

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

February 16, 2022 10:30 a.m.
Council Chambers

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Hedrick called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Chairperson Mayor Keith Hedrick

Commissioners: Jeffrey Godley (via Zoom), George Mathanool, 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
General Manager Projects & Planning, Bruce Kruszewski
General Manager Customer Service, Tina Daniels
General Manager Information Technology, Sue Blanchette
General Manager Key Accounts, Len Mediavilla
Associate General Manager Key Accounts, Aaron Brooks
Manager of Communications and Community Outreach, Dan Bouges
Environmental Engineer, Kelsey Haughey
Manager of Electric Engineering, Randall Surprenant
Manager Water/Wastewater, Richard Stevens
Manager of Water Engineering, Ray Valentini
Water Foreman, Mauricio Duarte
Wastewater CPO, Joseph Pratt
Project Manager, Joshua Rehrig
Director of Finance, Ron Yuhas
Accounting Manager, Yi Xiang

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Zuliani moved, **Commissioner Scully** seconded a motion to approve the minutes of January 19, 2022.

Motion carried.

3. REVIEW AND ACCEPTANCE OF TREASURER'S REPORT

Commissioner Zuliani moved, **Commissioner Scully** seconded a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report for the month ending January 2022.

Motion carried.

4. COMMUNICATIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE

- A. Email from Sheila Fuller regarding Tri Town Trails
- B. Thank you from customer
- C. 2020 Water Fluoridation Quality Award

5. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

- A. Joellen Anderson – 215 Plant Street, Groton – Addressed the Commissioners with some of her observations and said she would encourage them to see how the public is utilizing the Copp and

dog park property. She informed everyone that March 22, 2022 is World Water Day and May 2-8, 2022 is National Drinking Water Week. She also said it was important to note it is the 50th anniversary for the Clean Water Act. She concluded, adding that Groton Utilities does a great job of providing clean water.

Chairperson Hedrick stated no decision has been made about opening reservoir property. Currently options are being reviewed, and a study is being conducted. Once the study is complete, a meeting will be scheduled.

B. Sam Spano – 300 Thames Street, Groton – email dated February 15, 2022, is attached

7. REGIONAL WATER UPDATE

A. Poquetanuck Cove Interconnection – Manager Valentini reported that there is no time frame on approvals from the submittals. He added that pipe supply will be the biggest challenge for delivery given supply chain issues.

8. MONTHLY FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Manager Xiang reviewed January Monthly Financials.

Electric

Total Electric Revenue for the month of January is 2.8% more than budget, slightly less than last January by \$40K. The positive variance is driven by Industrial Sales which exceeds the budget by 11.1%.

Operation & Maintenance Expenses for January are 8.2% below budget. Net Income for the month is \$190K less than budget. The unfavorable variance of Net Income is driven by over budget Power Costs offset by over budget Revenues and below budget O&M Expenses.

Commissioner Zuliani inquired about the purchasing power variance. Manager Xiang stated there is more volume on the industrial side and the billing cycle.

For the month of January, customer conservation charges are \$85K and conservation expenditures are \$62K. As of January 31, 2022, \$2.1M remaining funds are available in the conservation account. *The current CLM Rate of \$0.0025 per KWh has not changed since January 1, 2011.

Water

Total Water Revenue for the month of January is 3.9% less than budget and 13.1% less than last year. The negative variance is driven by Sales for Resales which is below budget by 39.4%.

Operation & Maintenance Expenses for January are 9.4% below the budget and Depreciation Expense is 50.5% below the budget due to the delay of the WTP project. Net Earnings before Drinking Water State Revolving Fund grants (DWSRF) is \$234K more than budget. The favorable variance is driven by below budget O&M Expenses and the delay of the WTP project offset by below budget Revenues.

At the end of January 2022, \$53.9M has been incurred for the Water Treatment Plant project including \$14.9M applied for Grant portion and \$39M applied for Loan portion. The final payment request for the WTP project was submitted to DPH and the Project Loan Obligation will be closed by February 28, 2022.

Commissioner Zuliani asked when the plant will begin to be capitalized. Manager Xiang stated once the asset is put into service capitalization will begin.

Sewer

Total Sewer Revenue for the month of January is 5.8% more than budget and 21.5% less than last January. The positive variance is driven by Industrial Sales which is 8% more than budget.

Operation and Maintenance Expenses for January are 11.7% below the budget and Net Income is \$56K more than the budget. The favorable variance of Net Income is driven over budget Revenues plus below budget O&M Expenses.

