

**COMMON COUNCIL**  
**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2023**  
**6:00 PM**

Mayor Ryan Daniel – Absent  
Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle – Present  
Attorney Marcia McNagny – Present via phone

**Council Members**

Walter Crowder – Present  
Jennifer Middleton – Present  
Jennifer Romano – Present  
Tad Varga – Present  
Daniel Weigold – Present

The Columbia City Common Council met in regular session with all members present, Council President Walter Crowder presiding.

**MINUTES** Motion was made by Dan Weigold to approve an overview of the January 24, 2023 meeting minutes as presented, Tad Varga seconded the motion, Walt Crowder, Jennifer Middleton, Tad Varga and Dan Weigold voted aye, Jennifer Romano abstained.

**JON GOTZ – MS4 UPDATE** Jon Gotz with the Whitley County Soil & Water Conservation District was present to give an update on the MS4 storm sewer program and highlighted a few of the items within the annual report.

Mr. Gotz reported that IDEM has issued a new general MS4 permit, which we were now officially operating under. He noted one of the things we have to do is a water quality characterization report and is something that should be updated every year going forward. He advised the City also has a storm water quality management plan which has to be updated and submitted by February 20, 2023. He pointed out one of the requirements under the new permit is to review and update storm water ordinances. He advised that is supposed to be done by July 2024, but IDEM has said they would be flexible as long as progress is being made. He shared the water quality monitoring would be part of the water quality characterization report and advised they would review what they have found since 2007. He noted E-coli and total suspended solids were the two biggest water quality issues they encounter. He shared the combined sewer overflow mitigation project has made a big difference in the amount of overflows going to the Blue River.

Mr. Gotz advised the minimum control measures they follow; public education & outreach and public participation & involvement were two separate control measures but in the new general permit those would be combined into one. He explained one thing we need to do is target three water quality issues to three constituent groups. He advised for the residential constituent group he would like to focus on pet waste, which relates to the E-coli problem; for commercial and industrial he would like to focus on trash & litter and for construction and development their focus would be on erosion & sediment control. He shared for the illicit discharge detection and

elimination control measure we need to have an updated IDDE plan submitted by July 1, 2023. He advised we have a draft plan that was written in 2012 and just need to touch that up.

Mr. Gotz explained with construction and post construction the City's stormwater development manual has all of the technical standards for storm water management. He advised some of it relates to what is in the ordinances so depending on the direction Council takes we may need to make some changes in the manual. He felt there were some technical standards in there that he felt were insufficient and would be proposing some changes as well as clarifying some of the language.

Mr. Gotz felt we were in pretty good shape with the municipal operations. He advised there was not much new that would be required. He noted the departments were doing a good job with the things they were doing but stressed that we need to make sure we have good documentation on operations and inspections.

Tad Varga questioned who would communicate the updating of ordinances. Mr. Gotz felt since Mike Shoda was the MS4 Coordinator, he would work with him. He suggested he could put some information out on things to consider.

Jennifer Romano questioned if these changes were changes other communities were making to their ordinances as well. Mr. Gotz felt probably so but was not sure the extent other communities would make changes. He advised Purdue University has a local technical assistance program who has been working with the State MS4 partnership to develop a model ordinance and standards for communities to look at adopting or certain features of it.

Jennifer Romano questioned Mr. Gotz if he had a plan for community education on the pet waste, trash and erosion & sediment control. Mr. Gotz advised they do have some educational material on those issues but was something they need to look at developing. Jennifer Romano advised she had a good resource for educational materials she could share.

**BAKER TILLY – PRESENTATION ON UTILITY RATES** Jeff Rowe with Baker Tilly was present to discuss the utility rate study his company prepared. He shared they looked at the utilities individually but in addition looked at them holistically and attempted to put together a comprehensive rate plan keeping in mind the end impact to the customer.

