

**UTILITIES COMMISSION MEETING**  
**September 28, 2020**

**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 September 28, 2020 with the following persons present: Utilities Commission members Chairman Kevin Siepker, Vice-Chairman Mike Schwartz, Sandy Phillips, Mike Thurmer and Jenna 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 and Recording Secretary Dave Maschoff. (Utilities Commission members Joe Marthaler and Matt Madden were absent.) (A quorum of the Utilities Commission was present.)**

**OPEN THE MEETING**

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Chairman Kevin Siepker called the regular monthly meeting of the Utilities Commission to order. Siepker noted a quorum of the Utilities Commission was present.

**APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE JUNE 29, 2020 AND JULY 27, 2020 UTILITIES COMMISSION MEETINGS**

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Siepker asked if there were any additions or corrections to the minutes for the June 29, 2020 or July 27, 2020 Utilities Commission meetings. Hearing none, Siepker said the minutes would be approved as mailed.

**WELCOME NEW UTILITIES COMMISSION MEMBER SANDY PHILLIPS**

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Siepker welcomed Sandy Phillips as a new member of the Utilities Commission. Fellow Commission members also welcomed Phillips.

## **DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS**

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### **Electric Department**

MRES Jackson Distribution Maintenance Foreman Jeremy Boogerd reported the Electric Department installed four new lights at Dumont Park.

Boogerd said the new LED lights are street lights and have been placed at all the intersections around Dumont Park.

Boogerd noted the Electric Department has replaced 12 to 15 downtown street lights with LED lights. He said they plan to continue to replace the downtown street lights as more LED bulbs arrive. Boogerd pointed the new street light bulbs are white and bright and the street lights with kind of an orange colored light are the old bulbs which will be replaced.

Boogerd said the Electric Department completed the last bit of wreck-out along South Highway. He said there was a line that went south across a soybean field and through a gully and over a couple farm places. Boogerd said the soybeans were harvested so the Electric Department got in there to take out the poles and wire.

Boogerd said poles and wire have also been removed on Logan Avenue.

Boogerd explained there was a big sink hole near Rowe Industries on the south edge of Jackson where the earth slumped away into an old gravel pit. He said Carl Edlin filled in the sink hole and the Electric Department had to move some exposed underground electric wires. Boogerd said the sink hole was filled in and the electric wires were reinstalled.

Boogerd reported the Electric Department removed all the lights from the ice skating shack and stored them inside the skate shack. He said the poles at the old skating site will be removed and relocated to the new skating rink site along with remounting the lights on the poles.

Regarding the AMI meters, Boogerd said there are up to 475 new electric meters installed so far. He said the Electric Department has about 70 residential electric meters to be installed. Boogerd said a couple of weeks ago he ordered approximately 800 additional electric meters that will be installed throughout the winter.

Boogerd said the Electric Department completed their Phase Two underground electric project on River Street. He explained Phase One was from approximately Ashley Street to past the lift station in order to get the lift station updated. Boogerd said the Electric Department then started working from the Lift Station all the way down to the Benjamin/Gille intersection. He explained all those houses in that area have been cut over to the new underground electric system. Boogerd said currently the boring crew is working on getting up Benjamin Street. He said once the houses on Benjamin Street are cut over to the new underground system, the Electric Department will be able to take down all the old overhead electric wire on River Street and going up Benjamin. He said if time allows and the weather holds through October, the Electric Department might be able to finish off from the Benjamin/Gille intersection going west to the State Street bridge. Boogerd said hopefully they will be able to get that far depending on the weather.

Boogerd said the Electric Department has also been busy working on North Highway in connection with the street reconstruction project and also the natural gas company's relocation of their gas main. He said they have been busy with a lot of utility locates and making sure the gas line clears the crossings and things like that.

