

**CITY OF GROTON UTILITIES COMMISSION
/WATER POLLUTION CONTROL AUTHORITY
MINUTES**

October 21, 2020 10:30 a.m.
City of Groton Municipal Building
Council Chambers / Zoom

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Hedrick called the meeting to order at 10:31 a.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Chairperson Mayor Keith Hedrick (via Zoom)

Commissioners: Paul Duarte, Jeffrey Godley, Robert Zuliani

Absent: George Scully

Staff present:

Director of Utilities, Ronald A. Gaudet
Executive Administrator to the Director of Utilities, Noemi Walencewicz
Executive Administrative Assistant, Maureen French
Accounting Manager, Yi Xiang
Director of Finance, Ron Yuhas
General Manager Operations, Mark A. Biron
General Manager Customer Service, Tina Daniels (via Zoom)
General Manager Projects and Planning, Bruce Kruszewski
General Manager Key Accounts, Len Mediavilla (via Zoom)
Water Division Manager, Rick Stevens
Electric Engineering Manager, Randy Surprenant (via Zoom)
Electric Operations Manager, Vern Page (via Zoom)
Manager of Communications and Community Outreach, Dan Bouges
Utility Analytics Manager, Aaron Brooks (via Zoom)

In response to State of Connecticut Executive Order No. 7B “Protection of Public Health and Safety During Covid-19 Pandemic and Response – Further Suspension or Modification of Statutes”, dated March 14, 2020, suspending in-person open meeting requirements, all public meetings will be closed to the public at this time. Public Meetings will be televised in real time on Groton Municipal Television Channel 2 and online. If you wish to address the Commission, please call 860-446-4130 during the Public Communications part of the agenda. In addition, written communication sent to directorsoffice@grotonutilities.com by 9am on the date of the meeting will be read during this portion of the agenda.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Godley moved, **Commissioner Duarte** seconded a motion to approve the minutes of September 16, 2020.

Motion carried

3. REVIEW AND ACCEPTANCE OF TREASURER’S REPORT

Commissioner Zuliani moved, **Commissioner Duarte** seconded a motion to approve the Treasurer’s Report for the month ending September 2020.

Motion carried.

4. COMMUNICATIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE

- A. Email from Sam Spano 10-05-2020
- B. Customer Service Insert – MECA Annual Meeting
- C. Thank you from Aveline Mills
- D. Thank you from the Rotary Club
- E. Thank you from Floatchella
- F. Circular Letter #2020-71

5. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Chairperson Hedrick read the emails submitted by Sam Spano, 300 Thames St. and Bonnie Giesler, 25 Fort St.; please see attached.

6. REGIONAL WATER UPDATE

A. Poquetanuck Cove Interconnection

General Manager Biron reported the final documents and specifications for the installation of 1200' of 12" piping that crosses over Poquetanuck Cove have been received. Manager Valentini is working with Mark Decker at NPU and it is expected that DPH and the DOT will have revised documents within the next two weeks. He said he estimates this project will begin in the spring. Manager Stevens informed the Commission that this project would not be eligible for a grant, but may be eligible for the SRF (State Revolving Fund) program. He reminded the Commission that there is a signed contract and obligations have been fulfilled. Negotiations continue with NPU.

B. Drought Management update

Manager Stevens informed the Commission he has been assigned as the Municipal Drought Liaison. Manager Stevens has been reporting weekly updates to the General Manager of Operations and Director of Utilities, the Mayor and Manager of Communications and Community Outreach, Dan Bouges. He said conditions have been well communicated with *The Day* and Social Media. The Utility has been in a moderate drought, based on precipitation at 9" behind. The Utility has a dynamic plan, is in compliance and is following agency guidelines, and is overall in good shape.

Commissioner Duarte asked at which point of Stage Response would action be needed and Manager Stevens said is dictated by the DPH.

7. MONTHLY FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Manager Xiang reviewed September Monthly Financials.

Electric

Total Electric Revenue for the month of September is 1.9% over budget. Sales to Residential, Industrial and Sales for Resale exceeded the budget by 7%, 7.3% and 22.1% respectively. Commercial Sales are 10.7% below budget. For the month of September, heating degrees days are 95% more than last year and cooling degree-days were the same.

Operation & Maintenance Expenses for September are 18.5% below budget. Net Income of the month is 40.5% more than budget due to the below budget O&M Expenses.

For the month of September, customer conservation charges are \$75K and conservation expenditures are \$24K. As of September 30, 2020, \$1.5M remaining funds are available in the CLM Account.

*The current CLM Rate of \$0.0025 has not changed since January 1, 2011.

Water

Total Water Revenue for the month of September is 3.2% more than budget and 7.5% more than last year. Residential Sales and Industrial Sales exceeded the budget by 13.4% and 2.8% respectively while Commercial Sales and Sales for Resale are below budget by 3.7% and 3.8% respectively.

