

Water Study Committee & Master Plan Subcommittee
Joint Meeting Minutes – July 31, 2014

Note: Draft Minutes are subject to review, correction and approval. Review and approval of Minutes generally takes place at the next regularly scheduled meeting.

The July 31, 2014 joint meeting commenced at 4:00 p.m. at Swanzey Town Hall. Present were: Glenn Page (MP & WSC), Scott Self (MP & WSC), Don Skiba (MP & WSC), Steven Bittel (WSC), and Sly Karasinski (WSC). Also present were Sara Carbonneau, Director of Planning and Community Development, and Shane O’Keefe, Town Administrator (arriving at 4:10 p.m.).

WSC members agreed that Skiba would serve as chair. Carbonneau will serve as scribe.

Members reviewed an outline of goals and objectives prepared by Skiba. It was noted that additional items may be included in the report as they are developed.

Page stated that the Town’s Master Plan contemplates the Town having a water department that may be part of the Public Works Department. [The specific recommendation contained in the 2003 Master Plan Update was to “combine all community water services into one Town Water Department.” In addition, the 2003 Master Plan stated that the North Swanzey Water & Fire Precinct was (in 2003) “exploring and testing a working relationship with the Town’s Public Works Department. If results of this initial collaboration are successful, the Precinct may consider a long-term relationship with the Town.” There were no recommendations in the 2003 Master Plan Update to incorporate the sewer commissioners’ functions and its staff within the Town’s public works department.]

Page noted that the Town currently assists the North Swanzey Water & Fire Precinct with billing. In addition, Swanzey DPW does work for the NSW&FP and bills the precinct for this work. Self noted that the concept of integrating water and sewer utilities into the Public Works Department may not be the currently desired goal – noting that both the Swanzey Sewer Commission and the North Swanzey Water & Fire Precinct have been successful in the operation of their respective utilities.

The focus of this committee is to evaluate the status of the West Swanzey Water Company (financial and otherwise) and be prepared to intelligently respond to opportunities or challenges, as they may arise.

Skiba stated that he will approach both the NH Department of Environmental Services and the NH Public Utilities Commission to obtain the information that is on file with those offices. Skiba stated that it is important that the Town has sufficient information to adequately assess the value of the West Swanzey Water Company.

Discussion ensued as to what would happen if the West Swanzey Water Company went "belly up" or simply no longer wanted to operate a water company. Karasinski stated that it was his belief that DES would step in and run the company in the event of a financial crisis. He stated that he believed that DES/PUC would offer the company to the Town first, but could also offer it to the City of Keene (or any other entity).

Page noted that the Brown family has openly indicated that they no longer wish to be "in the water business." What exactly comprises the West Swanzey Water Company was discussed – it was noted that the lots that the well are located upon are owned by Homestead Woolen Mills and not the water company.

It was noted that there may be funds available to the Town to study the West Swanzey Water Company, with an eye towards acquisition of the same. Self stated that he would be willing to put together a map of the system, with his historical knowledge of the system. This would be augmented with information contained in the PUC filings, a map provided earlier by the West Swanzey Water Company, and information from Dufresne-Henry.

Committee members listed the following questions that they would like answers to:

1. Statutorily, what happens if the Browns say that they are finished operating the water company?
2. What are the requirements for operating a system with public ownership versus private ownership?
3. What "mechanisms" are available for ownership/operating the system (enterprise versus town operation)?
4. Obtain copy of 2013 financial statements.

Decided that the next meeting will be held on Thursday, August 21st at 4 p.m., again as a joint meeting. Meeting will be held at Town Hall.

Meeting adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

Submitted by,
Sara H. Carbonneau
Secretary to the Committee