Boogerd reported the Electric Department is also finishing up the installation of new street lights on Sherman and West Streets. He said they are going to try and get a majority of the new street lights installed so when the Electric Department takes down the overhead lines along Sherman Street there is still sufficient street lighting as the old street lights poles come down and are replaced with new poles in the same spots.

Otherwise, Boogerd noted the Electric Department has been busy with regular maintenance items, meter readings and utility locates.

Siepkner noted the chore of taking meter reading will be going away pretty soon due to the AMI System.

Boogerd said the need to take meter readings is diminishing. He said a majority of the businesses have been switched over to the new AMI System. Boogerd explained those businesses were namely those that the MRES crews reads the meters every month. He said now the MRES crews don't have to read those anymore. Boogerd said the Electric Department went from having two crew members spend an entire day to read all the business meters down to currently reading about 15 meters.

Boogerd said of the remaining 15 meters, some have meter sockets that need to be changed or the business requires a meter that the Electric Department only received a small shipment of in the first phase, so more of those meters had to be ordered for the second phase. He said when those meters arrive, the remaining business meters will be replaced with the new AMI meters.

Boogerd reported 90 to 95 percent of the apartments have had their electric meters replaced with the new AMI meters. He noted there are a few houses that have been converted into apartments that haven't had their meters changed yet. However, Boogerd said all the major apartment complexes in Jackson have been converted over to the new AMI electric meters. He said that's also helped save time for the Electric Department personnel.

Boogerd noted there was a final walk-through from the 2019 underground electric project in areas that had to be seeded this spring. He said there are four small things that Castrejon needs to fix such as two driveways and two areas where grass didn't grow. Boogerd said Castrejon is hoping to be back soon. Once those items are fixed, Boogerd said he will sign-off on the project and a final pay request will be submitted to the City Council to close out those projects.

Siepkner thanked Boogerd for his report.

## **Water Department**

Water/Wastewater Superintendent Tony Oxborough reported a company that does leak detections was in Jackson and found five water leaks. He said three of them have already been repaired. He said one of those leaks was at a fire hydrant. Oxborough said the other leaks may be a service line and a water main which may have to be dug up.

Oxborough said a new well, called a pit-less unit, has been installed for the top half of Well Number 6 at the ball fields. He said the new well is being flushed, water tested and it will be sanitized before it's put back on-line.

Oxborough noted the Water Treatment Plant renovations have been completed and the final pay application will be submitted to the City Council.

Oxborough said the D.O. levels (Dissolved Oxygen) at the City's lagoon ponds are still plaguing the Water Department. He said it's the second time in the North Pond and third time in the East Pond which are primary ponds consisting of 24 acres and 26 acres respectively. He said basically there's blue-green algae in the ponds which has never occurred before.

Oxborough said the ponds are being chemically treated. He explained they are basically putting oxygen back into the water and regenerating the blue-green algae. Oxborough said he's going to keep doing that until winter arrives and the blue-green algae dies off and doesn't create an odor across the entire town. He said the Water Department has also been recirculating the water using their own generator, old lift-station pumps and a prop on the back of a tractor. Oxborough said that's been doing a great job.

As far as sewage, Oxborough reported the lagoons do not have anywhere near the amount of water in them as they did last year. He said in March of 2019, there was 48 million gallons pumped and this March there was only 24 million gallons pumped. Oxborough said that's normally the highest pumping for the year. He said just in that one month, it was only half the amount of sewage going out to the ponds as the same time a year ago. Oxborough noted we went from the two wettest years to the driest year that the City has had in a very long time. He said there was too much water released from the ponds and at the same time rainwater wasn't being accumulated as it normally would because City has also been trying to attack it's I&I (Inflow and Infiltration) problem. He's said he's not saying the City has the I&I problem figured out at this point, but it's just been a total flip-flop from wet to dry conditions.

Oxborough said the Water Department has backed off installing new AMI Water Meters. He said about 150 meters have been installed at this point. Oxborough said larger water meters are being purchased to install at the Hyline Hatchery, Hitch Doc and the hospital. He said the Water Department is going to get another group of new meters and hit it hard this winter installing meters when the Water Department has more free time.

