

Minutes of the December 17, 2013 Meeting
Warwick City Council Sewer Review Commission

Meeting was called to order by Councilman Ed Ladouceur, Chairman at 4:18 PM in the Lower Conference Room in City Hall.

Commission members present:

Councilman Ed Ladouceur, Chairman

Councilman Joe Gallucci, Vice Chairman

Peter Ginaitt, Warwick Sewer Authority Board

Angelo Liberti, RI Department of Environmental Management

Michelle Komar, Chairman's Citizen Appointment

Jane Austin, Save The Bay

James Boyd, RI Coastal Resources Management Council

Members not present:, Representative Frank Ferri, District 22, Doug Harris, Narragansett Indian Tribe, Senator William Walaska, District 30, Ernie Zmyslinski, City of Warwick Finance Director, Mark Carruolo, City of Warwick Mayor's Chief of Staff, David Picozzi, City of Warwick Dept. of Public Works Director, Aaron Guckian, Warwick Sewer Authority Board Chairman

Also present: Janine Burke, WSA Executive Director

Mr. Don Fife shared his comments with the Commission relative to the problems with government and sources of water pollution.

Jim Boyd arrived at 4:35 PM to establish a quorum.

Following a review of edits and additions to the minutes from the December 11th meeting, Councilman Ladouceur called for approval. A motion was made by Jim Boyd, seconded by Michelle Komar and unanimously approved with Jane Austin abstaining.

Councilman Ladouceur passed out a suggested format for reviewing the various issues the SRC is looking at with respect to the WSA enabling legislation. It was in the form of a worksheet listing the following topics: "assessments, each project time line, formula for assessments, mandatory hook-ups, connect capable, deferments/assessments, hardship situations, 15% upfront discount, max rate increase or any rate increase, reporting to Council interaction/oversight, PUC/NBC, grinder pumps/service, make up of the board."

The group had a lengthy discussion on the issue of the usage deduction used for outside watering. Ms. Burke said she didn't have a problem making changes to that number but questioned what that issue had to do with the enabling legislation. Councilman Ladouceur asked for an objective number related to outside water usage and suggested the Water Department come to a future meeting. There was a lengthy discussion about how this issue related to the enabling versus regulations, the problem that was trying to be addressed with this change, and the impacts of whether changes to the amount of water used for sewer usage billing would make any difference. The group generally agreed that this issue should be looked at in the upcoming rate study. There was some discussion about whether the City Council (or other oversight body) should approve rate increases and how that should be incorporated into the enabling legislation.

Councilman Ladouceur stressed City Council involvement and oversight and interaction as being very important to him. Jane Austin agreed that establishing the process and mechanisms for City Council interaction on things like rate setting was important. Councilman Ladouceur asked Ms. Burke to collect some information about standards and what other communities do with respect to billing percentages.

Councilman Gallucci had to excuse himself. Before the quorum was broken, Ms. Komar suggested a method for organizing the Sewer Review Commission's process for reviewing the enabling legislation. She suggested taking Councilman Ladouceur's worksheet and listing various decision categories like if the issue is covered by the enabling legislation or WSA regulations. She offered to work on that. Peter Ginaitt suggested including pros and cons. Ms. Burke suggested what's working versus what's not working. Ms. Komar suggested setting up subcommittee to move this along.

Ms. Burke explained that the WSA's recommended changes to the enabling legislation were intended to make things more generic using language like "related to the cost of construction, related to the cost of borrow". She thought it was important to establish big picture principles such as equity and fairness and that should be the focus of the enabling legislation review with the details established via regulation. Peter Ginaitt thought it was important to do this right the first time to build a legacy of a process for the future.

Ms. Burke thought Ms. Komar's suggestion was a good one and she offered to serve on a Subcommittee to come up with a decision matrix for the Commission. Peter Ginaitt suggested organizing it around the sections of the enabling and what the section was intended to do, what changes were recommended, etc. Ms. Burke and Ms. Komar were going to meet on this before the next meeting. Ms. Austin suggested the full group could then contribute to prioritizing the issues. Councilman Ladouceur was also interested in setting up a subcommittee with several other members regarding establishing parameters for making decisions about mandatory connections and connect-capable properties. They established a tentative date for that subcommittee meeting. Councilman Ladouceur was going to check with legal counsel regarding the subcommittee meeting locations and posting requirements.

Councilman Ladouceur adjourned the meeting at approximately 5:45 PM.

The Next Commission meeting date is scheduled for December 30th at 8 AM, Lower Conference Room at Warwick City Hall.