

**GROVELAND WATER & SEWER BOARD  
MEETING MINUTES  
October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024**

A Regular Meeting of the Groveland Water & Sewer Board was held on Monday, October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. The meeting was held in the Rear Meeting Room at the Central Fire Station, 181 Main Street, Groveland.

**Board Members Present**

Sarah Sheehan-McGrath, Chairperson  
Bill Dunn  
Terry Grim via Telephone @5:14 p.m.

**Staff Members Present**

Colin Stokes, W/S Superintendent  
Kimberly Bourque, W/S Office Manager

**OPENING**

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath made a motion to open the meeting at 5:02 p.m. Seconded by Commissioner Dunn. All in favor.

**AGENDA AND MEETING MINUTES PROCESS**

Superintendent Stokes explains that the Town Clerk is the official record keeper of the meeting minutes. He states that after the minutes are voted on and approved, the following morning they are emailed to the Town Clerk. What she does with them, is what she does with them. The fact that they are on our website is more of a convenience, but our Water/Sewer Department website is not the official record keeping location for the minutes. Stokes states that understandably, something had changed, and since we do not post them, the location on our website had changed. They were on the town website, they were hard to find, but they were there and that there are no secret meetings happening. A link has since been added to The Water Department website that will bring you to where the Town Clerk posts them on the Town Website. If you go on the Town Website and type in "water department," it will give you every single agenda on the calendar that has happened as far back as the calendar saves. They are also posted on the wall in the hallway outside the Town Clerk's office. Stokes also states that if you call us, we can always send you a copy.

**RATE HEARING PROCESS**

Superintendent Stokes states that there were questions about the rate hearing process, again, there are strict rules that we must adhere to for how we set a rate and how they are posted. They have to be posted on the wall outside the Town Clerk's office and they get posted in the newspaper twice. He states that it is all state laws that dictate how we do these things, we do not just make it up on a whim. It has been the same process as long as Stokes has been around, before Stokes, it has been the same, and Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath explains that it is the same process as a tax rate hearing. Stokes explains that historically the water rates only cover the operational costs of the water and sewer department. We **DO NOT** set the rates to build in additional funding to reinvest into the system, although we should, realistically. Stokes states that it costs a lot of money to turn the pumps on and inflation has been through the roof and that we have not increased the rates since 2021. He explains that we try to be as financially responsible with the rates to try and keep them low, so that people can still afford to live here. We are not trying to price people out of Groveland, but at the end of the day, it costs money to run the department. Superintendent Stokes explains that we **DO NOT** receive any tax money from anybody, the only money we get, is from the water/sewer bills. The money paid for your water bill has to go a long way; electricity, gas, chemicals, there is a lot that goes into it and everything costs a ton of money. Because we are municipal, we have to pay prevailing wages and, for example, we just had to put a \$70,000 roof on one of our buildings. Stokes explains that since we do not increase the rates that often, it is understandable that people may not know how the process works.

Superintendent Stokes also explains that the rates only increased 6%. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath explains that along with the rate increase, plus the Capital Fee, and usually the October bill is on the higher end for people from the summer months, that, yes, it seemed like a massive increase and looks terrible, but it truly only went up 6%. Residents also cannot compare their bills with each other, since everyone uses different amounts of water. She states that until other board members are elected, she would like to keep these rates and fees so we do not fall back into the position we are currently in.

### CAPITAL FEE- WHAT WILL IT BE USED FOR AND WHY

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that we started talking about the Capital Fee approximately six to eight months ago and that we went back and forth several times about what it should be, how should we calculate it, what did we think was reasonable. She stated that we took what the old minimum rate was, \$76.13, and divided it and decided that \$25.00 per quarter was reasonable to start collecting money to go toward our infrastructure. Superintendent Stokes explains that we were told that we should be investing at least \$450,000.00 a year into the system, every year, for twenty years to get to where we should be. Currently we do **ZERO**. This \$25.00 Capital Fee generates half of what we should be investing. Right now, this Capital Fee is set so generate approximately \$200,000.00 per year and it is tracked separately, so we are not “hiding anyone’s money.” It is going into its own line item and we will have a known amount of money each year that we can put back into the system. Commissioner Dunn reiterates that this money will only be used for water infrastructure work, since a lot of it is getting very old. Stokes explains that we have some pipes from the 1900’s. Prior to this fee, we did not have the mechanism in place to fund these infrastructure improvements, but now we do and there is a lot of work that needs to happen. Understandably we cannot do all the work at once, but if we continue to do nothing, it will only continue to get worse.

