

**UTILITIES COMMISSION MEETING**  
**February 27, 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, February 27, 2023 with the following persons present: Utilities Commission Chairman Kevin Siepker, Vice-Chairman Mike Schwartz, and Commission members Joe Marthaler, Jenna Schwartz, Sandy Phillips, Dennis Hunwardsen and Sara Mix. Also attending were City Administrator Matt Skaret, Water/Waste Water Superintendent Tony Oxborough, MRES Jackson Distribution Maintenance Foreman Tony Nitchals, Street Superintendent Phil Markman, Rachael Landherr and Recording Secretary Dave Maschoff. (A quorum of the Utilities Commission was present.)

**OPEN THE MEETING**

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Chairman Kevin Siepker called the regular meeting of the Utilities Commission to order.

**APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE JANUARY 30, 2023 UTILITIES COMMISSION MEETING**

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Siepker asked if there were any additions, corrections or issues regarding the minutes of the January 30, 2023 Utilities Commission meeting. Hearing none, Siepker declared the minutes approved as mailed.

**DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS**

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**Electric Department**

MRES Jackson Distribution Maintenance Foreman Tony Nitchals reported the Electric Department personnel have been trimming trees when the weather has allowed.

Nitchals said he's being working on plans for the Electric Department's underground electric project for this year. He said he's also been preparing for the breaker/relay testing that will be taking place. Nitchals said he's been working on switching procedures to isolate those breakers and back feed them for testing purposes.

Nitchals said all of the Electric Department's equipment has been serviced, cleaned and tested and is ready for the new year.

Nitchals said the Electric Department has also been working on the "hot socket" issues pertaining to the electric meters. He said those issues are being resolved. Nitchals noted problems have been found in the double-meter pedestals that contain City-owned meter sockets. He said so far, he has found four of those double-meter pedestals that will need to be dug up and replaced this spring.

Nitchals reported quite a few of the street lights have been switched over to LED lighting. He noted many of the street lights in the downtown area have been switched over to LED.

## **Water Department**

Water/Wastewater Superintendent Tony Oxborough said the Water Department has been working on installing new AMI Water Meters. He said 55 percent of the new meters have been installed so far. Oxborough said 908 AMI water meters have been installed so far out of 1,642 water accounts. He noted another 260 antennas for the AMI water meters have been ordered with another 500 to be ordered after that. Oxborough said it's not known when the antennas will be delivered.

Oxborough said the Water Department moved some water over in the lagoon ponds. He explained they usually don't move water over this early in the year but they're trying a new process and so far, it's been working well.

In other news, Oxborough said City Hall has been helping by scanning the Water Department's maps which will help when the GIS project gets underway. He said all of the information of the Water Treatment Plant is now scanned and ready to go.

Oxborough reported the Water Department personnel has been doing maintenance on the lift stations to make sure they are ready in case there's a wet spring.

Oxborough said he's also been busy updating reports.

Skaret noted the pre-bid contractor viewing of the Water Plant pertaining to the Filter Media Rehabilitation and Backwash Tank Project will be held on Thursday, March 2nd.

## **Street Department**

Street Superintendent Phil Markman said the Street Department has been busy plowing snow. He said the Street Department personnel have dug out the intakes to allow the water to drain when the weather warms up to melt the snow, but then more snow falls and the intakes have to be cleaned out again.

Markman said the Street Department's equipment had all been serviced before the most recent big snowstorm. He said the Street Department personnel worked a lot of hours following the last snow storm.

Hunwardsen asked Markman if the Street Department digs the snow away from the fire hydrants.

Markman said it's a team effort by the Water Department, Street Department and private citizens.

Phillips noted the City of Jackson's Street Department does an excellent job plowing snow compared to some of the other communities she's driven through during the past 10 days.

Mike Schwartz agreed with Phillips. He said the Street Department does great work in clearing the snow from the streets compared to other communities.

## **Introduction of new Utilities Commission Member**

Skaret introduced new City Councilmember Sara Mix as the City Council's representative on the Utilities Commission.

Mix was welcomed by Utilities Commission members.

## **ELECTRIC SERVICE EMERGENCY SHUT-OFF REQUIREMENTS**

MRES Jackson Distribution Maintenance Foreman Tony Nitchals referred to the information that was distributed to the Utilities Commission members prior to the meeting pertaining to changes in the Electric Service Emergency Shut-Off requirements. He pointed out he highlighted the information regarding Emergency Disconnects. Nitchals explained the new code requires that a property owner must install an emergency disconnect on the outside of their house if they upgrade or move their electric meter socket to another location. He said under the 2023 National Electrical Code, that requirement is going to be mandatory.