Mr. Rowe reviewed the Executive Summary with Council. He pointed out the last rate adjustment for storm water was in 2009, sewage works was 2014, water utility in 2019 and electric utility was 2022. He shared over time there are events that begin to eat into the financial performance of the utility; mainly inflation but could also be projects. He shared the proposed rate plan considers a 3-phase rate plan with phase 1 being effective in 2023, phase 2 in 2024 and phase 3 in 2025. He shared in terms of the proposed rates that are reflected as part of the report, those rates would be sufficient to pay for nearly \$10 million in capital investment needs for all 4 utilities combined, over the next 5 years. He noted roughly \$5.5 million were capital needs within the sewage works, \$1.8 million for the water utility, roughly \$500,000.00 for the storm water utility and about \$2 million for the electric utility. He stated, at this point, have assumed all of those capital projects would be paid for with cash on hand and have not assumed any

financing or bond issue associated with funding those projects. He advised in terms of percentage, total utility bill, the proposed rate plan was less than 4% increase per year.

Mr. Rowe reviewed summaries for each individual utility and the total estimated revenue requirements compared to the current revenue stream generated from the current rates. He noted their proposed overall rate increase for the sewage works was 17%, water was about a 5% overall needed adjustment, storm water they were proposing an overall increase of 17% and electric were anticipating an overall 12% increase.

Mr. Rowe, in wrapping up the summary, talked about the proposed rates for all 4 utilities as well as what the estimated total utility bill would be. He advised the current bill, assuming a user of 4,000 gallons, was about \$239.00 per month and if the City were to move forward with the 3-phase rate plan the total bill would go up in 2023 to about \$245.00, in 2024 about \$257.00 and in 2025 the total bill would go up to about \$269.00. He explained, on average, it was a little bit less than 4% per year and a little under \$10 impact to the average residential customer.

Mr. Rowe pointed out how our rates, excluding electric, compared to communities of similar size and also communities around the State based on population. He advised the City is right in the middle ground with water, sewer and storm water rates. He shared in terms of the electric utility, based on the selected communities, we were again right in about the middle ground.

Rosie Coyle advised the Utility Rate Advisory Board would be meeting again and then would provide a recommendation to Council for consideration. Mr. Rowe advised if there were any changes the Board would like to see to let him know.

Jennifer Romano questioned if there was any merit to a 2-phase approach. Mr. Rowe advised it really comes down to a policy decision and how quickly you want to roll out the increases. He advised we could certainly accelerate it and consider 2 years, but it would obviously result in a slightly higher rate impact per phase in order to get to where we needed.

**DEPARTMENT REPORTS** **Chip Hill** – interviewed for and awarded contract to HWC Engineering for downtown revitalization plan. **Terry Wherry** – SOS finished free public wi-fi at MSF and ordered equipment for the water department. **Shawn Lickey** – permanent power to the new Community Foundation building, hung banners along SR 205 and were looking at Main Street, met with Kent Power regarding the North substation project, approved new program for the GenerLink generators. **Mike Shoda** – repaired 3 leaks, installed culvert on West Business 30, having insert valve installed on West Ellsworth Street. **Mike Cook** – annual reports completed and submitted to SDI and EPA, SCADA upgrades on lift stations, pulled new wire for ventilation system in Headworks building. **Kelly Cearbaugh** – televising in Columbia Shores, issues with jet machine, street sweeping, patching holes. **Gary Parrett** – update on hiring process, Officer Stamper resigned February 6 and Officer Stephenson retired February 8, 2 officers at academy and will return in April. **Tom LaRue** – truck 101 repairs, training in Indianapolis.

**ARTS COMMISSION** Jennifer Romano reported the Arts Commissions met. She advised they were working on a logo and grant funding.

**REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION** Tad Varga reported the LML site testing came back ok and were working to get that property opened up for development. He advised the property at Jackson and Line was open for proposals.

**CHICKENS** Melanie Love of 113 E. Market St. was present to remind Council how important chickens were and the continued increase in costs.

Having no further business to discuss, Council President Walt Crowder called the meeting adjourned.

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Council President Walter Crowder

Attest:

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Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle