

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

July 15, 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 10:30 a.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Chairperson Mayor Keith Hedrick

Commissioners: Paul Duarte, Jeffrey Godley, George Scully, Robert Zuliani

Staff present: Director of Utilities Ronald A. Gaudet
Executive Administrator to the Director of Utilities, Noemi Walencewicz
Executive Administrative Assistant Maureen French
General Manager-Operations Mark A. Biron (via Zoom)
General Manager-Key Accounts Leonard J. Mediavilla
General Manager-Information Technology Sue Blanchette (via Zoom)
General Manager- Customer Service Tina Daniels (via Zoom)
City Finance Director Ronald Yuhas
Accounting Manager Yi Xiang
Engineering Manager Randall Surprenant
Manager of Communications and Community Outreach Dan Bouges (via Zoom)
Chief Plant Operator PAF Joe Pratt (via Zoom)
Director of Finance Ron Yuhas
Manager Water Division Rick Stevens

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 Statues”, 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 Duarte moved, **Commissioner Scully** seconded a motion to approve the minutes of June 17, 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 June 2020.

Motion carried.

4. COMMUNICATIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Two items were received for Correspondence in June. The first was an email dated June 22, 2020 addressed to Chief Plant Operator of the PAF, Joe Pratt, from Iliana Raffa with the State of Connecticut regarding the Nitrogen Credit Exchange Program; and the second was a Thank You note from the Thames River Heritage Park for the Groton Utilities \$10,000.00 Conservator Level Sponsorship.

5. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Chairperson Hedrick read the received email communication from Sam Spano, 300 Thames Street. Please see attached.

6. REGIONAL WATER UPDATE

There was no update.

7. MONTHLY FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Accounting Manager Xiang shared a very high level financial highlights report and noted that the financial reports would not be final until the audit is complete. The commissioners did not require any clarification of the Financial Highlights package.

8. PROJECTS / INITIATIVES UPDATE

A. Operational Update – COVID-19/ Cancellation of City Day

General Manager Biron provided the Commission with the current statistical data regarding hospitalizations due to COVID-19. He reported that all operational staff are back to work as scheduled, with a group of linemen still working in the Bozrah territory. There is continued use of the COVID visitor questionnaire and continued increase of cleaning. Chairperson Hedrick reminded the Commission that the buildings and customer service desk are still closed to the public.

Chairperson Hedrick confirmed that City Day, held the first Friday of August, is canceled due to being unable to social distance, but will be held next year. Additionally, applications for the Jacqueline B. Nixon Award have been received and the award will be postponed.

At 10:47 am the meeting paused for technical difficulties and resumed at 10:49 am.

B. Customer Service

1. Accounts Receivable - General Manager Daniels noted that we are about 5-8% outstanding in customer payment. Chairperson Hedrick asked if we are similar to the figures of this time last year. General Manager Daniels confirmed that they are, and to remind the Commission that the percentage varies because of the number of billing cycles per month. General Manager Daniels said she has assigned an additional representative to assist with reaching out to customers to assist with payment arrangements.

9. OLD BUSINESS

A. PAF odor update

General Manger Biron reported that two engineers from Hazen and Sawyer visited the PAF and submitted their findings. They said the PAF appears to be well operated, clean, and well maintained. They said any odor release would deem more likely a limitation of existing

infrastructure and not related to operational procedure. General Manager Biron recognized the frustration of Mr. Spano as the Utility has not been able to identify the problem. The report did offer some action items, and said that any suggestions from the engineering firm would be explored. Mr. Spano is notified when routine operations are scheduled. Chief Plant Operator Pratt was on the meeting line and spoke of his teams efforts. He said the PAF staff works 8 hours a day and relies on the alarm system the other 16 hours a day. He said there is no evolution on weekends. He informed the commission on the progress with attempts to identifying the cause of the reported odor issue. He said additional ports were installed so hydrogen sulfite could be monitored as well as the wind direction; for two weeks, there has been no issue. A weather station has been installed to monitor the wind. Daily odor observation has been monitored and has also been uneventful. Hazen and Sawyer engineers suggested use of a chemical to treat the sewer, that is now being used and Evoqua is monitoring. Chief Plant Operator said a suggestion of the engineering company is to cover the plant, but if that were to happen, it would require an engineering study. All the maintenance that needs to be done has been done. Another vapor link could be installed, and Management is looking into that. General Manager Biron verified that each time a complaint has come in; staff has investigated and has attempted to correlate the odor with plant evolutions or with weather. He added that Management has taken the issue seriously, and repeated the engineering firm said the plant was well operated.

Commissioner Zuliani asked if Mr. Spano is the only resident who has complained, and that was confirmed by the Utility and by the Mayor's Office. The Commission was informed of the location of Mr. Spano's residence in relation to the PAF. Chairperson Hedrick requested a trend analysis as some of the complaints have come in off hours when there is no processing happening. Commissioner Duarte said there is an air quality station behind Hubbard House that may be able to offer some supporting information. General Manager Biron said he would look into it.

