

UTILITIES COMMISSION MINUTES
February 25, 2019

A regular meeting of the City of Jackson Utilities Commission was held in the Council Chambers of City Hall at 4 p.m. on February 25, 2019 with the following persons present: Utilities Commission members Chairperson Gayl Berkner, Vice Chairperson Kevin Siepker, Joe Marthaler, Mike Schwartz and Matt Madden, City Administrator Matt Skaret, City Finance Officer Deb Mitchell, Street Superintendent Phil Markman, MRES Jackson Distribution Maintenance Foreman Jeremy Boogerd, Water/Wastewater Superintendent Tony Oxborough and Recording Secretary Dave Maschoff.

CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER

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

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE JANUARY 28, 2019 MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes from the January 28, 2019 Utilities Commission meeting. Hearing no additions or corrections, Chairperson Berkner declared these minutes approved as emailed.

DEPARTMENTAL/PROJECT REPORTS

Street Department

Berkner thanked the Street Department and City personnel for their ongoing efforts of plowing snow and keeping the streets open. She said they are doing a great job.

Street Superintendent Markman reported the Street Department has been trying to keep up with the snow removal and keeping equipment operating.

Berkner asked about the dip in the road at the intersection of Park Street and North Highway where a water main break had occurred in January.

Markman said the material that was put in that location has settled. He said it's difficult to put material in that dip at this point because it will just get plowed out during snow removal.

Markman said the Street Department is monitoring the situation and as soon as the conditions improve they will try and get some material in that dip.

Berkner asked if traffic cones could be placed at that intersection to warn motorists of the dip.

Markman said if traffic cones were used they would then have to be moved when the road was plowed to remove snow. He said the dip at the intersection is part of having a water main break occur during the winter.

Markman reported there have been a few issues around Jackson of residents illegally depositing snow from their driveways into the street. He said City Administrator Skaret has been distributing information to try and educate the public about the City's ordinances regarding illegally pushing snow out into the streets.

Markman noted one incident where the Sheriff's Department had to be called. He said that resident filed a formal complaint against him about the snow removal incident.

Skaret said he did an investigation regarding the incident and wrote a report about it. Skaret said he also spoke to the resident several times.

Markman explained he has tried to explain the City's snow removal rules and the City's procedures for removing snow to people. He said at this point he's going to start taking pictures of illegal snow removal activity, document it and call the Sheriff's Department. Markman commented what it will take to end the illegal snow dumping into the streets is for someone to get ticketed and fined and have it reported in the newspaper in order to let residents know the City is serious. He said he was glad none of the other snowplow drivers have had the abuse.

Markman recalled in the 14 years he was been employed with the City's Street Department, he has had snowballs thrown at him, shovels thrown at him, had gestures made at him and has been called every name in the book. Markman said he's just been doing his job and he will continue to do so. He explained he has as much snow at the end of his driveway at the end of the day as everyone else.

Skaret said that's something that a lot of people forget. He pointed out City employees don't live in a castle on top of the hill. Skaret said the City employees have to go home and shovel out the end of their driveways like everyone else.

On other issues, Markman said the Street Department had one frozen sewer on Friday, February 22nd. He said it's a sewer they normally have trouble with but were able to get it opened up in 15 to 20 minutes and there was no major backup into a business place. Markman explained it's a very shallow sewer. He said it was just a product of the Street Department taking care of all the snow. Markman said they haven't had an opportunity to check on all of their normal items. He said luckily it worked out and there was no backup into the building.

Berkner asked Markman even if we don't get any more snow, what he anticipates for spring.

Markman explained a lot of the snow that has fallen is a dry snow so he doesn't think the spring melt will be too bad. But, Markman said if we experience snowfall in April like we did in April of 2018, there could be problems. He said he thinks a lot of the snowmelt will run off because the ground is frozen right now and won't absorb it. Markman said a couple warm days a few weeks ago really helped shrink the windrows of snow down in town and that really helped. He said it depends on how fast the weather warms up. Markman said everything right now is full.

Skaret noted there was a lot of chatter, especially on Facebook, about having snow gates on the City's snowplows. He said there's a lot to the snow gate issue.

Skaret explained there are basically three reasons why the City doesn't have snow gates. He said the reasons are the cost, the effectiveness and the time.

Skaret said the City would have to purchase about five or six new road graders in order to use snow gates. He pointed out the snow gates typically go onto a road grader or a front end loader. Skaret noted most of the City of Jackson's snowplowing is done with plow trucks.