Oxborough said the Water Department has been helping out with work on South Highway and with the North Highway construction project.

## Street Department

Street Superintendent Phil Markman reported the North Highway project is underway. He said the contractor is anticipating to start installing curb and gutter possibly on Wednesday (September 30<sup>th</sup>) from Sayles Drive up to the hill between the hospital and The Pines. Markman said the same construction crew that's doing the concrete work for the North Highway project is also contracted to do the work on the parking lot drainage for the hospital. He said the contractor actually poured concrete on September 28<sup>th</sup> for the west driveway of the hospital's main parking lot. Markman said the contractor is also going to do some residential work along North Highway as well.

Markman said the Street Department is hoping to move the warming house for the skating rink and get things hooked up to it while the weather is nice.

Markman said Svoboda Excavating dug out the area on Alice Street where a culvert had washed out and there were holes in the road. He said those repairs have been completed and the road was paved last week, curb installed where it was needed and the area around it seeded.

Markman said a valve was installed on the storm sewer line on the end of First Street. He explained the valve will be beneficial when there's flooding instead of using a neoprene plug. Markman said the Street Department has always had problems in the past with the plug blowing or getting pushed out. He said now there's an actual valve installed in the line so the valve can be shut off and it will basically protect the whole downtown. Markman said they won't have to rely on a \$300 plug to keep the downtown from flooding if the valve can be shut. He said the valve will be a lot nicer, safer and more user friendly.

Markman said the Street Department is also going to do some dirt work to extend the dike around to the west of the bathrooms so they don't have to sandbag the bathrooms because they are in a low spot. He noted in 2018 and 2017, the water went over the dike so crews had to sandbag around the bathrooms. Markman said extending the dike will hopefully alleviate the need to do that in the future.

Markman said the Street Department received delivery of their new/used Jetter Vac truck on September 22<sup>nd</sup>. He said the truck is being prepared and should be ready to be put into service within the week.

Markman said the river crossing has been completed for the sanitary sewer project that was started in 2015. He said the river has been crossed and manholes installed. He said the Petersburg service road has been rebuilt to basically a base. Markman said he's working with Bolton and Menk on when the road will be repaved. He said he didn't know if the road will be repaved this year or next year. Markman said they are just waiting now for a contractor to be contacted to bore under Highway 71 to extend the sanitary sewer line to the west to hook-up three or four places.

Markman said the Street Department has also been busy with utility locates in connection to what's all going on.

Markman reported the manhole leveling project has been completed. He said 10 manholes were completed in the downtown area. Markman said it took the company basically two days to cut out a piece from each manhole, level it, install a new manhole extension, reset the casting and cement it. He said it will smooth the areas of those 10 manholes when motorists drive downtown.

Markman said the company will also provide a demonstration and do one manhole for free to prevent I&I (inflow and infiltration). However, Markman said it's been so dry that there's no I&I running in. He said the company has a new product from a vendor that they want to demonstrate and Jackson is one of six towns they want to provide a free demonstration for. Markman said the product can be injected into the manhole and it will mix with the groundwater and seal the manhole. Markman said he wants to first get the audit of the manholes completed to see what the City has for precast verses old block manholes. He explained if there's an area of town where there's numerous old block manholes, it doesn't make any sense to do the band-aid. Markman said then it may be better to replace the manholes like was done with the slip-lining project several years ago. Markman noted there hasn't been too much done with the manholes on the east side of town which is probably the oldest part of town. He said the audit of the manholes will determine what's needed.

## **AGREEMENT FOR IMPROVEMENT AND SPECIAL ASSESSMENTS**

Skaret explained the Agreement for Improvement and Special Assessments pertains particularly to when the City is doing street reconstruction projects such as on North Highway. He noted the City is televising the main sewer lines and the sewer service lines to houses.

