

**GROVELAND WATER & SEWER BOARD  
MEETING MINUTES  
January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025**

A Regular Meeting of the Groveland Water & Sewer Board was held on Tuesday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025 at 5:00 p.m. The meeting was held at The Town Hall, 183 Main Street, Groveland.

**Board Members Present**

Sarah Sheehan-McGrath, Chairperson  
Bill Dunn  
Terry Grim

**Staff Members Present**

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

**Committee Member**

Michael Dempsey, Conservation Commission Representative

**OPENING**

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath made a motion to open the meeting at 5:01 p.m. Seconded by Commissioner Grim. All in favor.

**CPA TRAIL ENHANCEMENT PROPOSAL DISCUSSION**

Mike, from Community Preservation, attended the meeting to present a trail project, looking for an endorsement from the Water and Sewer Board. He states that the Recreation Committee and Conservation are working together to put in a proposal for 2025 funding for The Trail Enhancement Project. There was a project before this, with the Bagnall School, in which was similar. The idea of the project is to enhance the ability of volunteers to work on our trails. Mike states that they have volunteers who build bridges, put up signs and trail markers, put in benches, cut up fallen trees and branches, etc. Without the ability to buy the lumber and tools to do these types of things, it is not so effective, which is the reason for the project. The previous project that they had expired, and only addressed our main four Conservation properties, as well as other small ones. The Chair of the Community Preservation Committee recommended we come forward and do it again. Since the original proposal, they now have the Community Trail, which is under the control of the Selectman, and Water and Sewer has a great set of trails down by the river. Not too many people know about it or use it, but it is a fantastic trail that runs along the Merrimack River, a very quiet place to walk, and has been there for many years. Mike states that there are no markings, signs, or anything really about the trails and people would not really know it was there. He states that is why he is attending this meeting, to get the Water and Sewer Commissioners on board with this project, in which he hopes the Commissioners can write a letter of support for the project.

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath inquires about the location of the project specifically. Superintendent Stokes explains that it is by Well 3, as our department controls all the land to the cemetery, along the river. Commissioner Dunn asks about the condition of the trails now and Mike states that it is walkable. Stokes explains that the main part that our department uses, used to be a road and that it is now overgrown, but you can drive an eighteen-wheeler down there. Commissioner Grim states that he has walked the trails and that it is a nice walk. Mike explains in order for this proposal to happen, it has to be protected land or under a conservation restriction. Stokes states that it is already under restriction for anything the Water and Sewer Department wants or needs to do water related or passive recreation. Commissioner Dunn makes sure that it would not take any rights away for the Water and Sewer Department and Mike states that it would not. Mike explains that this project would not maintain the trails, but enhance them, as they cannot maintain them. Commissioner Grim explains that the CPA does not allow for a maintenance program. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that the maintenance issue is what makes her hesitant

about these projects. In her opinion, she loves the ideas of these projects, but there is no long-term plan to continue it, which makes it hard for her to say yes. She has seen other trails come out very nice, but in the long run they are not maintained and look terrible. She states that she would not be in favor of it, unless a long-term maintenance plan is established. Mike states that they do these projects because they are needed, they are a community resource, and they figure out how to maintain them. Commissioner Grim states that historically, the Conservation Commission has shouldered this responsibility, if not doing it themselves or finding organizations to do so. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that she would feel better if it was stated that they are going to this project AND figure out a plan to maintain it. Commissioner Grim states that we can specifically say that we will not be responsible for maintenance. He also states that there is already a trail there that people use, and even with a onetime clean up, it is a step in the right direction, although he completely agrees that a plan for maintenance is needed.

Superintendent Stokes states that he is not too familiar with CPA projects, but he personally does not care if they want to go down there and clean up the trails. Stokes' only concern would be if there were trash cans being installed because nobody would ever go and empty them. He inquires if it is feasible to do the project one year and then in two to three years, redo the project, so it is not maintenance per say. Mike states that he cannot say that this is going to cover maintenance of the trails, but that Conservation Trails are the same way, that they are maintained with the Commission and volunteers. He states that this proposal is going to do two things; provide the tools and the hardware to enhance the trails and then gather volunteers to keep it running, so that the trails are maintained. Commissioner Dunn inquires about who is in charge of gathering the volunteers and what trails need to be done. Mike states that the Recreation Committee and Conservation Commission work together to do this. Superintendent Stokes also mentions that our department uses the part of the trail that goes from one well to the other and that is it.

Commissioner Grim reads the proposal aloud to edit and add in any information in support of the proposal, while all the commissioners are present. The main point added is that "The Groveland Water and Sewer Department/Commission will not be responsible for ongoing maintenance beyond our departmental needs." Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath requests that this proposal be added as an agenda item for our next meeting.

## **BUDGET DISCUSSION**

Superintendent Stokes presents a budget handout and Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that she has worked with Stokes on the budget and that she does not have any concerns with it. Discussion was had about paying indirect costs to Town Hall for their support in payroll, bookkeeping, etc., which is rolled into the expense line. All salaries are present, the guys' salaries and overtime are contractual, retirement, health insurance, Medicare, and expenses (it is being level funded besides the new indirect costs being paid to Town Hall). The number was decided by the Town Administrator, Town Accountant, and Town Treasurer itemizing the hours per month that they do work for the Water and Sewer Department. Stokes states that the hours and dollar amount is a fair amount.

Stokes proposes taking the Emergency Fund line out of our budget and making it a reoccurring Town Meeting Warrant Article. He explains that anything that breaks in our department, costs a lot of money to fix and by doing it this way, it is money we have already collected, which frees up \$50,000 in our budget.