Operation & Maintenance Expenses for September are within budget. Net Earnings before Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) is \$160K more than budget. The favorable variance is driven by the over budget Revenue plus the delay of the DPH Consent Agreement projects.

At the end of September 2020, \$45.3M has been incurred for the Water Treatment Plant project. A total of \$44.6M has been received from DWSRF, including \$12.4M from grants and \$32.2M from loan. The Water Division Balance Sheet (line 28) reflects the restriction of \$3.4M in cash for the WTP upgrade as end of September 2020. Additional \$143K will be restricted for the collections for the first quarter of FY2021.

Sewer

Total Sewer Revenue for the month of September is 33.5% more than budget. Sales to Residential, Commercial and Industrial exceeded the budget by 13.8%, 6.1% and 53.2% respectively.

Operation and Maintenance Expenses for September are 6.2% below budget. Net Income is \$140K more than budget due to the over budget Revenue plus the under budget O&M Expenses.

8. PROJECTS / INITIATIVES UPDATE

A. COVID-19 Update

General Manager Biron said CT has bumped up to almost 3% infectivity across the state with a continued trend to favor the Eastern part of the state. He said the Governor has not mandated any closures and plans to scale back only when infectivity rate reaches 5%. Groton Utility has been fortunate to be spared of any positive cases affecting employees, but several employees have been tested. Protocols have remained in place including social distancing, continued cleanings and mask wearing.

B. Customer Service, Accounts Receivable

General Manager Daniels reported that last month average delinquency rate of receivables was sitting at about 15%. Since October 1st there have been roughly 300 Electric shutoffs between GU and BLP. That has brought delinquency rate to roughly 7%. She did an estimate to determine how much guaranteed money will be coming in from social service assistance programs such as TVCCA and Town of Groton, and estimates roughly \$194,000.00 will be paid to GU from those programs. When that is received, it would drop the delinquency rate to 4.8 or 5%.

Commissioner Zuliani asked if the delinquency rate dropped from 15%-7% because we went unpaid. General Manager Daniels clarified that once service was disconnected, payment was received from the customer.

C. Water Filtration Plant Project Commissioning Update

Manger Stevens informed the Commission about the extreme emergence of eels during the 30 day testing period of the new WTP. The plant needed to be shut down and fallback to the old plant until the problem could be rectified. There were no violations, reports were filed and quality maintained. All equipment was cleaned out, lights have since been installed both above ground and under water, and a new plan to build a multi-barrier approach to eels will be put in place. It was determined that the eels follow the flow of water. Due to the drought the eels cannot exit over the spillway, and followed the flow of

water to the plant. . Manager Stevens shared a schematic of the multi-barrier eel protective system, which includes multiple layers of screens that has been planned and will be installed. DEEP has been called in and they concur with the plan.

Commissioner Duarte asked if any fish hazardous to the eels could be brought in. Manager Stevens said that would be environmentally hazardous, and that eels are also DEEP protected.

Commissioner Zuliani indicated that this issue was not anticipated and asked if would be considered a design flaw of the plant. Manager Stevens said that modifications to the low lift pump were planned to come at a later time. He asked if the cost would fall into the contingency. Director Gaudet said the Low Lift Pump Station and the eel screens would come before the Commission as a new project. Manager Stevens said that because the old plant was not as sophisticated, this issue had not occurred previously. He assured that customers would continue to receive the highest quality of water.

Chairperson Hedrick asked if measures could be taken to prevent cavitation of pumps. Manager Stevens said there should not be any issues. He asked if we start over from day one in the testing process or do we start from where we left off. Manager Stevens said he could not determine, and DPH would have to approve but would possibly request to pick up to continue for remainder of the 21 days of testing.

- D. Update on various projects – General Manager Biron provided the Commission with updates on completed projects: UConn Avery Point lighting project, the 340 Line on Rainville Ave. (4 pole replacement), West Side Middle School, a long term project of 15kV transformer installation on Laurelwood, work at Groton Regency, and Grasso Tech. he added updates that the Thomas Road Underground Cable has been determined to contain asbestos so that project will be outsourced and will have to go out to bid. He said the Sewer Underground Tanks has gone to city Subcommittee for approval and plan to start that project in November. General Manager Kruszewski informed the Commission on the Progress on the Transmission Project and the new line feed to the new EB substation.

- E. Software Assessment –

General Manager Blanchette informed the Commission that GU has been reviewing the features and functionality of the financial and utility billing program. The Utility is currently in the process of contracting with a third party vendor to determine where improvements, efficiencies, or changes to internal processes can be made. This is budgeted, it is in the Strategic Plan, and we will work with the vendor to determine how we move forward to improve. The Commission will be updated as this progresses.

