

UTILITIES COMMISSION MINUTES
January 28, 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 January 28, 2019 with the following persons present: Utilities Commission members Chairperson Gayl Berkner, Vice Chairperson Kevin Siepker, Mike Thurmer, Joe Marthaler and Mike Schwartz. Also in attendance were City Administrator Matt Skaret, MRES Jackson Distribution Maintenance Foreman Jeremy Boogerd, Water Department Superintendent Tony Oxborough, Street Superintendent Phil Markman, City Finance Officer Deb Mitchell, Loren Tusa, Robert Gjertson and Recording Secretary Dave Maschoff. (Utilities Commission member Matt Madden was 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 a quorum of the Commission was present.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE DECEMBER 31, 2018 MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes from the December 31, 2018 Utilities Commission meeting. Hearing no additions or corrections, Chairperson Berkner declared these minutes approved as mailed.

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

Water Department

Water Superintendent Tony Oxborough reported on Friday, January 25th, the City's water pumpage doubled due to a water leak. He said Water Department personnel drove around Jackson on Saturday looking for the leak but could not find anything. Oxborough said all the realtors in Jackson were notified in case any empty houses they had for sale may have frozen pipes and were leaking. He said the leak was not found on Sunday either.

Oxborough said the Sheriff's Department found the leak just before midnight on Sunday night, January 27th, on North Highway near the intersection of North Highway and Park Street.

Oxborough reported the leak was repaired on Monday, January 28th. He said the amount of water lost was equivalent to a water tower and a half. Oxborough said the pumpage of water was keeping up so there was no shortage of water in town. He said repairs of the water line went well.

Regarding the upgrades at the Water Plant, Oxborough said Magney Construction has all of the outside piping installed and are ordering pipe for the inside of the plant. Oxborough said Magney is limited is what they can do at this point until the new pumps arrive. He said Magney will be working at the Water Plant periodically until April or if the ground thaws out earlier, they will begin to install the framework for the new Ground Storage Tank.

Street Department

Street Superintendent Phil Markman reported the Street Department has been busy plowing snow. He said the Street Department assisted the Water Department with the water main break at North Highway and Park Street.

Markman said a citizen had a sewer issue at a residence on White Street. He noted there was also a natural gas leak at that location which resulted in the street being dug up at White and Butler Streets. Markman said the gas company ran into difficulties and had to have a specialty repair truck from the Twin Cities come to Jackson to help make repairs. He said the repairs were completed on Friday evening, January 25th.

Markman said the Street Department personnel will be coming into work early on January 29th to clean up the snow from the downtown area.

Berkner commented she's been thinking of all the Street Department personnel while they are plowing and removing snow and asked that everyone be safe first and foremost.

Electric Department

MRES Jackson Distribution Maintenance Foreman Jeremy Boogerd reported that electric power lines were transferred from 16 of 20 CenturyLink poles before the cold weather set in. Boogerd explained the remaining poles are located in backyards with underground wires attached to them. He said the ground is frozen and it's difficult to get the mud-truck into those areas so the work on the remaining poles will have to wait until spring because they can't hand dig at this time.

Boogerd said the Electric Department has assisted the Street Department in plowing and hauling snow.

Boogerd noted the Electric Department has been cleaning everything up from the summer, organizing the shop and going through materials.

Boogerd said the Requests for Proposals have been prepared and sent out for the AMI (Advance Metering Infrastructure) and will be advertised in the newspaper. He said bids will be opened for that on March 12, 2019.

Sewer Issue on White Street

Skaret noted the sewer issue Markman mentioned on White Street. He said where the sewer line had collapsed was underneath where the electric line had been installed during the underground conversion project two years ago.

Boogerd noted it's at a house located just west of the Catholic Church's sanctuary. He said the electric line was bored-in in 2017. Boogerd said when it was excavated out he took a photograph of it. Boogerd said two 5 inch ducts had to be pulled back. He said the bottom of the electric duct was 9 inches above the top of the sewer. Boogerd said the issue will need to be worked out by insurance between the contractor, City and the affected homeowner.

Skaret said the homeowner submitted copies of their invoices which were forwarded to the contractor's insurance company.

Boogerd said they did not directly hit the sewer but were above it.

PEGGY MARAS REGARDING WATER BILL AT 906 GRANT STREET

Skaret said Maras was not present at the meeting. To offer background information regarding her water bill, Skaret explained Maras had about 150,000 gallons of water usage which was an excessive amount in one month.

Skaret said Water Superintendent Tony Oxborough tested Maras' water meter and found it to be about two percent faster than it should have been. He said that amounted to about 3,000 of that 150,000 gallons. Skaret said Maras was credited back on her bill for those 3,000 gallons, but she's still contesting the other 147,000 gallons.

Berkner asked how much the 147,000 gallons would cost on Maras' utility bill. City Finance Officer Deb Mitchell said it would be about \$1,800.

Berkner asked if there would also be a sewer charge on that.

Mitchell explained that amount includes water and sewer.

Thurmer asked where the water went.

Skaret said it's not exactly known.

Siepkner asked if Maras reads her water meter every month.