Markman said the snow gates are not cost effective. He noted when the windrows get so high, the snow gates become ineffective. Markman pointed out although the snow gates may keep the snow out of the end of the driveway, the snow has to go somewhere and increases the amount of snow that's deposited along the boulevard. Because the snow has to go somewhere, Markman said that makes the streets narrower by seven to 10 feet. He added the snow gates doubles the time that it takes to remove the snow and fuel consumption goes up 30 to 50 percent. Markman said it would cost the City of Jackson well over a million dollars to implement snow gates.

Markman said it's been an unusual year compared to what we've had in the past and people aren't used to this. Markman said one person thought the City should go out and clean everybody's driveway. He said that would not be cost effective.

Markman said he invites anyone that stops him on the street commenting about snow removal to attend the Tuesday night City Council meetings to present their thoughts in front of everyone. He said so far no one has attended the City Council meetings to present their ideas.

Berkner noted reading an article on Facebook from a community close to the Twin Cities where a snowplow driver was plowing snow on a City street and noticed a hole in the snow bank where he would be plowing by. She said the plow driver stopped and there were two children playing in the snow bank. Berkner said if the plow driver would not have stopped, it could have been a fatal situation.

Markman said that's a reality that Jackson's plow drivers also deal with. He pointed out that's not as much of a situation in Jackson on a normal plowing schedule as the City starts plowing snow at 4 a.m. and is done by 7 a.m. However, Markman said on days where it's been snowing throughout the day and there are a lot of kids playing because there was no school the City's snowplow drivers are really watching for that.

Siepkner asked where the City is at as far as snowfall for February.

Markman said Federated Rural Electric keeps track of snowfall.

Madden said Jackson has broken the snowfall record for February at 26 or 27 inches.

Siepkner asked what the snowfall average is for the year.

Marthaler said he could obtain those statistics for a future meeting. He said Federated Rural Electric has weather statistics dating back to 1945.

Electric Department

MRES Jackson Distribution Maintenance Foreman Jeremy Boogerd said on the days the Electric Department has been able to work outside they have completed some more electric power line transfers from the CenturyLink poles. He said there are only three poles left and they will have to wait until the snow thaws so they can access backyards to get to those poles.

Boogerd said the Electric Department has also been taking down lines and equipment from last year's underground electric project when the weather permits.

Boogerd explained the Electric Department has been busy moving snow from around pedestals, switches and transformers at the intersections. He said they have been keeping those items exposed the best they can. Boogerd noted they have also been doing maintenance on the days the weather is not below zero or winds are 40 miles per hour.

Boogerd said they are aware of the street light issues that have been called in. He explained when the weather warmed up, the snow melted and filled the street light vaults in the sidewalk full of water and then froze. Boogerd said if there is a day when the temperature reaches at least 20 degrees they can bring the vac down and thaw the vaults out, suck the water out and repair the connections. He said right now the vaults are filled with a solid block of ice enclosed in a solid block of concrete.

Water Department

Water/Wastewater Superintendent Tony Oxborough said the Water Department has been busy keeping up with snow removal at the Lift Stations and the Water Plant.

Oxborough said the Ground Storage Water Tank Project and work in the pump room at the Water Plant is at a standstill at this point as they are awaiting parts to arrive. Oxborough noted that worked out fine since he was at school this past week and the contractor could not have worked on anything anyway unless he was there. He noted there is plenty of time as the new pumps won't be delivered yet for a couple months.

Otherwise, Oxborough reported the Water Department is just been trying to keep up with the snow.

AMI (Automated Metering Infrastructure)

Berkner asked about the progress of the automatic electric and water meter reading project.

Boogerd said the bids for the project don't come in until March 13th.

Skaret said there have been quite a few contacts by companies that provide that type and equipment and services.

Boogerd said there has been a lot of interest by people that have definitely asked enough questions where you feel they will submit a bid.

Fire Hydrants

Sieper asked if there have been any difficulties with fire hydrants being hidden by snow.

Oxborough said in addition to the Lift Stations, the Water Department has been busy cleaning snow away from fire hydrants.

Skaret said information has been put on Facebook asking people to clean snow away from fire hydrants near their home.

Markman said he has also shared information about cleaning snow away from hydrants as a reminder. He noted when Matt Arlandson of the Sentence to Service has enough help; they also work to shovel out fire hydrants. Markman pointed out Arlandson is a member of the Jackson Fire Department and has helped the City out in the past with clearing snow away from fire hydrants.