Superintendent Stokes explains that we did get a grant from the feds, but they have not written us a check yet, so we cannot spend it. We worked with Seth Moulton to get just shy of \$1,000,000.00, but they have indicated that they are approximately a year behind with actually “handing out the money”, but once we get the money we are going to be doing one of three projects: Wood Street, which would get us to our new water tank which is on top of the hill, Balch Avenue, which is deplorable, or Washington Street, which would be a main transmission line, depending on which avenue we go with either buying water from Haverhill or building our own treatment facility. Stokes explains that we are not at the point to decide yet, because we do not have a check. When we decide on which route we take, the hierarchy changes a little bit, but once we know and we get the money, that will dictate what project to start with.

### CODE RED NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

Superintendent Stokes explains that Code Red is an optional service that the town has. The system can email, phone call, or send a text message. You can find the sign up on the Water Department website and sign up for the service. Residents will need to make sure the correct email and/or phone number is correct, otherwise the messages will never get to you. Also, importantly, if you move, you have to remove yourself, we cannot remove you from the system. Stokes states he can send a link in order to remove themselves. We have tried varying aspects of utilizing the system, getting complaints that we use it too much or that we do not use it enough. The Water Department uses it for water shut downs, hydrant flushing, any type of water break, although we are **NOT** going to use it about meetings, as that would be abusing the system. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath also states that this system is not just used for water and sewer, all departments in town use the system.

### HYDRANT FLUSHING UPDATE

Superintendent Stokes explains that we have to hydrant flush, as it is one of our only mechanisms to remove the iron, manganese, minerals, and sediment that we know we are pumping out of our wells into the system because we do not have any sort of filtration right now. Twice a year we systematically flush the system. In years past, the guys would open all the hydrants and let it run until it was clear. We have since had a professionally designed Unidirectional Flushing System designed and implemented, so now we work more gate valves in the system, moving the clean water around. This way we are using less water in a more condensed time frame, which takes

about two and a half weeks to flush the entire town. This way is more efficient and safer for the workers. Commissioner Dunn states that when flushing is happening, you will get discolored water in your neighborhood. Stokes states that the flushing schedule is posted on our website and unless there is a catastrophe, that schedule is basically set in stone. Even if we are not on your street, but in the "area," it can still affect your water. Stokes states we do our best to let people know, the Code Red will go out the Friday before the flushing is going to start and you can always call the office to see what day it will be happening on your road. He explains not to do your white laundry when they are flushing your area because it will get dirty. We have put together a list that homeowners can do to alleviate some issues that they can cause themselves during flushing. If you can limit what you are pulling in while we go by house, you will be much better off. We know we are disturbing the pipe out in the street, so if you are sucking in that discolored water, it is going to fill your hot water tank with that dirty water, it will stain your toilets, sinks, and tubs. Stokes states that water heater manufacturers suggest that you flush your tank at least annually, but here where we know we have high mineral content and high sediment, you should probably be flushing it at least twice a year. Stokes refers to a handout about what homeowners can do during flushing. Commissioner Dunn states that if you do get discoloration during the year, to call the department. Stokes states that our system is very temperamental, so if there is a fire, you will get dirty water, if the Fire Department uses a hydrant for training, you will have dirty water because the sediment collects at the bottom of the pipes. Anytime there is more flow than normal, it scoops up all that "stuff" and spreads it around.

A resident questions why there is no filtration at the wells. Stokes explains that we have ground wells with no filtration, so if you do not have a filter at your house, you are not getting filtered water anywhere in town. We have never had a filter plant. Stokes explains that the DEP considers it an esthetic problem, so they will never make us filter out the iron and manganese. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath explains that when we have to treat for PFAS, we will have to treat the iron and manganese as well.