9. PROJECTS / INITIATIVES UPDATE

- A. Safety Moment – General Manager Biron introduced “The Safety Moment” to the Commission and explained that the goal is to implement a safety moment in every meeting. He said there have been a few issues with proper lifting, and the topic has impact across Operations. He explained the recommendations for proper lifting techniques, and noted that when lifting it is best to keep the load close to the body, and said it is best to lift with the legs and not with the back to avoid injury.
- B. Customer Service, Accounts Receivable – General Manager Daniels stated Accounts Receivable is holding steady, back to normal aging.
Chairperson Hedrick recommended removing this update off of the agenda. The Commissioners were in agreement. General Manager Daniels promised that the Commission will be kept informed of anything important.
- C. Water Filtration Plant Project Closeout Update – Manager Valentini informed the Commission that the State is reviewing about 35 boxes of records. There is an itemized spreadsheet of the list of items to be fixed, and those items are being worked on. Chairperson Hedrick stated that he signed several documents for the loan; obligating payments until 2041. He also has requested the Utility to provide a training to educate consumers of water; through the whole cycle from the reservoir to tap; and from drain back into the Thames.
- D. Projects Update
Transmission – Manager Surprenant updated the Commission on the progress of the Transmission Project; he said vegetation has been completed, tree clearing is just about completed, and about 50% of the drilling has been completed. Management is working with Eversource scheduling to identify GU’s need for outages.
Commissioner Scully commented that two lines have to be available. Manager Surprenant confirmed as it will be more robust.

Director Gaudet wanted to update the Commission on the Technology and Process Assessment. The Springbrook upgrade is a giant, ongoing endeavor with hopes to cut over within the next month. Key Accounts and Information Technology are working with the meter system vendor to pull into the system. The holdup is on the vendor’s side. Management is obtaining a quote from CityWorks (extension of Trimble GIS system) for a work order and asset management system. Public Works will also budget funds for this.

10. OLD BUSINESS

- A. WWTF Odor Update – General Manager Biron explained that there were some equipment failures at the Waste Water Facility Plant within a short span of time, and gasses were able to escape during that time. Wastewater CPO Pratt described the equipment failure in detail, and said corrective action was taken immediately. He continued to say that needed parts are difficult to obtain, but they are all ordered. Chairperson Hedrick reminded the Commission there are real supply chain

issues, long lead times, and high prices. He commended the WWTF staff for their continued efforts.

- B. Tri Town Trail Association – Manager Stevens reported that SLR, the consultant hired by Groton Utilities, is working on financial, mechanical, and permitting processes, for the trail. All data requested from Groton Utilities has been forwarded to SLR, Management is awaiting their findings. Chairperson Hedrick stated he is not ready to bring this item to the COG until the expectations and restrictions are determined.

Commissioner Zuliani said he is looking forward to the findings and would like to walk the whole trail to have a better understanding of the request from Tri Town Trails for opening the reservoir. Manager Stevens said that a walk could be arranged.

- C. Purchasing Policy – General Manager Blanchette commented on the Draft Schedule of Authorizations included in the package. Language in the policy was reviewed to ensure it complies with the City Charter. A full draft of the policy should be ready for review at next GUC-WPCA Meeting. Commissioners discussed, and agreed to add the schedule of authorizations to the policy. Language regarding Emergency Purchasing is included in the new policy. Chairperson Hedrick said supply chain issues do not seem to be improving, and will most likely not improve any time soon.

- D. Project Tracking – Project Manager Rehrig presented the Commission with the project tracking sheet for the Transmission Line approved project. The tracking sheet goes along with the proposed purchasing policy and uses a red light green light model. According to the policy, expenditures, schedule, and scope, would all be tracked after the capital project is approved to keep the Commission informed of progress and spending.

10. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Wastewater Treatment Facility Presentation – Wastewater CPO Pratt presented the Commission with a PowerPoint presentation of the Wastewater Treatment Facility operations. The Commission was pleased with the presentation and explanations provided. CPO Pratt informed the Commission on how the Nitrogen credit is awarded and what the license certification requirements for the department are. The Commission was reminded that if they wish to tour, the Wastewater Treatment Facility or the new Water Treatment Plant, Management can arrange.

12. ACTION ITEMS

- A. **GUC-WPCA 22-02-04** Consideration of and action to authorize Groton Utilities Management to issue a purchase order to Phasor Engineering Services, 14 Industrial Park Place, Middletown, Connecticut, preferred vendor, for an amount not to exceed One Hundred Seventy Four Thousand One Hundred Eight Dollars and No Cents (\$174,108.00) including a ten percent (10%) contingency, for materials and testing of the 1X transformer to be paid from the Transmission Lines 1410/1280/400/Buddington Substation FY 2022 Bond Fund Project, and furthermore that the City Council be apprised of this action with the recommendation that it concur

Commissioner Mathanool moved, **Commissioner Zuliani** seconded that the Groton Utilities Commission / Water Pollution Control Authority approve Action Item GUC-WPCA 22-02-04.