Nitchals said in the past, the City of Jackson has always supplied the electric meter sockets for their residential customers. He explained electric meter sockets are getting expensive. Nitchals provided information outlining a couple of quotes for meter sockets. He pointed out the Milbank meter socket from Wesco that would meet the new code requirements if the City continues to supply meter sockets as they have in the past. Nitchals said he can get the Milbank meter sockets for \$359.06 apiece. He also provided the Utilities Commission members with a quote from Irby for the Durham meter sockets.

Nitchals said he was inquiring whether the City was going to continue to provide electric meter sockets for their electric customers going forward. He also asked if the City does continue to provide meter sockets, how does the City want to go about in doing that. Nitchals noted the Milbank meter sockets would cover everything from 100 to 200-amp services and includes the lever bypass for linemen safety.

Nitchals said the plain meter sockets have gone up in price significantly and the homeowner could supply their own disconnect. Or, he said those could be a 50/50 cost sharing between the homeowner and the City with the all-in-one meter socket with the emergency disconnect. Nitchals said he's looking for direction from the Utilities Commission.

Skaret noted 200-amp electric meter sockets have been the norm but with the push for electric vehicles, there could be requests in the future for 400-amp service at a residence.

Nitchals gave an example of a new four-bedroom house with a three-car garage with two electric chargers for vehicles. He said the chargers draw about 50 amps per charger for the fast charging of vehicles.

Nitchals said the City has supplied the electric meter sockets, but once they're installed, it's the homeowner's responsibility. He said the meter belongs to the City. Nitchals said in the past the City has always supplied the electric meter socket.

Siepkner noted having the City supply the meter socket has provided for uniformity of the electric sockets.

Phillips noted that housing is an issue in the City and the City has been working hard to address housing. In an effort to make it more attractive for people to build a home and live here in Jackson, Phillips said she would make a motion for the City to continue to provide the electric meter socket with the electric disconnect. She said having the City provide the meter sockets would provide for uniformity which was important for the Electric Department in the past and still is. Phillips said providing the meter socket would be one less expense for someone who is building a new home in Jackson and may have not been aware of that expense.

**PHILLIPS/MARTHALER moved and it was unanimously carried that the City continue to supply the electric meter socket with the emergency electric disconnect to meet the current required standards.**

It was noted the homeowner will hire the electrician to install the meter socket, but the City will provide the meter socket to be installed.

Oxborough asked if the meter sockets provided by the City would be 200 or 400-amp sockets.

Nitchals said the meter sockets would be for 200-amp service with 250-amp continuous run-through.

Skaret asked Nitchals what the cost difference is between a 200-amp and 400-amp meter socket.

Nitchals said a 400-amp meter socket would cost more than a 200-amp socket.

Skaret asked if the Utilities Commission wanted to amend Phillips' motion that the City will provide up to a 200-amp meter socket and if the customer wants or needs more than 200 amps, they would pay the difference.

Nitchals said the City would provide a meter socket up to 200 amps and anything over 200-amps would be a cost to the homeowner.

Phillips asked if there's a different policy in place regarding meter sockets for commercial properties.

Nitchals explained the emergency electric disconnect was only for one and two-family residential homes.

**PHILLIPS/MARTHALER moved and it was unanimously carried to amend the previous motion to state the City continue to supply the electric meter sockets with the emergency electric disconnect up to 200 amps to meet current standards for one and two-family residential homes at no charge and the homeowner to pay the cost difference for electric meter sockets that are over 200 amps.**

Hunwardsen asked if the new standards for meter sockets with emergency disconnect would only pertain to when someone upgrades their electrical service in their current home or if someone is building a new home.

Nitchals said the new standard would only apply when upgrades occur or for new home construction. He said the City will provide up to a 200 amp electric meter socket with the emergency disconnect for no charge.

**JENNA SCHWARTZ/SANDY PHILLIPS moved and it was unanimously carried to have the City continue to supply the electric meter sockets with the emergency electric disconnect up to 200 amps to meet current standards for one and two-family residential homes at no charge and for the homeowner to pay the cost difference for electric meter sockets that are over 200 amps.**

## **POWER SUPPLY MIX 2022**

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Skaret noted information has been received on the City of Jackson's Power Supply Mix for 2022. He referred to the information that was distributed to the Utilities Commission members.

Skaret noted the City of Jackson ended up with 59 percent of the City's energy coming from renewable resources. He said specifically, 56 percent of the electrical power comes from hydro through the City's contract with WAPA (Western Area Power Administration) from the dams on the Missouri River system.