Skaret said if it's found that the sewer service line is in need of replacing and the homeowner is required to replace it but doesn't have the money, the City would pay for the replacement up front and then assess the cost back to the homeowner on their taxes. Skaret said City Attorney Brad Anderson worked on an agreement for those situations.

Skaret said the highlights of the proposed agreement is that the City would assess 105 percent of the cost of repair or replacement of a sewer line or it could also be used for the replacement of a water line. He explained five percent would be for the cost of the administrative and legal expenses. Skaret said the property owner would pay the special assessment in equal installments over 15 years with interest commencing on January 1<sup>st</sup> of the year following the date of the agreement at three-and-a-half percent interest annually. For example, Skaret said if it costs \$2,000 to replace the sewer service line, that would amount to about a payment of \$172 per year over 15 years.

Siepkner asked if this is an agreement that would be signed by the homeowner.

Skaret said the homeowner would sign the agreement and the agreement would be recorded at the courthouse.

Siepkner asked what if the homeowner sells the house.

Skaret said the payment of the assessment would be an item to be discussed between the person who signed the agreement and the buyer on who would pay the special assessment.

Siepkner asked if the City would be the doing the televising of the sewer lines themselves.

Skaret said the City will be televising the lines. He said the contractor has been televising the lines along the North Highway project.

Markman noted there were only 13 residents affected along the section of North Highway that is currently under construction. He said the Street Department has done some work for the contractor and the contractor said they would camera the 13 sewer lines as a trade-off for the Street Department's work.



Markman said he received a quote from Flexible Pipe for a push camera for the City. He explained the camera has a 10-inch color monitor, internal battery, battery charger and it's a color camera. Markman said it has a flex spring and push cable that goes up to 300 feet. He said the camera has a self-leveling head and a sonic head on it so the camera head can be located. Markman explained if you find an issue while operating the camera, you can determine the location of the problem on top of the ground and mark it to avoid digging up a yard more than you have to. He said the camera will also tell the operator how far up the line the camera is. Markman said the camera quote of \$8,500 will go before the City Council for consideration at their October 6<sup>th</sup> regular meeting. He said there are less expensive cameras also available, but you get what you paid for.

Markman noted there are also other cameras that are much more expensive than the camera being considered. Markman said the camera being considered is equipped to have an SD card which will allow sewer lines to be recorded so you can show someone what the problem is in the pipe. He said Flexible Pipe of Cold Spring, Minnesota will also service the camera. Markman noted Flexible Pipe is the same company the City purchased the Jetter Vac truck from. He said the City does a lot of business with Flexible Pipe and they are easy to work with.

Siepkner asked if a motion was needed to make a recommendation to the City Council.

Skaret said a motion would be needed to recommend City Council approval of the Agreement for Improvement and Special Assessments.

Thurmer asked who would be in charge of saying whether a sewer line needed to be repaired or replaced.

Markman said it would probably be himself and probably the engineer for the project. He said going forward on these projects, the City will camera all the sewer line services.

Siepkner asked what would constitute the need to fix or replace a sewer service line.

Markman said what would constitute requiring a fix would be if there was a lot of old clay pipe, a lot of roots growing in the pipe, if there's a sag in the pipeline and if there's a broken pipe causing a lot of I&I (inflow and infiltration). Markman said what the City is doing on this particular street project is that everything from the main to the right-of-way is getting new PVC. He said if there's anything that's bad from there to the house, it would be noted for repair or replacement. Markman said repairing or replacing a sewer service line will benefit the homeowner to avoid having a problem in the future.

Siepkner noted Jetter Clean can clean up a lot of root problems in the sewer line.

Markman said the roots can be cut out of a line, but they will grow back in. He noted on the North Highway street project, there wasn't a tree within 40 feet of the sewer line, but there was a root line that was running parallel to the sewer main. Markman said it was amazing that the tree roots sought the ditch for moisture.

