

SECOND TAXING DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS

Regular Meeting Minutes

April 21, 2020

Present: David Westmoreland Chairperson
Maria Borges-Lopez Vice Chairperson
Harold Bonnet
Robert Burgess
Mary Mann
Sandra Stokes
Martha Wooten-Dumas

Also Present: Alan Huth Interim General Manager / Director
of Water Operations
Lisa Roland District Clerk
Kara Murphy, Esq. Tierney, Zullo, Flaherty & Murphy
Scott Murphy Director of Electric Operations
Eric Strom Director of Customer Care & Finance
Gwen Gonzalez Collection Specialist

Public Present: Ronald Meier
Travis Simms

This meeting was recorded in its entirety with the exception of Executive Session.

Call To Order:

Commissioner Westmoreland called the Regular Meeting of The Second Taxing District to order at 7:10 p.m. on Tuesday, April 21st, 2020. The meeting was held via Web Video Conference Call originating in Fairfield County, Connecticut.

Public Participation: None.

1. Acceptance of the Minutes

1.1 Regular Meeting Minutes of March 10, 2020.

Commissioner Borges-Lopez moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Burgess seconded.

The minutes were approved unanimously.

(2020-04-21-1.1)

CONSENT AGENDA

2. Electric Write-Offs – January 1, 2020 through March 31, 2020

Commissioner Borges-Lopez moved to accept the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Mann seconded.

The Consent Agenda was approved unanimously.

(2020-04-21.2)

REGULAR AGENDA

3. Management Update

Alan Huth, the newly named Interim General Manager, took the floor. First, he thanked the Commission for the opportunity to represent the General Manager's duties.

Reservoirs:

The reservoirs at 100% capacity.

Water Main Breaks:

There were 2 water main breaks since the last regular meeting. Six customers were affected on Roton Avenue, and 4 customers were affected on Ledge Road.

Water Ops Staffing and tasks being performed:

- Some changes to staffing were made. Two water operators are stationed at the plant during normal working hours to allow Alan Huth more time to devote to General Manager duties.
- Still maintaining a one person per vehicle guidelines.
- Maintenance & Construction crews are still reporting to work but are separated in duties.
- Leak detection and normal leak repairs continue.
- Flushing of the water mains began on 4/20. It was advertised in the newspaper, as well as shared with Senator Bob Duff who extended the information through social media. No feedback nor complaints of discolored water have been received.
- Grounds department is continuing with regular security visits of all water facilities including watershed. Some minor vandalism and illegal dumping incidents were found, and already resolved.
- Grounds is in the process of rebidding seasonal groundskeeping.
- SNEW joined CtWarn, a formal mutual aid agreement between 20 something water utilities throughout the State of Connecticut.
- Water Department is installing various sample stations throughout SNEW's water territory to allow lab personnel to more easily perform water testing and reporting without the need for customer interaction. The stations are on SNEW property and secured/locked.

Electric Outages:

Eight since the 4/10 Commissioners' meeting, one of which is occurring now during this meeting.

- 4/13 storm caused outages on Cedar Street, Allview Avenue & Summit due to a fallen tree which took out 2 poles and a primary wire. 106 customers were affected.
- Line Department assisted Eversource restorations the following day, 4/14.

COVID-19 Update:

Scott Murphy presented.

The following have been added to the 19 initiatives listed at the Special Meeting of 4/1/20.

- 4/7/20 – temporary closure of the payment window.
- Reviewed Executive Order 7V to ensure compliance. The additional protective measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 were already in place at SNEW.
- Reviewed the Critical Infrastructure Guidelines for workers that may have been exposed to the virus. Prior to the new guidelines, if an employee had had direct contact with another employee that had been exposed to the virus, the employee having had contact would be required to self-quarantine at home for 14 days. The new guideline allows the exposed employee to report to work, but that employee must wear a mask, monitor his temperature, and maintain a 6’ social distance.
- 4/9/20 – sent out guideline reminder to all employees and posted the guidelines on the SNEW intranet.
- 4/9/20 – emailed the President’s “30 Days to Slow the Spread” guideline to all employees.
- 4/11/20 – reviewed Executive Order 7X which extends existing guidelines to May 20th.
- 4/21/20 – Executive Order 7BB requires use of mask or face covering in all public spaces when distancing of 6’ cannot be maintained.

Moving ahead, SNEW will need to focus on Phase I Return to Work guidelines, which probably will not begin before May 20th. These include:

- Continue to encourage telecommuting,
- Return staff in phases (not all at once),
- Close common areas where people tend to congregate,
- Strongly consider special accommodations for the more vulnerable employees, generally those over 60 years of age, as well as those employees at higher risk for serious illness, and
- Minimize face to face contact between employees, and employees and customers.

