

UTILITIES COMMISSION MINUTES
December 30, 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 December 30, 2019 with the following persons present: Utilities Commission Members including Chairperson Gayl Berkner, Vice-Chairperson Kevin Siepker, Jenna Schwartz, Mike Thurmer, and Mike Schwartz. 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 Members Matt Madden and Joe Marthaler were absent.) (A quorum of the Utilities Commission was present.)

CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER

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

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE NOVEMBER 25, 2019 UTILITIES COMMISSION MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes from the November 25, 2019 Utilities Commission meeting. Hearing no additions or corrections, Chairperson Berker declared the minutes approved as mailed.

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

Electric Department

MRES Jackson Distribution Maintenance Foreman Jeremy Boogerd reported the Electric Department has been busy transferring residents over from the overhead to the underground electric system from this year's underground electric project.

Boogerd said there are about ten houses to transfer over and about another ten to eleven electric poles in backyards to do. He explained they've had to move some snow to get to the poles but progress is being made with the transfers.

Boogerd said the Electric Department has also been working to repair wiring issues with the outlets on some downtown street lights.

Boogerd said he did inventory a couple of weeks ago. Otherwise, he said the Electric Department has been taking care of normal maintenance items such as tree trimming and street lights.

Sieper asked Boogerd if some of the street lights are being switched over to LED lights.

Boogerd said they are switching old street lights over to LED's. He noted replacing ballasts on the old lights costs twice as much as installing a new LED bulb. Boogerd said the LED lights are supposed to last 30 years. He pointed out the LED street lights he installed five years ago are still in operation.

Water Department

Water/Wastewater Superintendent Tony Oxborough reported installation of a double door and painting will about wrap up the renovation work at the Water Plant. He noted the pipes to the old ground storage water tank have been demoed.

Oxborough said repairs were made at Lift Station No. 4 to remedy a foaming issue. He said Lift Station No. 4 has been working well.

Oxborough said the Water Department has also been busy doing maintenance work.

Jenna Schwartz asked Oxborough if the Utilities Commission members could sometime take a tour of the Water Plant.

Oxborough said the Utilities Commission could certainly take a tour of the Water Plant after the renovation work and clean-up is completed.

Skaret said people driving by the Water Plant see the new ground storage tank, but so much of the renovation project took place inside the Water Plant such as upgrading the controls, electrical system, pumps and installing a new water meter.

Skaret said a tour would be a good opportunity to see the improvements that the money was spent on.

Oxborough said it would be good to show the improvements that have been made and what can be built off of the improvements for the future.

Street Department

Street Superintendent Phil Markman the Street Department has been keeping up with the winter weather as it comes.

Markman said maintenance work has been underway on the trucks along with other maintenance items that arise.

Markman said he was going to meet with Engineer Greg Mitchell of Bolton and Menk on December 31st to start working on plans for the South Street and North Highway projects coming up in 2020.

Berkner said someone asked her about the City having snow gates on their snowplows to avoid plowing in driveways.

Markman explained the snow gates are not monetarily feasible and are only effective in ideal situations. He said they are good in two or three inch snows, but causes more snow to be left on the street between driveways. Markman said in snowfalls of six inches or more, the snow gates are not effective.

Skaret noted to upgrade all the City's snow plows with snow gates would cost about a million dollars.

Berkner said in her opinion, so far, the streets have been in good shape this winter.

Markman thanked Berkner for her comment and said he would pass that along to the rest of the Street Department personnel.

AMI Project Update

Boogerd said some AMI equipment has arrived, however the electric meters haven't been delivered yet. Boogerd noted the base stations and the antennas for the system have arrived but the antennas won't be put up until March. He said the electric and water meters can be changed but no information will be available until the antennas and collectors are installed.

Boogerd said it will take only a day to install the antennas. He said in the meantime the electrical part of each base station is being installed at the water towers.

ARC FLASH STUDY PROPOSAL

Skaret explained the Arc Flash Study has been discussed since around 2012. He said it's a requirement that the City have what's called an Arc Flash Assessment of the electric utility system as it pertains to City facilities.

Boogerd explained the study tells what the Arc Flash rating is for the City's electric system. Boogerd said the rating will provide information to anyone working on the electric system to know what type of personal protective clothing or equipment they need to work on an energized electric panel in all of the City's facilities. He said the study would be conducted by DGR at the Water Treatment Plant, the Lift Stations, Library, Liquor Store, Fire Hall and City Hall.

Boogerd said DGR would compile information collected in the Arc Flash Study. He said DGR would then provide stickers that would be placed on each electrical panel at the City's facilities that would tell an electrician what protective clothing was needed to work inside a particular energized panel. He said if an electrician did not follow the information on the sticker and not wear the correct protective clothing, the City would not be liable.

Skaret said the cost for the Arc Flash Study conducted on the non-Electric Department facilities would be \$16,600.

SIEPKER/JENNA SCHWARTZ moved and it was carried to recommend to the City Council to approve the Arc Flash Study proposal from DGR for \$16,600.

Utilities Commission Members voting in favor of the motion included Kevin Siepker, Jenna Schwartz and Mike Schwartz.

Utilities Commission Member Mike Thurmer abstained.

WATER AND SEWER ORDINANCE UPDATES

Skaret said he's met with Oxborough and Boogerd to discuss some of the issues that's expected to be encountered with the changing of meters for the new AMI system.

Skaret said changing the electric meters will be simpler than changing the water meters since most of the electric meters are on the outside of a residence. He said there are six or seven electric meters that are in the inside of residences or garages. Skaret said the consensus at the time was for the City to pay for moving those electric meters to the outside.