Thurmer asked if the camera is used on the sewer service line and roots are found, who's going to determine that the line needs to be repaired or replaced.

Markman said the Street Department will let the homeowner know, but if there are tree roots going in the sewer line, obviously the roots are getting into the pipe if it's clay pipe and you'd probably want to get it fixed.

Thurmer noted he's had the sewer line cleaned out once or twice in all the years he's lived at his residence.

Markman said it would be a determination of how bad the roots are and whether the roots are separating the clay pipe.

Thurmer asked who's going to make the determination.

Markman said the video from the camera would have to be looked at and a discussion held with the homeowner. He said a determination would be made involving the homeowner, the engineer, himself and the Water/Wastewater Superintendent.

Jenna Schwartz asked about the cost of replacing a sewer service line. She asked if the cost would be about \$2,000 as was mentioned earlier in the meeting.

Skaret said the cost to replace a sewer service line will vary widely.

Markman said it will depend on who the homeowner hires as a contractor and how many feet of line will have to be replaced.

Siepkner asked if there were any more questions.

**JENNA SCHWARTZ/MIKE SCHWARTZ moved and it was unanimously carried to recommend to the City Council to approve the Agreement for Improvement and Special Assessments Template.**

Oxborough noted Minnesota Rural Water recently announced that there's extra grant money available for residents to improve their sewer service. He said that's a program that could be looked into.

Skaret also mentioned that some homeowner's insurance policies may also provide some coverage regarding the replacement of a sewer service line.

#### **CHARGE FOR CALL-OUT SEWER BACK-UPS**

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Skaret said this agenda item pertains to sewer back-ups. He explained typically the way the process should be when there's a back-up on a residential line, the resident would call City Hall and report their sewer line is backed-up. Skaret said then the City Hall would call Street Superintendent Phil Markman or whoever is on call to go out and check the City's sewer line first to make sure the City doesn't have a back-up on the City's line.

Skaret said if the City doesn't have a back-up on their sewer line, then the City would let the homeowner know that the City's line is open and the problem must be on the homeowner's service line. He said the homeowner would then call a plumber and the plumber would come to the homeowner's residence and clear the line. Skaret said most of the time the process works that way, but sometimes the City gets called back a second time by the plumber saying they can't find a blockage on the homeowner's service line and the City needs to come out and check the City's sewer line again. So, Skaret said the City then comes out a second time to check the main sewer line. He said usually, the City's sewer line is still open.

Markman said very rarely it's found that there's a back-up in the City's sewer line. He said it's happened in the past where a plumber calls the City before the plumber has even tried to snake (clear) the homeowner's sewer service line. Markman said that gets a little frustrating when you're in the middle of another project and get called away and the plumber hasn't even tried clearing the homeowner's line out first claiming the back-up is the City's fault. Markman pointed out a recent call to a home where there was a sewer line back-up. He said the City checked their sewer line and had the homeowner's neighbors run water to see if the water was flowing. He said there was no problem with the City's sewer line whatsoever. Markman said as it turned out, a camera was used and there were tree roots in the homeowner's sewer service line and the back-up had nothing to do with the City's sewer main. Although the blockage had nothing to do with the City's sewer main, Markman said the City had two City staff members at the site for overtime and call-back. He noted that costs the City money and the City gets no reimbursement for it when there wasn't any problem with the City's sewer line. Markman said that's another reason for the City to have their own camera to run down the City's sewer main to show the plumber and the homeowner that the City's main is flowing and there's no blockage in the City's line.

Siepkner asked if the past incidents have been happening with homeowners that have their own single sewer line. He noted his situation where three homes are hooked up to the same service line going to the City's main sewer line.

Markman said the situations the Street Department has experienced have been at single service lines. He said he's aware of a situation back when George Tauer was Street Superintendent where two houses shared the same sewer service line. Markman said in that case one house had no problems with the service line and the other house had a blockage. Markman said he didn't have the information on where it was determined the blockage was or who paid to clear the line.