10. NEW BUSINESS

A. 2021 Meeting Schedule for review

The 2021 proposed meeting schedule was sent to the Commission; the Commissioners had no changes

11. ACTION ITEMS

A. GUC-WPCA-20-07-29 Consideration of and action to authorize Groton Utilities management to provisionally approve Change Order No. 17 from R. H. White Construction Company, Incorporated, 41 Central Street, Auburn, Massachusetts for Water Treatment Plant Mechanical Equipment Relocation, a Water Meter Credit, Vacuum Prime Control Valve Power Supply, Chemical Metering Pump Diaphragm Leak Detectors, Parco Control Panel Power Supply & Panel Alterations, Additional Valves not listed on the Valve Schedules, FRP Grating Credit and Air Scour Blower Feed Alteration, as part of the State of Connecticut, Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) Project No. 2013-0140, pending final approval by the State of Connecticut, Department of Public Health (DPH) in an amount not to exceed Forty Six Thousand Six Hundred Eleven Dollars and Fifty Four Cents (\$46,611.54), and furthermore that the City Council be apprised of this action with the recommendation that it concur and Mayor Keith Hedrick be authorized to execute the Change Order No. 17 upon final approval by the State of Connecticut DPH

Director Gaudet explained the change order is for several miscellaneous credits and charges. It is a mix of item, and nothing extreme was included. Commissioner Godley asked about the issue with the PCBs.

General Manager Biron gave an update on the progress with the PCBs. DPH and EPA has granted approval to move ahead. There has been a tremendous amount of sampling. He commended Manager Valentini and Environmental Partners for working through the issue with DPH, EPA, and DEEP. It is moving along and progress is being made.

Commissioner Godley asked if there would be any additional expense in relation to the PCBs. Director Gaudet explained the recent additional expense that came before the Commission last month was the cost approved for the engineering firm. Going forward, as the soil gets tested it will depend if the soil can be used or if it is contaminated. Currently, the additional expense is related to testing and consulting services.

Commissioner Godley moved, **Commissioner Scully** seconded that the Groton Utilities Commission / Water Pollution Control Authority approve Action Item GUC-WPCA-20-07-29.

Motion Carried.

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION

None

13. RECESS

Chairperson Hedrick called for a recess at 11:43 a.m. for lunch and the GUC/WPCA meeting proceeded at 12:25 p.m.

14. STRATEGIC PLANNING

The third session of the 2020 Strategic Plan with outside consultant, Tim Blodgett, of Hometown Connections, Groton Utility Commissioners and GU Staff took place for the remainder of the meeting. The following staff were present: Commissioners Hedrick, Duarte, Godley, Scully and Zuliani; Director Gaudet; General Managers Biron, Blanchette, Daniels and Mediavilla; Managers Xiang, Ouimet, Siano, Fleury, Bouges, Dietrich and Surprenant; and Executive Admins French and Walencewicz.

The Commission commended the Groton Utilities' staff for their hard work and progress with the Strategic Plan to this point.

15. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, at 1:57 p.m., **Commissioner Godley** moved, **Commissioner Scully** seconded a motion to adjourn.

Motion Carried.

Attest:

Paul Duarte
Clerk

Sam Spano 300 Thames Street

Unfortunately there has been no improvement in the odor situation at the WPCA since the June 17 2020 UC Meeting. In fact things have gotten worse. This could have been anticipated since the weather has gotten warmer.

Odor days since days since the 6/17 meeting - Thurs 6/25, Sat 6/27, Wed 7/1, Wed 7/8, Thurs 7/9 Sat 7/11, Sun 7/12, Mon 7/13 and Tues 7/14. The 6/25 date was due to primary tank #1 being cleaned. While the cleaning is a good thing, I have asked the current chief plant operator to inform me prior to any maintenance being done which will exacerbate odors so I can close windows and reverse my fans to blow outward.

I have not been given an explanation as to the odor cause for the other eight days.

Please note that on the above odor days the wind was blowing from the South West over the plant and directly towards my house. I suspect that there actually have been more odor days than those listed above. Depending on the wind direction, I have also smelled odors from the plant at the Fort Griswold Park (ferry landing)to the North of the plant and the Thames View Park to the South and on Thames St itself.

As stated at in my letter for the 6/17/20 meeting I am seeing a pattern in the odor days. May odor days were Fri 5/8, Sat 5/9, Sun 5/10 and Thurs 5/14. June odor days were Mon 6/8, Fri 6/12, Sat 6/13 and Sun 6/14.

I request that the General Mgr.of Operations look into whether or not there actually is a pattern going on here?

It is my understanding that there has been a report done by an outside engineering firm on the WPCA. One thing called out was the scrubber. This makes some sense to me since it is tall and output from this might get high enough in the air to produce the odors I am experiencing at my house. I also understand that while an air monitor has been put on the stack intermittently there has not been one in place there 24/7 because the proper one is not available at the plant.

I request that GU Management procure one immediately so this potential problem can be fully investigated.

We just passed the one year anniversary of the current odor problems which began on 7/8/19. Frankly I am getting fed up with the lack of progress on this issue. I am also tired of hearing excuses like the odors could be coming downstream from EB or Pfizer or that this is typical of any waste water plant or that the plant has always smelled.

Let me be clear. The current odor problems started last year. After living across from the plant for 26 years I can say for certain- While we may have had intermittent odor problems in the past, before last

year, the causes were always identified by the prior chief plant operator, fixed immediately and the odor went away.

There has has never been an ongoing and continuous odor problem like experienced in the past year.

Again I Thank the Commissioners for your Help in Advance