#### **WATER TREATMENT FACILITY/HAVERHILL WATER TIE IN- WHY IS THIS REQUIRED**

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that if we build a Treatment Facility, it will take until 2029 to get it online. If we choose to buy water from Haverhill, a timeline is not guaranteed right now because we are doing a Feasibility Study with Haverhill to see what it would entail to interconnect. There are a lot of factors that go into it, how much will it cost to connect, how much they want to pay, etc. and there are a lot of conversations that need to happen. She states that we appropriated the money at Town Meeting for this study, as Stokes has been helpful and in contact with Haverhill to get our engineers together to see what it would take to interconnect. There is an agreement going to The Board of Selectmen at their next meeting to sign stating once this is over, that we will pay them whatever cost it was for this Feasibility Study. Until we have all those facts, we cannot make a decision. Commissioner Dunn explains that Haverhill has a Treatment Facility already in place.

Superintendent Stokes gives a little background stating in 2021 when we had a Feasibility Study done for a Treatment Facility in Groveland, it was not for PFAS, as PFAS was not even a "thing" yet. It was for iron and manganese because it has been a problem in town for decades. In his opinion, everyone wanted to complain about it, but nobody ever wanted to pay for it, so it never got dealt with. He states that we received grant money for a Feasibility Study for the Treatment Plan and we already know where it is going to be, we already own the land, the size of the building required, we know what type of general filtration we would need, and this winter we are doing a Pilot Study. This is a "mini plant" that will come in in a trailer and they will run our water through it at a much lower rate and that is how it is determined what the optimal filter media would be for what we have in our water. We will take that data from this coming winter and put it into the Feasibility Study for the plant. Stokes explains we know how much water we are allowed to take out of the ground by the state as well, so we are piecing everything together. Now that PFAS has "come along," whether we want to do something or not, we **HAVE** to. Stokes also explains that they drilled nine test wells in town, as our first option was to find new sources. He states that we found plenty of water, but it all has minerals or PFAS in it. Then, we went to the Treatment Plant, because we already had a Feasibility Study done, and more recently the Haverhill option. One of these two options has to happen and either route we take, it is going to cost a lot of money. Commissioner Dunn elaborates that it is going to cost a lot of money and a lot of residents, including himself, are already paying a lot of money for their water/sewer bills. He states that they are looking into all grant programs. His worry with Haverhill, is what happens, hypothetically, after a twenty-year agreement, on the twenty first year they decide "all bets are off," this is why we

must be very careful with our decision. Stokes states that Haverhill will not talk any money with us until the engineers decide what is required for Groveland to interconnect. At a bare minimum, Haverhill stated that they are **NOT** going to sell it to us cheaper than what their residents pay. Stokes refers to a chart which shows what Groveland residents are paying now, you would have to add Haverhill's rate to it. On top of that, Haverhill will want Groveland to pay a portion of their Capital Bill because they just revamped their facility to the tune of \$42,000,000.00-\$44,000,000.00, plus multi-millions of dollars' worth of infrastructure work just to get their water here. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states, to be fair, Haverhill has been very good about our sewer contract, as we send all of our sewer to Haverhill. Stokes states bottom line to build our own plant will be approximately \$26,000,000.00-\$40,000,000.00, but does not think it will hit the higher end. He explains that Sharon, Massachusetts built basically the exact plant with very similar specs as we would need, and it was about \$26,000,000.00. If we were to buy the amount of water Groveland used last year from Haverhill, it would be \$1,200,000.00, just for the water. Then you would have to add on \$5,000,000.00-\$10,000,000.00 in infrastructure work, just to get the water here, plus a portion of their Capital Loan (estimated at approximately \$100,000.00/year) and Groveland would not own anything and we would be paying Haverhill forever, approximately \$1,800,000.00/year. This also means that our own water and sewer department does not go away, as we still need to operate our own infrastructures. To build our own Treatment Plant, again these are speculated numbers, \$1,000,000.00-\$1,500,000.00 loan payment per year plus \$150,000.00-\$200,000.00 in operational costs, according to the Feasibility Study, above what we already function at, comes out to about \$1,700,000.00/year. Again, these are hypothetical numbers. Stokes explains that our current budget is \$1,200,000.00 and that lets us put the lights on and function.

Superintendent Stokes explains that even if we build our own plant and we are pumping out clean water, there is still one hundred years' worth of buildup in the pipes and will not go away overnight. It is going to take years of pumping clean water through the pipes and replacing pipes to totally fix the issues of brown water. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath explains that this is where the Capital Fee comes into play, to replace the pipes. Stokes explains that none of this work that needs to be done is going to be for free. We have not decided how it would be set up, but it could be rolled into the rates depending on the volume of water you use or it could be an additional fee of some sort, but we are not at that point yet.

