

Minutes of the March 4, 2014 Meeting
Warwick City Council Sewer Review Commission

Meeting was called to order by Councilman Ed Ladouceur, Chairman at 8:05 AM in conference room at the Warwick Sewer Authority.

Commission members present:

Councilman Ed Ladouceur, Chairman
Councilman Joe Gallucci, Vice Chairman
Janine Burke, WSA Executive Director
James Boyd, RI Coastal Resources Management Council
Topher Hamblett, Save The Bay
Angelo Liberti, RI Department of Environmental Management
Representative Frank Ferri, District 22
Michelle Komar, Chairman's Citizen Appointment
Mark Carruolo, Mayor's Chief of Staff

Members not present: Doug Harris, Narragansett Indian Tribe, Senator William Walaska, District 30, Ernie Zmyslinski, City of Warwick Finance Director, David Picozzi, City of Warwick Department of Public Works Director, Aaron Guckian, Warwick Sewer Authority Board, Peter Ginaitt, Warwick Sewer Authority Board

Also present: William Russo, Advisor to Committee

The Chairman opened the meeting to public comment.

Marjorie Murphy: Ms. Murphy, 105 Chapman Avenue, read from a prepared statement. She protested the estimated \$22,000 cost per property for sewers. She described in detail her financial situation and the impact that the sewer assessment would have on her. She argued for the front footage method or some other basis that would be fair in her situation. She said she should not have to pay the same as the \$400,000 homes on nearby Burnett Road. She ended by saying that the WSA's plan is not a plan and it is unjust.

James Boyajian: Said the WSA should consider the impacts of mandatory connections especially putting people out of business such as the septage haulers.

Roger Durand: Thanked Ms. Murphy for her attendance/comments which he said were typical of Ward 5 residents. He thanked Councilman Gallucci for his consistent message regarding mandatory hook-ups and connect capable fees. He questioned what happened to the recent 12% rate increase, said Ms. Burke was disingenuous, and that the use of that money to pay back the City was a violation of State Enabling legislation as it needed to be earmarked.

Gene Nadeau: Introduced himself as representing "Save the City". He spoke to storm water being the real problem. He said the DPW Director had said that potholes were being filled with cold patch which can cause solids and oils to run off when it rains. He said conversely his cesspool has not overflowed in 49 years, he lives 2 miles from Narragansett Bay and his cesspool is not the cause of the pollution problems.

Don Fife: Questioned the Sewer Review Commission's voting methods and who gets to vote. He mentioned that the gas company puts lines in front of people's houses with no connection

requirement and they are doing just fine. He asked Councilman Gallucci when the next meeting would be for the O'Donnell Hill sewer project.

Open Microphone Session Ended: 8:23 AM.

February 25th Minutes

Michelle Komar read her suggested changes to the draft minutes. Jim Boyd also made the suggestion to add with respect to incentives he had noted that the building in grinder pump costs and waiving permit fees. He thought that was worth mentioning in the minutes. Janine Burke asked if Ms. Komar would update the approved minutes. Ms. Komar asked if Mr. Boyd would email his addition to the minutes.

Action: Motion to amend the minutes

Moved by: Janine Burke

Seconded by: Jim Boyd

Motion passes (unanimous)

Action: Motion to approve minutes, as amended.

Moved by: Councilman Gallucci

Seconded by: Michelle Komar

Motion passes (unanimous)

Update from DEM – Deferrment of Cesspool Phaseout Fines

Angelo Liberti reported that DEM had sent out 2 different letters to properties affected by the Cesspool Phaseout but in the WSA's plans for sewers (he had also emailed that information to the Commission). He said because the Warwick Neck South sewer project was not included in the bond ordinance, that letter was different with a deadline of June 15, 2015, to replace those cesspools. He said the other areas included in the bond have until sewers are made available. Ms. Komar clarified that the deadline for funding for Warwick Neck South was December 31, 2014. There was discussion about options for homeowners and what they would need to do if their systems failed, especially for lots with constraints.

Discussion -- Grinder Pumps

Ms. Komar said that grinder pumps were not mentioned in the enabling legislation but were a topic of concern. Councilman Ladouceur asked what she had heard from residents regarding grinder pumps. She mentioned Bruce Gemp from the Diamond Hill neighborhood association who has done a lot of research on grinder pumps. She said the main concern was that homeowners need to maintain the pumps and this was a problem because they have to call a Massachusetts company and provide a credit card number for service. She asked if the issue was that DEM doesn't fund the pumps as part of the project costs and suggested a better situation would be for WSA to maintain the pumps. Councilman Ladouceur said that he had heard similar concerns from residents and that grinder pumps were part of the sewer system and a lengthy discussion ensued. Janine Burke gave information regarding the cost of the grinder pumps: the first grinder pump is paid by the WSA; to replace the internal system may cost the homeowner \$1,900 and if the total unit needs to be replaced, the cost is \$3,000. She said that the life of a grinder pump is about 10 years. Councilman Ladouceur said the issue would be left to the WSA rules and regulations with ratification by the City Council.

Discussion in Regards to Enabling Legislation

Discussion resumed at Line 310. Mr. Hamblett stressed the need to minimize the suggested changes but focus on accountability in order to give it the best shot of passing the General Assembly. The group discussed the connect capable fee and its purpose. Ms. Komar was in favor of establishing a restricted account for renewal and replacement revenues/expenses if the connect capable fees were to be used for this purpose.

One copy of a colored pie chart diagram illustrating a breakdown of the types of WSA deferments in the past and associated monetary values was passed around to Commission members. The group discussed Section 2.13 (assessments for parcels held by religious corporations). Ms. Komar suggested tightening up the language about “used solely for religious purposes” so as to apply to only the building of worship. The group discussed the implications of removing this exemption, political considerations, and what other communities do. The group was in agreement about removing the phrase “for thirty years” at line 418 and adding language to allow for sewer assessment deferments for religious corporations “according to WSA rules and regulations”.

Various ideas for sewer assessment methods were discussed including front footage, equally dividing the project costs, spreading the costs across the entire City tax base, using assessed value of property, number of bedrooms or number of bathrooms. Ms. Burke suggested adding some language to allow WSA to re-assess upon redevelopment or major improvements to the land. Mr. Liberti pointed out that the sewer assessments are supposed to pay for the construction costs so that really wouldn't be fair if the project was already paid for. Councilman Ladouceur suggested rewarding people for paying their sewer assessments upfront and setting up a restricted receipts accounts to ensure those upfront payments go to pay off that debt. Ms. Burke mentioned that wasn't practical at this time (all revenues have to be used to pay the bills) and WSA has to pay interest on the loans.

The next Commission meeting date was scheduled for March 13th at 8 AM at the offices of the Warwick Sewer Authority.

Councilman Ladouceur adjourned the meeting at approximately 10:05 AM.