Alan Huth added that there may be other recommendations from the Department of Public Health to consider for the water operators.

Commissioner Westmoreland asked about the current outage. Scott Murphy replied that

there is a blown fuse on Couch Street. Line crew found a primary tap came out of the hot line clamp possibly due to a shot of lightning. The line crew wants to ensure the line is completely clear before it is energized.

Commissioner Burgess reported that the lights are out at 37 Brookline. Scott Murphy responded that the outage is sizable – Taylor Ave., Flax Hill, Couch, and others - and the crew is working on restoring power within an hour or so.

Commissioner Stokes asked if the field crews have all the proper equipment and PPE that they need or are they [the employees] required to provide their own? Alan Huth responded that PPE is provided to the employees. Scott Murphy added that plenty of face masks, hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes had been purchased at the beginning of the crisis, and there is still a good supply for the office staff. Recently, the line workers purchased 40 N95 masks which they are keeping as a back-up for when more urgently needed. At the moment, they are using the disposable face masks which we have plenty of. Also, we are waiting for a shipment of cloth masks to come in. Commissioner Stokes added that if there is a need for PPE, her husband Travis Simms can facilitate in getting the materials.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

1. Discussion concerning the employment, performance & evaluation of a public officer or employee pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes section I-200(6)(A).
2. Discussion of confidential commercial or financial information pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes sections I-200(6)(E), I-210(b)(5), and 16-262c.

Commissioner Borges-Lopez moved to enter Executive Session at 7:30 p.m. Commissioner Burgess seconded. The Commissioners, Alan Huth and District Clerk Lisa Roland were present.

Attorney Kara Murphy recused herself from participating in the first item of Executive Session but remained in the “waiting room” for the second item at which time she rejoined the meeting.

Commissioner Stokes moved to exit Executive Session at 8:00 p.m. Commissioner Borges-Lopez seconded.

No action was taken on Item 1, however, as a result of Executive Session regarding Item 2, the following resolution relating to the adoption of a low interest rate program for SNEW customers was presented and voted on:

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE ADOPTION OF A LOW INTEREST RATE PROGRAM

WHEREAS, on April 1, 2020, Governor Ned Lamont issued Executive Order 7S, which provided for a Low Interest Rate Program reducing the interest charges on certain delinquent municipal water and electric charges for a period of ninety days;

WHEREAS, the Low Interest Rate Program provides: (i) for the reduction of existing interest charges and assessments to 3% per annum for ninety (90) days from the time when the delinquent charges and assessments became due and payable from March 10, 2020 through and including July 1, 2020, unless such delinquent portion is subject to interest and penalties at less than 3% per annum. After ninety (90) days, the remaining delinquent portion shall be subject to interest and penalties as previously established; (ii) any municipal water and electric rates, charges and assessments delinquent prior to March 10, shall be subject to an interest rate of 3% per annum for ninety days from April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2020, unless such delinquent portion is subject to interest and penalties at less than 3% per annum. After ninety (90) days, the remaining delinquent portion shall be subject to interest and penalties as previously established.

WHEREAS, Executive Order 7S requires the District Commission to adopt the Low Interest Rate Program and direct the Interim General Manager to notify the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management of the adoption of the program on or before April 25, 2020.

NOW, THEREFORE, the District Commission herein approves the adoption of the Low Interest Rate Program with the following terms and conditions:

Resolved, that the current interest rate of 18.24% on water customer accounts herein be reduced to 0% during the time period specified in the Governor's Order;

Resolved, that no change will be made to rates, charges and assessments on electric customer accounts, as delinquent electric customer accounts are not currently charged interest on past due balances;

Resolved, that the Low Interest Rate Program will automatically expire at the end of the ninety (90) day period, and the prior interest rates will be reinstated, unless this Resolution is amended by further order of the Governor and/or the District Commission;

Resolved, that the Interim General Manager, Alan E. Huth, notify the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management of the adoption of the Low Interest Rate Program on or before April 25, 2020; and

Resolved, that the Director of Customer Care, Eric Strom, shall be authorized to make any and all appropriate adjustments to customer accounts in order to comply with Executive Order 7S.

Dated on this 21st day of April 2020 at Norwalk, Connecticut.

Lisa Roland
District Clerk

Commissioner Borges-Lopez moved to accept the resolution. Commissioner Mann seconded.

Commissioner Burgess asked how any interest accrued prior to the 90-day period [commencing March 10th] would be handled. Commissioner Westmoreland responded that any interest due prior to the 90-day period would remain due on the customer's account; there was no waiver being given for prior interest due.

The resolution was approved unanimously.

Adjournment

Commissioner Burgess moved to adjourn. Commissioner Wooten-Dumas seconded.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Attest:

Lisa G. Roland
District Clerk