be found. Oxborough said if a plumber shuts the water off, the Water Department will get a phone call that something is happening to the water system in that residence. He said the AMI should be a preventative system.

As far as the electric meter, Boogerd said the meter has no idea what the person is using the electricity for whether it's for a hot tub, a hair dryer, lightbulb or stove. He said the meter just knows you're using electricity. Boogerd said the meter has no idea what you're using; it just knows you're using electricity.

Madden asked Skaret if MMUA had any other examples of how cities handled instances where the electric meters had to be moved from the inside of a house to the outside.

Skaret said the person he spoke with at MMUA was going to do some more checking and get back to him.

Madden asked what is the City allowed to mandate or do regarding changes.

Boogerd explained the indoor electric meters they have found include a couple instances where someone added an attached garage to the house. He said in another case, a person added a porch addition on the back of the house. Boogerd said in another case a storage addition was built onto the front of the house. He said at one time the property either had to get a building permit which got signed off on or the additions were added without a building permit. Boogerd said he doesn't know how you would ever go back and prove when someone did the addition or whether they did or did not have a building permit.

Madden asked Boogerd how many indoor electric meters he thinks there are in Jackson.

Boogerd said he can think of five off the top of his head and he'd be shocked if there's more than eight. Boogerd said he feels he's found most of them. He said he knows of three meters that are located in garages which would not be that intensive to move to the outside. Boogerd said he knows of another instance where the electric meter is in a closet two rooms deep into the house.

Madden said if the City wants to have the electric meters moved to the outside to the house, he thinks the City is almost going to have to pay for it. He asked how do you make a resident spend money just because the City wants the meter moved even through it would be better and safer. Madden pointed out even if the City wants to make those residents pay for the change, in flat out reality, some people can't afford to have the electric meter moved because it will probably cost \$800.

Boogerd said right now with the underground electric project, the Electric Department is burying resident's electric services and they are not charged anything. He said residents are asked to hire an electrician to hook up the bottom side of the meter because the Electric Department can't legally do that. He said the cost to the resident is a couple hundred dollars. Boogerd noted moving an electric meter is going to cost more. He said in some cases the cost could be over a \$1,000.

Boogerd said also depending on what is found with older wiring, there could be further costs in moving a meter. He said if the City decided to pay for moving the electric meter, there may have to be stipulations set on what the City will pay for if other issues are found.

Berkner asked Skaret if he wanted to wait on any action by the Utilities Commission on this issue until he receives more information.

Skaret said the issue is not something the Utilities Commission has to decide right now but it's really just looking ahead as the City gets going on the AMI project.

Madden asked Boogerd if it would be possible at some point to get a rough estimate from an electrician on what moving an electric meter to the outside of a house would cost.

Boogerd said he could get an estimate and additional information from an electrician regarding moving an electric meter. He said he would also try to get an accurate list of the meters that are located in the house or garage.

Skaret suggested also talking with Missouri River Energy Services Electric Distribution Superintendent Jeff Bechhold on what he thinks regarding moving electric meters.

Boogerd said he will also talk to an electrician to see if they have had to move electric meters in other communities and what it entailed.

## **NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES INSURANCE PROGRAM UPDATE**

Skaret noted the Utilities Commission discussed the National League of Cities Insurance Program at their last meeting.

Skaret said the Insurance Program went before the City Council and the Council was not very enthusiastic about it. He explained the City Council had concerns about having the City's name on the marketing materials and having it look like the City was trying to get people to sign up for the Program.

Skaret said the City Council also didn't see the need to have a special arrangement with this Company when there are other insurance companies that offer similar products. He said the City Council was also concerned about liability if there was a dispute between a policy holder and the insurance company and if the City was going to get wrapped up into that. Skaret said he did check into that and there is an indemnification clause in the agreement.

Overall, Skaret said the City Council didn't think it was something the City needed to get into. Skaret said if the Company wanted to make a presentation to the City Council at a later date the Council would be willing to hear it.

Thurmer said look at how much time the Utilities Commission has put into this already, for what?

Skaret said the update on the National League of Cities Insurance Program was an informational item on the Utilities Commission agenda.

### **MRES RATE STUDY PRESENTATION ON SEPTEMBER 3<sup>RD</sup> AT 6 P.M.**

Skaret said the MRES Rate Study Presentation will be held at the City Council meeting on September 3<sup>rd</sup>. He encouraged all the Utilities Commission members to attend if they are able to.

#### **Other:**

#### **Potential candidate to fill a vacancy on the Utilities Commission**

Skaret reported there is a potential candidate to fill the vacant seat on the Utilities Commission.

Maschoff said Jenna Schwartz's name has been forwarded to Mayor Wayne Walter. He said consideration of Schwartz's appointment to the Utilities Commission will be taking place at the September 3<sup>rd</sup> City Council meeting.

Maschoff noted Schwartz has been invited to attend the MRES Rate Study Presentation on September 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Berkner pointed out when she was asked to serve on the Utilities Commission in 1991, she obtained the past six months of meeting minutes to familiarize herself with what the Utilities Commission did.

Skaret said from her application, it appears Schwartz has been reviewing the minutes of the Utilities Commission.

Berkner said she is looking forward to having Schwartz as a Utilities Commission member.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

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**With no further business, the Utilities Commission adjourned their meeting at 4:38 p.m.**

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**David A. Maschoff, Recording Secretary**

