

Lancaster Selectboard Work Shop Public Meeting Minutes
March 18, 2024
Lancaster Town Hall, Second Floor

The meeting was called to order at 5:05 PM by Chair Leon Rideout followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call:

Present: Leon Rideout, Kathy Jean Lavoie, and Shane Beattie

Others Present: Town Manager Benjamin S. Gaetjens-Oleson, John Garrison, Finance Director Michael Nadeau, and Alan Savage

Work Session: Water/Sewer Rates

Shane Beattie explained he had spoken with Land Use Coordinator Robin Irving and she informed him that Underwood Engineering has not yet completed the rate survey. Leon Rideout stated Tax Collector Charity Baker had spoken with the Town's billing software company and they can run models to test the impacts of different rate changes. He stated he would like to run models with our current rate of 0.00375 cents per gallon and compare it with increases of 0.0050, 0.0075, and 0.0080 cents per gallon. The plan would be to develop a connection rate to cover treatment and distribution and other fees would be used for maintenance and capital improvement.

Mr. Garrison asked if the Board is considering adding back in the forgiven base rate for multi-unit commercial accounts. It was explained that has not been considered yet. It was mentioned the Commercial base rate is higher than the Residential rate but the usage charge is the same. The Agricultural rate might also increase for usage over 500,000 gallons. The proposed change to be modeled would go from 0.0003 cents per gallon to 0.0005 cents per gallon over 500,000. There is concern for the impact on the Town's largest Ag user, Forbes Farm.

John Garrison asked if a standard usage amount (3,000 gallons) would be included in the base rate to help support users that have little usage like the Town's seniors. Mr. Rideout stated they had not considered that in their rough calculations as they were trying to simplify things early. Kathy Jean Lavoie stated the plan for sewer would be to increase the rates at the same percentage as the water rates are finalized at. Mr. Beattie stated the Board should be sure to review these rates often to ensure they are keeping up with the needs of the Departments.

Mr. Garrison reminded the Board that nobody can buy bottled water for \$3.75 per 1000 gallons so a rate increase is reasonable. Ms. Lavoie stated she is concerned about what the increase will do to the community's elderly. It was mentioned that there is no incentive to conserve, rates go down the more you use. Generally, usage over 1,000,000 gallons has a new rate of 0.0003 cents per gallon. Mr. Garrison offered a model where rates are tiered and increase with increased usage. This would again benefit the elderly who are typically the lowest users. Mr. Beattie and Mr. Rideout agreed this would be a possible and viable solution. Mr. Garrison also

stated moving from semi-annual to quarterly billing may help, as users could budget their payments more easily. It would increase costs to the Department and Town Office though. The Proposed base rates to model will be cut in half for both Residential and Commercial users and see how things look with the usage increases. Mr. Rideout will give the proposed changes to Charity to send out to model and share the results with the Board when they come in.

Mr. Rideout stated the Board should consider extending the Town Manager search as there have only been 3 responses to the original ad. He also thought they may want to consider other places to advertise the position. Mr. Garrison asked if the Board had considered a headhunter. Mr. Rideout stated they have not contacted one yet. It was explained that the advertisement was placed in several local, regional, and state papers as well as the NH Municipal Association's and Northern Forest Center's websites.

As there was no further discussion a motion was called to adjourn.

A motion was made by Shane Beattie and seconded by Kathy Jean Lavoie to adjourn the 03/18/2024 Selectboard Work Session. A vote was taken and the motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 5:48 PM

Respectfully Submitted

Lancaster Selectboard

Benjamin S. Gaetjens-Oleson
Town Manager

Chair, Leon Rideout

Shane Beattie

Kathy Jean Lavoie