Skaret said the other issue pertains to changing the water meters. He noted the problem the City has with infiltration and inflow into the sewer system. Skaret said since the Water Department will be going into most of the buildings in Jackson to replace water meters, it would be a good opportunity to do a sump pump inspection as well. He said it was some food for thought for the Utilities Commission.

Skaret asked if a sump pump is encountered that's not compliant and hooked up to the sanitary sewer system, how long do you want to give the property owner to properly hook up their sump pump. He said does the City want to give the property owner 30 days or 60 days to properly hook up their sump pump. Skaret said a citation could also be issued. He noted in all fairness there are some people who aren't even aware their sump pump is non-compliant.

Skaret noted the City of New Ulm hired additional help over the course of a couple of summers to do sump pump inspections. He said New Ulm added a \$50 fee to the monthly utility bill to those accounts in non-compliance until the property owner had it certified that their sump pump was properly installed.

Responding to a question from Jenna Schwartz, Oxborough outlined several things a property owner can do to make their sump pump compliant.

Oxborough said rules have to be put in place to remedy the situation.

Thurmer asked Oxborough if he would be open to them getting together and trying to come up with some standard rules that everyone could look at.

Oxborough said he would be willing to work with Thurmer on developing some rules.

Berkner noted about communicating with the public that the inspection of sumps pumps will be taking place.

Oxborough said the City doesn't want to scare people about the sump pump inspections but hope that people will fix their sump pumps if their pump is not compliant.

Skaret said the City is not out to impose penalties and fines but just wants compliance.

Berkner said she thinks a lot of people in this day and age are very nervous about government interference in their private lives and everything. Berkner said she's of the opinion that you have to be honest above the board and inform people. She said people are best behaved when they know what's happening.

Jenna Schwartz noted the rules regarding sump pumps are already in place and it's nothing new. She said technically people should already be aware of the rules.

Oxborough said the City doesn't have a policy on how the City will correct the issue if someone is found to have a non-compliant sump pump.

Berkner said she thinks it would be great if Oxborough and Thurmer could work together on developing some rules regarding non-complaint sump pumps.

Skaret asked if Oxborough and Thurmer could develop some possible rules before the next Utilities Commission meeting.

Boogerd noted there are six houses where the electric meter is inside instead of outside. He asked the Utilities Commission if they would prefer him to gather quotes from electricians regarding moving the electric meters on a house by house basis or as a quote for all six houses.

Berkner said she would prefer receiving a quote that would include moving the electric meters on all six houses.

Boogerd said it will probably be six or eight months before the meters are moved. He said he can bring that information to the Utilities Commission.

Skaret said there are a few other updates on the Water and Sewer Ordinances but he's still working on some verbiage with the City Attorney regarding those items. He said he plans to have an actual ordinance draft at the Utilities Commission's next meeting.

Other:

Assessments on property in Jackson

Mike Schwartz said he had a question regarding unpaid utility bills. He asked if a former owner of a property hasn't paid an outstanding utility bill, is the amount due assessed to the property or does it follow the individual who didn't pay the bill. Schwartz said he recently had a situation where the former owner of the property was delinquent on an electric bill and the bill was assessed onto the property. He said that wasn't discovered until the new owners were closing on purchasing the property and discovered it was assessed to their property taxes.

City Finance Officer Deb Mitchell explained people should be doing an assessment search whenever they are buying a house. She said if an assessment search is done, then the City will let the seller or purchaser know there is an outstanding bill with the City on that property.

Schwartz said the outstanding amount was discovered during a closing on the purchase of a property. He said the outstanding amount was assessed on the taxes of the new property owners. Schwartz said in all the other communities he works with; the outstanding bill goes with the previous owner. He said the previous owner is stuck with the bill, not the new owners of the property.

Mitchell said an assessment search would show what was still owed.

Schwartz said it would be nice to be able to find out if anything was owed on the property by the previous owner at closing. He said that's the policy in other communities. Schwartz asked if there was anything that could be done to change the City of Jackson's policy.

Mitchell reiterated an assessment search would show any outstanding utility bills. She explained an assessment search would state how much was still owed.

Maschoff asked in this case, was an assessment search done.

Schwartz said he didn't think an assessment search was done. He said the previous owner said he had paid the bill, but had not.

Mitchell noted that's why an assessment search is done because it protects the buyer. She said usually the request for the assessment search is done a couple of weeks before closing. Mitchell said the assessment search will then show if there's any delinquent bills.

Schwartz asked if an assessment search could be done on the day of closing.

Maschoff explained the assessment certificate may say all utilities current, not final, meaning there's one more bill to be paid if there's 10 days between the assessment certificate being issued and the closing date.

Mitchell said, for example, Boogerd will go and get a final electric meter reading on the day of closing and the City can tell you what the final bill will be that day.

Schwartz said he doesn't know what happened in the incident he was referring to, but someone must have dropped the ball.

Mitchell said the person buying the property is supposed to make sure there's an assessment search done.

Schwartz asked how do we get it to work so the bill doesn't fall on the property but follows the person.

Skaret said he thinks it's statewide that an outstanding bill would follow the property.

Berkner said it's probably something mandated by the State.

Mitchell said it's very important to have an assessment search done.

Berkner suggested Schwartz find out if assessing an outstanding bill to the property is something that's mandated by the State.

Mitchell noted that on the day of closing, Boogerd can get the electric meter readings and bring them to City Hall. She said then City Hall can tell you what the final bill will be on the day of closing. Mitchell said that would be a way to provide the exact amount of the final bill.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, the Utilities Commission meeting was adjourned at 4:56 p.m.

David A. Maschoff, Recording Secretary