Siepkner said shared sewer service lines may be an issue that's encountered. He asked what action was being requested from the Utilities Commission.

Skaret pointed out it's gotten routine sometimes for the plumbers to call the City back multiple times to a home because of a question about a sewer back-up. He said as Markman has mentioned, maybe the City needs to have a charge like \$100 during regular hours and \$150 after hours for the second call-back. Skaret said obviously there would be no charge for the first call to a location to check a sewer line. He said a charge for a second call-back of \$100 during regular hours and \$150 after hours would allow the City to recoup some of their costs.

Sieper asked if the plumber or the homeowner would pay the charge for a second call-back.

Phillips said the City would have to charge the homeowner.

Sieper said the plumber and homeowner would have to be informed about the charge for a second call-back.

Markman agreed.

Sieper asked if the Utilities Commission was being asked to approve a form for second call-back charges.

Skaret said the charges for second call-backs would be a recommendation from the Utilities Commission to the City Council. He said if there was a second call-back to a site due to a sewer back-up, the City would send the homeowner a bill.

Sieper noted the Street Department personnel could show the plumber and the homeowner the results of televising the main sewer line before they left the scene during the first call.

Markman said the plumber and homeowner would probably be on hand so they could be shown the results of televising the line during the City's first trip to the site of the call.

Thurmer asked if the City would use the camera every time at a call for a backed-up sewer line.

Markman said he doesn't know why they wouldn't use the camera every time. He said the City has the tool and they might as well use it. He noted some plumbers and sewer line cleaning services have their own cameras and will televise a line when they are called.

Markman noted contractors and plumbers charge to have a line televised. He said the City having its own camera will pay for itself especially considering the number of service lines that are planned to be televised during the South Street project.

Oxborough noted there are approximately 68 sewer services along South Street.

Siepkner asked for a motion.

Phillips said she would like to wait and see what happens after the City gets their camera. If the issue can be taken care of with the plumber and the homeowner by showing them what the camera shows while televising the line, Phillips said she thinks the issue of second call-backs will go away. She said why would the plumber and homeowner call the City back if they've seen the City sewer main is clear through televising the line. Phillips noted the Street Department might run into problems of second call-backs for the next month or two before the City gets a camera. Phillips said if it's only going to be a month or two or less, she doesn't know if it's worth trying to facilitate a charge.

Siepkner asked if this matter should be tabled.

Skaret said the Utilities Commission could take no action and see how things go with the City's camera.

Siepkner noted if there's still an issue with second call-backs, even with the camera, the proposal for charging a fee could be revisited.

Markman said the Street Department keeps an activity log whenever they are called out, so they will have a record if they have a second call-back due to a sewer back-up.

**PHILLIPS/JENNA SCHWARTZ moved and it was unanimously carried to table action on having the City charge for second call-backs for sewer back-ups.**

## **Other:**

### **Addresses on houses**

Mike Schwartz brought up the issue of houses that don't have their address numbers posted on them. He noted the safety factor for emergency personnel for finding the house when there's an emergency and there's no house numbers posted. He noted City Hall doesn't have an address number on it.

Schwartz suggested the City push the need for homeowners to have their house numbers displayed on their home.

Siepkner pointed out there's a City ordinance requiring house numbers be posted.

Skaret said the City recently posted a reminder on their Facebook page about the need to have house address numbers posted.

Mike Schwartz said he saw the post.

Maschoff said a reminder could maybe again be included in the monthly utility bills. He said it's a constant issue.

Markman also noted some homeowners don't use contrasting numbers that can be easily seen from the street.

### **Welcome to Sandy Phillips**

Siepkner again welcomed Sandy Phillips as a new member of the Utilities Commission.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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**With no further business, JENNA SCHWARTZ/THURMER moved and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the Utilities Commission meeting at 4:59 p.m.**

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**David A. Maschoff, Recording Secretary**