Superintendent Stokes explains that we are in the class action lawsuit of PFAS and will be receiving a good amount of money towards remediating our PFAS issue, with the new guidelines, which will help the rate payers.

### **MASSDEP PFAS LETTER- EXPLAIN IN FURTHER DETAIL AND CLARIFY**

A resident inquired about the PFAS results for September and October. Stokes explains that we have received them and that they are not posted. September came back at 13.3ppt and October came back at 12.4ppt. The current action level is 20ppt, but the new regulation will be 4ppt in April 2029. The only time our levels were over the limit, was in July 2024, which triggered the letter that was sent out.

Superintendent Stokes explains that the letter was an abomination that was "highly recommended" it be sent out by the DEP. It served no purpose, other than to scare people. It was required wording from the DEP and the only things that could be changed on that letter was to put in Groveland and our results. All of the other wording, is theirs and it had to be sent out. It was alarming to say the least. The way they calculate the results is by quarter. So, the first quarter is January, February, and March, so for that quarter they do not care about the December result. Our high result was in the third quarter. The DEP strongly suggested that we send out the letter to be transparent, but Stokes wishes it was an option to use better wording to be able to explain it to the residents better, but the DEP does not agree and that is why that letter was sent out.

Superintendent Stokes explains that we have been testing for PFAS for about four to five years and our results are very linear. There was work being done down at the well and it cannot be proven that caused the results to be higher, but as soon as the work was done, the next months' results were back in the normal range. He also explains that we have been publishing our PFAS results in our Annual Consumer Confidence Report that gets mailed out to all residents, it is in there as the PFAS 6.

## **PRIVATE WELL vs. TOWN WELL**

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that she read a lot about "I'll dig my own well." She explains that she grew up in Groveland with a private well and that her family had the same issues as she does now on town water. It is basically the same water, same color, so even a private well is not ideal because you are still pulling ground water from the Town of Groveland.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE- REPLACEMENT PLAN**

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that there was a study done in 2016 on every pipe, which ones should be replaced, how old they are, and the cost. We have a cost associated with every single pipe that needs replacement, but that is 2016 costs, not today costs. She states we want to use that list to put a plan in place. Of course, if something comes up, such as a water main break, that would clearly change the schedule, but our hope is to stick to that plan as much as we can. Superintendent Stokes explains that the town is working more cohesively together, Stokes, highway, and National Grid Gas. If a road is dug up, we want to take care of everything in the ground in that area. If National Grid comes in and digs the road up to replace a pipe in the ground and then pave it, we do not want to come back two years later and dig it up again. He states it is a waste of resources. If we can all get on the same page and fix water, sewer, gas, and any drainage issues at the same time, pave the road, the town will be in a much better position and that has never happened here before. We are making great strides in that department and we just hired a new Paving Project Manager in the Highway Department, so we are getting him up to speed with all of our plans. The roadway paving might change our Capital Improvement Plan a little bit, depending on which roads they are paving.

## **SENIOR DISCOUNT- HOW TO APPLY**

Superintendent Stokes explains that there is a senior citizen discount on the minimum usage. It is a very simple form to fill out, along with a copy of an ID, birth certificate, passport, etc. You can print it out from our website and mail or drop it off, or come into the office to fill it out.

## **CUSTOMER EMAILED QUESTIONS/CONCERNS**

Superintendent Stokes explains that there were only two residents that emailed questions and/or concerns. Resident Steve Magnus is asked if there is anything that he emailed that he felt that was not covered yet during the meeting. Mr. Magnus states that he wanted to touch back on plant or purchase of water and the condition of the current piping. Stokes explains that they are two different things, happening at the same time: source, plant or Haverhill, and Capital Fee, paying for pipes. No matter where the water is coming from, Stokes explains that the pipes have to be addressed. Commissioner Dunn asks how long it will take with the money we set aside from the Capital Fee to do the necessary work. Stokes explains that water main costs about \$1,000,000.00/mile. He states that if we do projects "in house," it is an immense amount of work for the crew, so we will only take on 1,500-1,600ft. of water main in a season, but can save the rate payers a ton of money. To circle back to Commissioner Dunn's question, we are collecting approximately \$200,000.00/year, so every two years we would be able to do a decent project. Stokes states that it is not possible to do our entire Capital Project "in house." Mr. Magnus asks if the Capital Fee is implemented based on jobs going to bid or "in house," would it go up depending on job costs and Stokes explains that the Capital Fee would not go up based on that. The fee was set, thinking it was a reasonable amount of money to collect towards doing projects. Commissioner Grim states that without the Capital Fee funds, we would be bonding some of these projects, which ends up costing more. Superintendent Stokes explains that, right now, if we were to do a large project, we would be borrowing the money and paying for it for the next twenty years with interest. Doing it with the Capital Fee money, we are "paying cash." Stokes also states that we are constantly looking for grants and outside funding options, but unfortunately, Groveland does not qualify for a lot of grant programs because we are considered affluent.