Mitchell said when she called Maras, Maras commented that she doesn't actually read her meter every month. Mitchell said the water usage could be over three months with for example, a toilet running or softener or something else.

Siepkner said it could have been over a year's time period.

Berkner asked if Maras is now carefully watching her water meter.

Oxborough said a new water meter was installed at Maras' residence.

Mitchell said her most recent water usage was down to a normal amount.

Oxborough added that Maras' basement floor was ripped up to install a new sewer line and floor drains. Oxborough said he didn't know if that contributed in any way to the higher usage meter reading.

Berkner asked Mitchell what the protocol has been in the past in such a case.

Mitchell said the City has always charged for the water if it's gone through the meter. She said the only thing the City has done that was decided years ago was that a large utility bill could be divided into three payments if Maras wanted to pay it over three months. Mitchell said the City has never given a refund during the years she has worked for the City.

Thurmer asked what Maras' normal water usage was.

Mitchell said it's about 3,000 to 4,000 gallons per month.

Skaret said he thinks everyone sympathizes with the situation that's a huge bill but the water went through the meter and into the house somewhere. He noted the City still has to pay for pumping the water, going through the water plant, treating the water and all the costs the City has.

Berkner asked what the City's staff recommendation would be.

Mitchell said as long as she's been employed with the City, the City has always charged as long as the water has gone through the water meter.

Siepkner noted the only thing the Utilities Commission has forgiven in the past is when a resident can prove the water hasn't gone through the sewer and the sewer charge has been forgiven.

Mitchell concurred the City has done that in the past. She said if someone has a water leak and it's outside the Water Department is sent to the residence right away to check it out.

Berkner asked for a motion pertaining to the staff's recommendation.

Siepkner said he didn't know if there was anything else the Utilities Commission could do than to follow the staff's recommendation because of the protocol that has been done in the past.

SIEPKER/SCHWARTZ moved and it was carried to follow the City's staff's recommendation to charge Peggy Maras for the approximately 147,000 gallons of water usage as read by the water meter.

Utilities Commission members voting in favor of the motion included Kevin Siepkner, Mike Schwartz and Joe Marthaler.

Utilities Commission member Mike Thurmer abstained.

ROBERT GJERTSON REGARDING SEWER BACK-UP AT 115 SVERDRUP

Gjertson explained he and his wife moved to Jackson in September to a house at 115 North Sverdrup. He said on Saturday, January 19th, they had a big wet spot in their carpet in the area of the basement floor drain. Gjertson said he had a plumber come on Monday, January 21st who ran a camera down their clean-out access and down the sewer pipe and everything looked fine. Gjertson said the plumber said he didn't think the problem was in his pipes.

Gjertson said the plumber called the City. He said the City opened up the manhole cover and found the sewer line was blocked and full of water. Gjertson said the City cleaned out the sewer line and now everything works just fine. Gjertson said the problem was not in his house. But, Gjertson said because he had two plumbers working at his house for three hours they charged him \$545 for a problem that wasn't his.

Gjertson said he was requesting relief from the City by paying or paying a portion of the \$545 he incurred from the plumbers.

Berkner asked Skaret what his opinion was on Gjertson's request.

Skaret said to his knowledge this isn't something the City has done in the past. He said everyone sympathizes with the situation but it's something the City hasn't done.

Markman explained Drain Pro contacted him. He said he pulled the manhole cover downstream from Gjertson's residence to see if there was flow. Markman said Drain Pro had their jetter running and there was water flowing down the pipe. He said he then pulled the manhole cover behind Gjertson's service which is a dead end line. He said Gjertson's home is basically the first line on the sewer line. Markman explained with Drain Pro running there jetter first he had no idea what the line looked like or if something changed. He said there was a sludgy backup in the dead end manhole but it was in the trough. He said the City ran their jetter and flushed the line and there were some fibrous type towels that shouldn't have been flushed. Markman said with other residents on the sewer line it's unknown who's they were. He said that's the unknowns of the workings of the sewer as you don't know where things came from.

Gjertson also noted their house sat empty for two years before they moved in.

Berkner asked if any other residents in that area called the City with sewer problems.

Markman said he wasn't called and as far as he knows no other residents called in.

Gjertson noted his house is at the end of the sewer line so if they started having problems you may have had a domino effect up the block. He said there's maybe a half dozen houses between their house and White Street and two of them are for sale so they aren't even occupied. Gjertson said there's not a lot of traffic in that area right now.

He said he didn't have time to look it up, but Markman said the City did their semi-annual flushes in the fall and that's a line that would have been flushed.

Skaret said in order for the City to pay the claim there should be some kind of negligence or some kind of liability on the City's part. He said he's done some research through the League of Minnesota Cities on this. Skaret said to prove negligence on the City's part, or if it was the City's fault, it has to be shown that there was a defect that caused or contributed to the backup in the City's sanitary sewer system and that the City had notice of the defect and failed to correct it within a reasonable amount of time.

Skaret said the City didn't know there was a problem. He said when the City found out there was a problem Markman was there right away.

Gjertson commented how fast Markman and City personnel arrived at the scene.