Equipment Expense is for maintenance on our equipment, such as our backhoe, tow behind compressor, and any equipment the guys need to do their jobs. Commission Dunn inquires if we typically use the entire expense and Stokes explains that we do not, and that it is not a "use it or lose it" and goes back into retained earnings.

The loans are the current bonds that we have, along with interest. These budget lines will change based upon borrowing for whatever engineering we have to do, whether it is for the Treatment Plant or interconnecting with Haverhill.

Superintendent Stokes explains that he has added a Capital Fee expense line, which is the \$25.00 fee that is collected each quarter by water customers. He states that it is a good idea to include this in our budget, in the case that something happens mid-year, we will have that money available to fix any water infrastructure that may be needed. If the money is not spent, it will go back into the account, which in turn, we can combine funds from multiple years, if needed, to do a project.

Stokes explains that the budget, as of now, does not require a rate increase, however, whatever amount we are borrowing for the engineering will, and we do not know what that number is as of yet. There will be either a rate increase or an additional fee line added in 2026, in which Ryan (our Engineer) will be able to help us with. Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that she would like to figure out a plan of how much the increase would need to be over the next couple years. Stokes explains that we most likely will be borrowing from the State Revolving Fund and that they are anticipating releasing the new list around the first week of February and that we *should* be on the new list, as we scored very high on last years' list.

Superintendent Stokes states that the sewer budget comes out completely level funded, by removing the emergency funds and making it a warrant article. The biggest expense in sewer, is paying Haverhill (\$217,000.00), which is based on flow, and a portion of their loan for the maintenance of their plant (\$102,000.00).

Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath states that the stipends for the Commissioners will remain the same, with no raise.

Stokes explains the Warrant Articles that will be needed for Town Meeting. He states that we are due for our tanks to be cleaned, as we are required to do so every three to five years (\$10,000).

Stokes explains that we have a \$360,000.00 temporary bond (BAN) from the Chestnut/Union Street project. We borrowed another \$600,00.00 to try and find a new well. That project will no longer happen because of the PFAS issue, although some of that money has been spent on the early engineering phases for the new well. In order to close out the remaining money, we have to pay off what has already been spent out of our retained earnings, which will require a Warrant Article.

Superintendent Stokes explains that the ERP/RRA (Emergency Response Plan/Risk and Resilience Assessment) is required by the State and Federal Governments. It is required to be updated every five years and we are due for it this year. \$10,000.00 is allocated for this, although it should only cost about \$5,000.00, but Stokes explains that he does not have the proposal in his hand yet, so he would like to be cautious with this number. This number will change to be accurate before submission.

Stokes states that in order for us to use The State Revolving Fund, there is specific language that needs to get voted on, that will allow us to enter into it and it needs to be a Warrant Article.

There is a VFD (Variable Frequency Drive) that needs to be replaced at a sewer station, which is basically a motor control. This got ruined when there was a leak in the roof and now that the roof is fixed, we can fix the drive.

Superintendent Stokes states that in retained earnings for water we have roughly \$650,000.00 and for sewer \$250,000.00. In addition to that, we had funded the Scada Project for \$550,000.00, but once we got into it, we realized we could do all of it for approximately \$50,000.00. He states that we need to go through the process to get the remaining money from the Scada Project dumped back into our retained earnings. With that, realistically, we have approximately \$1,000,000.00 in water retained earnings and approximately \$400,000.00 in sewer retained earnings. According to those involved in water/sewer rates, we should have roughly 50% of our budget in retained earnings, and right now we currently have more than that. Stokes explains, in his experience, this would be a good time to do a project, but in this particular time, it is not a good time to do a project with the Treatment Plant/Interconnection with Haverhill project going on.

Stokes explains that we are talking with the Police Chief about adding a surplus vehicle to The Water & Sewer Department. Chief Gillen stated he would recommend to the Selectmen that instead of getting rid of a vehicle, as they do each year, that they would give it to The Water & Sewer Department.

**Commissioner Grim made a motion at 6:13 p.m. to approve the budget with the exception of the borrowing line having a variation when more accurate data is available. Seconded by Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath. No further discussion. All in favor.**

**Commissioner Grim made a motion at 6:14 p.m. to accept the Warrant Articles as displayed. Seconded by Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath. No further discussion. All in favor.**

### **ENGINEERING UPDATE**

Superintendent Stokes explains that he has a meeting on Friday, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025 with himself, our engineers, Haverhill's engineers, and a representative from Haverhill to decide on the numbers for the next step in the engineering process, whether that is building a Treatment Plant or interconnecting with Haverhill. Once we know those numbers, within the next couple weeks, we will have a better idea of how much money we are going to need to borrow for the next step of the engineering, which *has* to happen next year. Stokes states that all of our parts of the engineering and Ryan's work, is complete, he just needs the information from Haverhill to plug in what he has done, then he can have a document for us. Commissioner Dunn inquires that with this information, Ryan will be able to suggest which route is the best route to go.

### **DEPARTMENTAL PAPERWORK**

Superintendent Stokes presents paperwork for Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath and Commissioner Dunn to sign from the Town Clerk, Elizabeth Cuniff, pertaining to campaign finances.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Ms. Bourque presented the minutes from the November, 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Water & Sewer Board meeting. **Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath made a motion to approve the minutes from November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024, as submitted. Commissioner Grim seconded. No further discussion. All in favor.**

### **ITEMS NOT REASONABLY ANTICIPATED AT THE TIME OF POSTING**

None.

### **NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at 5:00 p.m., Town Hall, 183 Main Street, Groveland.

### **CLOSING**

**Chairperson Sheehan-McGrath made a motion to close the meeting at 6:20 p.m. Seconded by Commissioner Grim. No further discussion. All were in favor.**

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly Bourque  
Water & Sewer Office Manager