Skaret noted 3 percent comes from wind generation. He pointed out other sources include nuclear at 4 percent, coal at 12 percent and market purchases which are a mix of everything which Missouri River Energy purchases to supply electric power to their members. Skaret noted the electrical power generated by coal continues to get smaller each year.

Skaret noted that by the year 2040, the City will be required to have 100 percent of its electrical energy coming from carbon-free sources. He said right now, the City is at 86 percent. Skaret said going from 86 percent to 100 percent is going to be very, very difficult. He said there's going to be a lawsuit from North Dakota because Minnesota's electric grid is connected to North Dakota's. Skaret said North Dakota is where the coal-fired power plants are located and North Dakota doesn't have the same standard as Minnesota. He said North Dakota is going to be suing the State of Minnesota over the new standard.

Phillips said the information about Jackson's power mix is very attractive. She said the information should be posted on the City's Facebook page and pointed out that 86 percent of the City of Jackson's power supply mix is from a 86 percent carbon-free power supply.

### **SHUT-OFF POLICY – RACHAEL LANDHERR**

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Rachael Landherr appeared before the Utilities Commission with questions regarding the City of Jackson's Electric Shut-Off Policy. She said she fully understands the City's policy. Landherr explained their electric power was shut-off but then was turned back on the next day when a \$200 deposit was made. She said the requirement for a \$200 deposit was due to their two late payments that were made not "hugely" late.

Landherr explained that although their monthly bill had been paid, their \$200 deposit had not been paid leading to their electric power being shut off. She said she doesn't agree with the City's policy. Landherr pointed out the monthly bills had been paid in full, but not the deposit. She said the temperatures in Minnesota fluctuate and shutting off a person's power during the winter months can put a person's premise at risk.

Landherr had questions about notifications from the City. She said the shut-off notice comes in a very thick white envelope so it's something, if you're busy, that you might not open. Landherr suggested maybe using a different colored envelope, such as pink, so it stands out that's it's a shut-off notice. She also said if the City calls to notify you that the power is going to be shut off, there's no message left. Landherr said a message should be left for people. She also suggested that something should be put in place to text people if their power is going to be shut off because a payment had not been made.

Landherr said she thinks the City's policy needs be looked at especially if the electric power is going to be shut off in the winter. She said the City's policy is legal, but thinks it should be addressed. Landherr noted the City did everything correctly, but she doesn't agree with the City's policy. She said she's not upset. Landherr said she just thinks it's something that needs to be reviewed.

Skaret explained the City is very mindful if it's a situation where the weather is going to be cold and frozen pipes may be an issue. He said the power is usually turned on overnight if the outside temperature is going to be below zero.

Skaret explained efforts were made to contact Landherr that their power was going to be shut-off if the deposit payment was not made by February 8<sup>th</sup>. He said the City office left a voice mail and also sent a text. Skaret said the City Hall office sent a text on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, called on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, sent a text again on February 6<sup>th</sup> and left a message on February 7<sup>th</sup> and a note that they called twice.

Landherr said she would check their voice messages. She said beyond that, Landherr said the City's policy needs to be looked at especially if the power is going to be shut off in the winter.

Mike Schwartz said times and habits change and maybe the City's policy should be reviewed.

Jenna Schwartz suggested putting the City's policy on the Utilities Commission's next agenda to be reviewed.

Landherr said she appreciated the Utilities Commission's time.

(Landherr leaves the meeting)

Utilities Commission members further reviewed and discussed what actually happened in Landherr's situation, the efforts to notify her before the power was shut off, and what the City's current policy is.



Mix said she thinks the City's policy in shutting off the power for not paying the deposit is a little aggressive.

Utilities Commission members also discussed the City's deposit requirement and options available to customers such as automatic payment.

Mix suggested reviewing the City's shut-off policy and then dating when the policy was reviewed.

Oxborough noted situations like Landherr's maybe occur 15 times per year.

Skaret said cases where customers are shut off maybe occurs one or two times a month.

Hunwardsen noted it seems like the City made a lot of effort to get a hold of Landherr. He said it seems like the City went to a lot of work trying to get a hold of Landherr before the City shut off her power.

Skaret said shutting the power off is always the last resort. He said often times there's a list of 130 or 140 customers on the late list after the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month. Skaret said after notifications are made, it's usually down to one or two customers that are actually shut off.

Sieper said the City's Policy could be put on the Utilities Commission's next agenda.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

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With no further business, Chairman Sieper asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

**MIKE SCHWARTZ/JENNA SCHWARTZ moved and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the Utilities Commission meeting at 5:05 p.m.**

Sieper thanked everyone for attending.

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**David A. Maschoff, Recording Secretary**