Markman said he's seen a lot of residents take care of clearing snow away from the hydrants near their homes.

UPDATE REGARDING THE AMI SYSTEM – SELECT RFP REVIEW COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE

Skaret reported the City of Jackson's ad seeking Request for Proposals for the AMI system is posted on the League of Minnesota Cities website and was published a couple of times in the Jackson County Pilot.

Skaret said the City has received contacts from a number of different vendors. He said he's spoken to some of the vendors. Skaret said Boogerd has also spoken with some vendors.

Siepkner asked Boogerd if there's a system the City is kind of looking for.

Boogerd said the City is looking for a system with the highest read accuracy.

Siepkner asked Boogerd if he has reports on any systems.

Boogerd said he hasn't called anyone in particular at this point. He said he's talked to Federated Rural Electric about their system.

Siepkner asked if the successful bid will be awarded based on monetary amount alone or by reliability.

Boogerd said the Request for Proposals is worded that it's not just price alone but also functionality, service along with other aspects of the system.

Skaret explained once the bids have been received, the thought is to have a committee made of City staff; a couple of City Councilmembers and one or two Utility Commission members review the bids and narrow them down to two or three companies. He said those companies could then make a presentation to the committee. After that, Skaret said hopefully the committee will be in a position to make a recommendation to the City Council.

Madden said he attended a conference last week and spoke with several people about AMI systems. He learned not to make a hasty decision and don't get into too big of a rush. Madden pointed out there's a lot of information to process and a lot of vendors out there all saying their system is the best. He stressed doing your research and it's not something you want to rush into.

Boogerd noted to also make sure to have a system that is capable of handling load management in the long term.

Madden said it's a big investment. He said once you sign the contract you're stuck with it for a long time unless you want to eat that cost and look for something else.

Madden and Siepkner both said they would serve on the committee to review the bids for the AMI project.

Card to send to Ken Temple

Berkner pointed out she had a card for Utilities Commission members to sign to send to former longtime Utilities Commission member Ken Temple. She said Commission members could sign the card however they wished thanking or wishing Temple well for his years of service on the Utilities Commission.

Sympathy Card to the Maschoff family

Berkner noted she sent a sympathy card on behalf of the Utilities Commission to Recording Secretary Dave Maschoff and his family following the death of Maschoff's father.

Berkner said she would like to send a card every time when such incidents arise.

Berkner read a card addressed to the Jackson Utilities Commission from Dave, Jan and Ellie Maschoff thanking the Commission for the sympathy card and their thoughts and prayers.

Berkner also asked to keep the Maschoff family in their prayers as Jan Maschoff's cousin has been battling cancer and is now in hospice care.

Updates

Skaret reported the City Council awarded the bid for the reconstruction of Lift Station Number 4 just off of South Highway. He said R & R Excavating of Hutchinson, Minnesota was the low bidder at \$662,122. Skaret said the engineer's estimate was \$867,000 so it was nice to be under the estimate for a change.

Skaret said the bids for the South Highway reconstruction also came in as well during the first week of February. He said while the bid was under the engineer's estimate for the reconstruction of Lift Station Number 4, the bid for the City's portion of the South Highway reconstruction project was about five percent over the engineer's estimate. Skaret said the County's portion of the project was about 22 percent over the engineer's estimate. He said that bid was awarded to GM Contracting, Incorporated of Lake Crystal, Minnesota. Skaret said GM Contracting has done work in the City of Jackson in the past and is a reputable company.

Skaret said the general contract for the South Highway reconstruction project is under the County. He said both the City Council and the County Commission had to approve that contract.

Skaret noted the City Council approved submitting an application to the State's Local Road Improvement Program. He explained it's a program that's periodically funded by the Legislature to fund road improvements that have a regional significance. Skaret said that can be an economic or tourism significance. He said the project the funding application was made for would basically be for paving on Homedale Drive and the rest of Prospect Lane north of where the new liquor store is located.

Skaret said the City tried for the Local Road Improvement Program grant back in 2017 and was not awarded the grant. He explained at that time, the State had \$25 million in funding for \$125 million worth of requests. Skaret said there is actually no funding available right now for the program but the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) wants to get another list of projects together to show the Legislature that there is a lot of demand and needs. He said hopefully the Legislature will fund the program.

ADJOURNMENT

Berkner thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

With no further business, the Utilities Commission meeting was adjourned at 4:26 p.m.

David A. Maschoff, Recording Secretary