- F. PCB Soil Update

General Manager Biron said approval was granted from the EPA on the stockpile of soil. All the good soil has been used. There is about 22 yards of contaminated soil that needs to be disposed of. There was a plan to have a Rhode Island facility take it but they are unable to so an alternate facility needs to be determined.

9. **OLD BUSINESS**

- A. WWTP odor update

General Manager Biron informed the Commission of the latest updates regarding the Waste Water Treatment Plant odor issue. There were some minor leaks found in the building at the WWTP. A roofing company has come in to repair. Chief Plant Operator Joe Pratt has contacted operational personnel at Pfizer and EB. Sewage was being held in holding tanks at both locations. They have agreed to flush more often. They are both interested in learning about using Bioxide and Joe Pratt is working with them. Continual monitoring of the stack for odors is not presenting positive

results. Any hydrogen sulfide has been a momentary issue. The Utility continues to work on it but we have not found the source.

Chairperson Hedrick asked that both Mr. Spano and Ms. Giesler be kept informed.

Commissioner Zuliani said he stopped by the plant and he did detect a minor odor. He continued to the street, but did not recognize it in the community.

General Manger Biron said he will check to be sure the correct instrumentation was used at Mr. Spano's house. He also said the carbon filters in manhole covers were installed last month. The Utility is not giving up on getting to the source of the issue.

10. NEW BUSINESS

None

11. ACTION ITEMS

A. GUC-WPCA 20-10-39 Consideration of and action to authorize Groton Utilities management to contribute up to One Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$150,000.00) to the Neighborhood Assistance Act (NAA) Program in return for matching tax credits, pending approval from the State of Connecticut, and furthermore that the City Council be apprised of this action with the recommendation that it concur

Commissioner Godley moved, **Commissioner Duarte** seconded that the Groton Utilities Commission / Water Pollution Control Authority approve Action Item GUC-WPCA 20-10-39.

Manager of Communications and Community Outreach Bouges explained that three different non-profits would benefit from this program. GU will support Avery-Copp House Museum for the purchase of mini splits; Bill Memorial Library for the full amount to replace all lighting with LED lights, and Sacred Heart School for partial amounts for second floor mini splits, LED lighting in their parking lot, energy efficient water heater and an energy efficient auto scrubber and extractor. The amounts they receive must be approved by the State of CT and are a tax credit to Groton Utilities.

Motion Carried.

B. GUC-WPCA 20-10-40 Consideration of and action to authorize Management to contribute up to Five Hundred Thousand Dollars and No Cents (\$500,000.00) to Mystic River Homes, Incorporated, towards the development of the Mystic River Homes Congregate in return for matching tax credits as part of the State of Connecticut's Housing Tax Credit Contribution (HTCC) program, and furthermore that the City Council be apprised of this action with the recommendation that it concur

Commissioner Godley moved, **Commissioner Zuliani** seconded that the Groton Utilities Commission / Water Pollution Control Authority approve Action Item GUC-WPCA 20-10-40.

Manager of Communications and Community Outreach Bouges explained this request was made and will be a tax credit to the Utility.

Motion Carried.

12. STRATEGIC PLANNING

A. Review mission, values, priorities

Director Gaudet reviewed the Missions Values, and Priorities with the Commission. The Director will share with the Strategic Planning Team.

B. Commission Level Goals

Director Gaudet presented the four proposed Commission Goals. They were asked for suggestions and asked for input. The Commission expressed emphasis on Commission Education, a Governance Plan and a travel policy. Director Gaudet thanked them for their input and said it will be considered in the final draft.

13. EXECUTIVE SESSION

None

14. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, at 12:21 p.m., **Commissioner Godley** moved, **Commissioner Duarte** seconded a motion to adjourn.

Motion Carried.

Attest:

Paul Duarte
Clerk

Sam Spano 300 Thames St UC meeting 10/21/20

The odor situation since the last 9/16/20 UC meeting has remained basically the same. The only positive difference being is that there has been no rotten egg smell due to hydrogen sulfide gas since the Thurs 8/20/20 incident which was the worst to date. Still no explanation from GU for what happened that day.

Odor days since the 9/16/20 UC meeting. Wed 9/30, Thurs 10/1, Sat 10/3, Sun 10/4, Wed 10/7, Sat 10/10 and Wed 10/14. Again, there may have been more odor days but I only detect it when the wind is blowing from the South West over the plant and towards my house. The Thurs 10/1 event was a particularly bad raw sewage odor and this ties only with Sat 9/5 as the second worst odor day to date. I believe the 9/30, 10/1, 10/3 and 10/4 events were related. These incidents were reported directly to Director Gaudet. See email Spano/Gaudet 10/5/19.