Superintendent Stokes explains that The Groveland Water & Sewer Department is an Enterprise Fund, which means we only receive money from the bills. We pay all our own bills and this also means that the town cannot take our

money to do something else with it. The whole funding mechanism is set up so that the water and sewer departments keep their money to do only water and sewer “things.” The Capital Fee money will only be used for replacing pipes and infrastructure projects. Mr. Magnus asks if the town is assisting at all and Stokes explains that we receive **ZERO** tax dollars and that whatever you pay for your water/sewer bill, is your contribution.

Resident Tracy Theodorakopoulos, the second received email, explains that she believes that the frustration came from the perfect storm: decades of issues, PFAS, and the increase in rates/Capital Fee. Superintendent Stokes states that it is totally understandable and that we are in it and we do not have a choice. He explains that we are not bound by how residents feel about the water, we are bound by state and federal regulations. If our water meets those regulations, we meet those regulations, but it is your personal choice to drink it or not drink it. Mr. Magnus asks about having to provide clean water and to define clean. Stokes explains that it is clean based on the samples that are sent to the state. DEP cares about the samples meeting the regulations, they do not care about your tub, and that sounds terrible, but they do not. The DEP also tells us where we have to pull our samples from. Stokes explains that the water does not come out of the wells looking brown or dirty. The water goes out into the system, sits in the distribution pipes, all the minerals collect together and settle. We have three wells; they are either on or they are off. The water goes out, mixes together and is distributed to the residents or goes to the water tower, so there is not one well that one resident is getting their water from. Commissioner Dunn explains that we have tried drilling wells in other areas, but they all have the same iron and manganese. Ms. Theodorakopoulos asks about heating and boiling the water, do we know what that would bring it to (PFAS levels). Stokes explains that in the “water world,” say you have a bacteria issue, you boil the water, and the problem goes away. In the “PFAS world,” boiling it does not kill it, so do not boil it thinking that the problem will go away. Stokes explains, in his opinion, that boiling water to cook with, will not change the levels much, if at all. He also states that if you are within any of the health concern subgroups outlined in the letter, talk to your doctor.

A resident asks about the PFAS levels and if someone can explain them better. Superintendent Stokes states that right now we are not bound by what the Federal Government is looking at. The Massachusetts’ rule is different, 20ppt for PFAS 6, which is a combination of six of those things. The Federal Government is looking at PFOA and PFOS separately. Massachusetts cares about the collection of six things and the new Federal Guideline does not care about the combination of six things, they care about the things individually. Stokes explains that it is hard to compare our current results with the new guideline because they might not even care about the PFAS 6 anymore, they care about the individual numbers. They are the same “things,” but Massachusetts groups them together. It is very much an apples and oranges comparison.

Superintendent Stokes pleads for people with any questions to call the office and to not get your information online. He states that if whoever answers the phone does not know the answer, they will forward you to him, or you can just ask for him. He will gladly answer any questions and explain things to you.

#### **OLD OR UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

None.

#### **DEPARTMENTAL PAPERWORK**

None.

#### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Ms. Bourque presented the minutes from the September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, Water & Sewer Board meeting. **Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath made a motion to approve the minutes from September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, as submitted. Commissioner Dunn seconded. No further discussion. All in favor.**

**NEXT MEETING**

Monday November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at 5:00 p.m., Town Hall, 183 Main Street, Groveland.

**CLOSING**

**Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath made a motion to close the meeting at 6:45 p.m. Seconded by Commissioner Dunn. No further discussion. All were in favor.**

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly Bourque  
Water & Sewer Office Manager