Thurmer said in the past when he was cleaning a sewer and it was discovered the problem was in the main sewer line, the City paid the bill incurred by the homeowner.

Skaret asked Mitchell if she remembers the City paying a bill for such an incident.

Mitchell said she couldn't recall that occurring in the past. She asked Thurmer if there was a specific incident he recalled that she could look up.

Thurmer said he couldn't immediately recall a specific incident.

Skaret said if that's something the City wants to do, the City really needs to develop a policy because there's probably going to be future cases like this too. He said the City needs to clearly define what the City is going to pay and what they're not going to pay.

Siepkner pointed out that Gjertson's line was cleared by the plumbers so they did provide a service to him.

Markman said the Drain Pro technician reported it was too dark to define anything in the line with a camera. He said Drain Pro then ran a snake down the sewer line to the City's sewer main.

Siepkner asked Gjertson if he had any problems with his sewer line after Drain Pro had worked on it.

Gjertson said he had no further problems.

THURMER/SIEPKNER moved and it was unanimously carried to stay with the City's policy and not to pay for Gjertson's plumbing bill.

Gjertson thanked the Utilities Commission for their time in hearing his request.

Skaret thanked Gjertson for attending the meeting.

LOREN TUSA REGARDING WATER LINE

Tusa explained he and his wife Marilyn purchased the property at 314 East Ashley in the area commonly referred to as "Erosion Hill". He explained their plans are to demolish the current house on the property and build a new house.

Tusa pointed out there is a one inch galvanized water pipe that goes to the house south of his property and then a three-quarter inch water line that feeds three other houses after that.

Tusa said when they build a new house on their property they are not going to hook up to a three-quarter inch half-filled galvanized line. He said either they will run their own water line up to their new house with the permission of the City or asked if the City was going to try and fix an issue with three or four other houses. Tusa said that's the question he had for the Utilities Commission.

Oxborough informed Tusa that his question regarding the water line has been discussed at a prior Utilities Commission meeting. Oxborough said he has put together a letter and proposal for Tusa to go and talk to his neighbors to see if any of them want to join Tusa in installing a new water service line. Oxborough said he strongly promotes having his neighbors join Tusa in installing a new water line.

Oxborough noted it's a private water line and the City will not take over the responsibility of maintaining it. He said Tusa will need to do the leg work for such a project. Oxborough informed Tusa the City will help him out if anyone has any questions. He said Tusa needs to talk to his neighbors about it.

Tusa said that would be fine especially if Oxborough has information outlining the benefits of improving the water lines that serve the homes along the area commonly referred to as “Erosion Hill”.

Oxborough said he listed the reasons for improving the line especially if there’s ever a water leak somewhere along that line.

Skaret suggested before Tusa starts to visit with neighboring property owners that he first meets with him, Oxborough and the City’s engineer Greg Mitchell to review what’s going to be proposed and that it meets specifications.

Tusa said Skaret could arrange a date for a meeting.

Berkner thanked Tusa for attending the Utilities Commission meeting.

Updates

South Highway Reconstruction Project

Skaret said bid opening will take place on Friday, February 1st on the South Highway Reconstruction Project. He said Jackson County is leading the project. Skaret said the City has quite a bit of infrastructure that will be upgraded as part of that project. He said there will be water, sewer, force main and some storm sewer work associated with it.

Berkner asked if all of South Highway will be closed for a certain amount of time or if traffic be able to travel through the construction area.

Markman said access will still be maintained to the apartment buildings and the residences along South Highway. He said the entire road won’t be open, but sections of it will be open.

Skaret noted the bid opening for the reconstruction of Lift Station Number 4 will be held on February 12th. He said all these projects are well overdue and are all part of critical infrastructure.

Boogerd added there will also be a bid opening in February for materials for this year’s underground electric conversion project.

Water Leak at the intersection of North Highway and Park Street

Schwartz commended the Water and Street Departments for a good job in repairing the water leak in the cold temperatures.

Berkner said the City crews are to be commended.

Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI)

Siepkner asked if the City Council had approved moving forward with the AMI.

Skaret reported the City Council approved moving forward in seeking bids for the AMI metering infrastructure.

Boogerd said the bids sought for AMI would be for a four year phase-in.

Siepkner asked when that project would start.

Boogerd said the deployment of the system is scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2019. He said the collectors and repeaters have to first be installed. Boogerd said the bid also will include 300 electric and 200 water meters just as a start up to the system to get things on line. He said the following three years they will be purchasing meters within the scope of the budget. Boogerd said the system will be fully completed within four years. He said AMI would first start to be deployed in the residential areas. Boogerd said he would like to have the commercial and industrial properties installed in 2020 and then subsequently finish the rest of the residential areas.

City Council Representative on the Utilities Commission

Skaret reported City Councilman Matt Madden will be the Council's representative on the Utilities Commission filling former Councilman Ken Temple's vacancy.

Skaret said the search is still on seeking another person to fill a vacancy on the Utilities Commission.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, the Utilities Commission meeting was adjourned at 4:53 p.m.

David A. Maschoff, Recording Secretary