I made a point to Director Gaudet in the above referenced email and I would like to make it again. I believe these odors are coming from somewhere High Up in the plant. They somehow get into the air stream OVER the plant and then are carried to my property which has an elevation approx. 20 feet higher than ground level at the plant. This is providing there is a SW wind that particular day. As a result odors detected at my elevation both in the front and rear of my house may not necessarily be detected at the plant or even on Thames St which is slightly higher than the plant.

The odor problems have now been going on for over 15 months. Not only has this caused me respiratory health related problems but I believe it has hurt my property value and also degrades the whole neighborhood.

I watched the televised the 9/16/20 UC meeting very closely. I was very disappointed as to the direction this meeting went. This basically being that everyone at GU is doing a great job and I am the only one complaining.

I also take offense and feel somewhat betrayed at the what the the chairperson said in regards to myself since my name was mentioned more than once by him. Basically to sum this up: While there had apparently been a couple of other legitimate complaints submitted by other individuals, these were not read nor considered relevant due to in his "opinion" these had been "solicited" by me.

In addition he said I "need to stop" calling around to GU personal and demanded I only call GU customer service with my complaints. I have tried this new procedure and it is very tedious. First being asked if I want to make a payment, please have my credit card information available etc. then press number 2 to talk to an operator. I then have to go thru my whole identity process each time and then explain what the issue for the call is to someone who has no clue as to the history of the problems. This is very inefficient particularly during regular business hours and precious time is wasted when an actual odor event is taking place in real time.

I would like to remind the chairperson that I had originally come in him in his position as mayor to ask for his help on 10/15/19. This was after getting no where trying with GU upper management for three months straight. At this meeting I presented him with a letter from my pulmonary physician dated 9/5/19 describing how my respiratory condition had been exacerbated by the fumes coming from the plant. At the conclusion of this meeting he then asked me if I could attend the next days UC meeting on 10/16/16 to explain to the commission about the odor problems.

This was now more than a year ago. While I believe that GU is trying, it is disappointing to me that much of the progress at the plant has been because of me pointing out at these meetings or thru other correspondence, what should have been basic procedure done by the operators at the plant all along. For example: Regularly scheduled cleaning of all tanks, Using a vent hose on the pump trucks, Regular every day use of chlorine tabs in the scrubber. I would also like to point out that it also was me who first noticed, while on a tour of the plant, that the gas alarm and detection system in the methane burner room was unplugged and apparently not working at all for who knows how long?? While this does not affect the odor issue it is a major safety violation. How could something like this have gone unnoticed by the current operators?

One thing that was mentioned at the 9/16 meeting was new odors at the beach this past summer. I believe these are coming from the pump station down there. This station regularly stinks. Complaints about this have been attributed to seaweed by GU.

Another thing I would like to clarify. The orange air monitors put on my front porch in 2019 by GU were I believe manufactured by Industrial Scientific. It is my understanding that these were of a type designed for concentrated gas found in manholes and not open air. It is no wonder there were not more positive readings due to the dilution factor in open air. Also I do not believe the one day that did show a high CO reading was due to trucks going by. There are very few trucks on Thames Street with the exception of the waste pump trucks.

One last point. Also mentioned at the meeting was the issue from about six or so years ago of the buckled primary tank covers. I am very much aware of this since I worked very closely with then chief plant operator Kevin Cini to identify and correct this problem. At the time I also had a good talk with then interim GU Director Banshee about this issue. Director Banshee was instrumental in getting funding approved thru city council to get the new covers. It should be noted that after these covers were replaced there had been no more odor issues until 7/8/19.

Again I Thank the Commissioners for Your Help in Advance.

UC Meeting 10/21/20

Bonnie M. Giesler

25 Fort Street

I would like to bring to everyone's attention that an email I sent on August 25, 2020, was not read at the UC meeting of 9/16 2020. It occurred when the chairperson deferred the emails regarding the WPCA meeting to old business. At which time, instead of reading the email the chairperson accused me of being solicited by my neighbor to write the email. That is a complete lie. Anyone that knows me, knows I'm a woman who couldn't be solicited by anyone.

On Thursday, August 20, 2020, I smelled an odor that smelled like rotten eggs. Being concerned, I went into the house and googled it. What I found was unsettling. I sent an email to find out what was going on. I've not really gotten an answer.

I don't care if the chairperson tours the plant and checks everything out. He doesn't live here, and he doesn't smell the odors we do. I have communicated with some mosque members, and they are bothered by the odors and dirty water.

So, I would request instead of the chairperson criticizing me; the commission truly investigate the problem. This is just like the rat problem, which I've been handling for over four years. Now the electric boat is the scapegoat for both?

If the chairperson doesn't want to read emails sent to him, perhaps he should give the position to someone else.

I am annoyed by the chairperson criticizing me on social media and now at a city meeting that has been videotaped.

Thank you for your time.

BB Giesler