Manager Surprenant explained this is a terminal upgrade at Buddington to accommodate new transmission line.

Motion Carried.

Chairperson Hedrick asked for a motion to suspend the rules to amend the agenda to add action item GUC-WPCA 22-04-05.

Commissioner Zuliani moved, **Commissioner Scully** seconded the motion to suspend the rules to amend the agenda to add GUC-WPCA 22-02-05.

Motion Carried.

B. **GUC-WPCA 22-02-05** Consideration of and action to authorize Groton Utilities Management to issue a purchase order to GrayBar, 80 Pepsi Road, Manchester, New Hampshire not exceed Two Hundred Thirty Five Thousand Eight Hundred Sixty Five Dollars and Ninety Nine Cents (\$235,865.99) to purchase pole mounted capacitors and reclosers to be paid from FY22 Bond Fund Project and furthermore that the City Council be apprised of this action with the recommendation that it concur

Commissioner Scully moved, **Commissioner Mathanool** seconded that the Groton Utilities Commission / Water Pollution Control Authority approve Action Item GUC-WPCA 22-02-05.

General Manager Kruszewski stated this quote has been in the works for almost three months. The quote was received on Friday, February 11, 2022 and expires Sunday, February 20, 2022. Due to price escalation and delays and Groton's credit rating with GrayBar this will be a pass-through purchase to Bozrah.

Motion Carried.

13. EXECUTIVE SESSION

None

14. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, at 12:25 p.m. **Commissioner Scully** moved, **Commissioner Mathanool** seconded a motion to adjourn.

Motion carried.

Attest:

Keith Hedrick
Chairperson

From: sam spano <syclonesam@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 15, 2022 1:55 PM
To: Director's Office <directorsoffice@grotonutilities.com>
Subject: UC Meeting 2/16/22

Sam Spano 300 Thames St

There have been three odor days since the last UC meeting on 1/19/22. These were Wed 1/19/22, Thurs 1/20/22 and Sunday 1/23/22.

The Wed 1/19 thru Thurs 1/20 problem can best be described as a Major Event and due to multiple mechanical/systems failures resulted in the direct release of Digester Gas into the atmosphere for more than 24 hours. (See email Spano/Gaudet 1/21/22). It was called into GU customer service.

Normally this time of year all Digester Gas should be funneled to the plant furnace to be burned off to heat the facility buildings and tanks. Should there be any failure in the system it should then be automatically funneled to the Evoqua Automated Torch to be burned off rather than directly released due to excess pressure.

Here is my understanding as to what happened as it was explained to me. Sometime Wed 1/19 the fuel pump to the furnace failed. There was also a solenoid failure. As a result the furnace stopped working and due to the solenoid failure the gas was not shuttled to the torch. Even if this system had correctly worked, the transformer on the torch had apparently also failed, so the torch would not automatically ignite. As a result the gas was released into the atmosphere and hung in the air since it was basically windless at that time.

Sometime midday Thurs 1/20 the torch had to be manually lit to start burning off the gas and it burned thru out the night. Sometime Thurs/Friday the fuel pump and solenoid were replaced. As of last week the torch transformer had not yet been replaced. As to whether this has now been fixed or not yet, perhaps GU management can advise as to the current status? Without the transformer the torch will not automatically light and can only function if manually lit thus risking a similar event.

For those who have not had exposure to Digester Gas, you are lucky, as it is Very Nasty Smelling and Highly Toxic Stuff!

On Sunday PM there was what seemed to me to be exactly the same odor in the air and similar wind conditions. (See email Spano/Gaudet 1/25/22). This was again called into GU customer service. It is my understanding that while an operator was dispatched and smelled the odor the cause could not be determined.

For reference purposes there were zero odor days during the same time period last year.

A few points I would like to make.

One- Considering the magnitude of the Wed 1/19-Thurs 1/20 problem it would have been nice if either the plant operators or GU management had called me and made me aware of the issue before I had to discover it myself by literally walking into a cloud of the gas.

Two- It is a real stretch to believe that three mechanical failures all happened simultaneously on the very same day.

Three -The Evoqua Automatic Torch is less than two years old. Has anyone looked into why it is malfunctioning ?

The problems at the plant which began on July 8, .2019, have now been going on for more than 31 months. Things have only gotten worse! .

Again, I Thank the Commissioners for Your Help in Advance.