

**SELECT BOARD MEETING**

**TUESDAY, June 13, 2023 7:00 PM**

**The GREAT HALL, 10 PEARL ST., 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor**

**10 Pearl Street, Stoughton, MA 02072**

**& VIRTUALLY via GOOGLE.MEETS**

In accordance with Governor Baker's declaration of June 16, 2021 granting certain pandemic-related authorizations to Public Board and Town meetings and recently extended until March 30, 2025, this meeting will be conducted both in person and virtually via Google Meets.

A comprehensive record of the proceedings will be posted on the Town's website and/or SMAC as soon as possible after the meeting if live broadcast or livestreaming is unsuccessful. Times are approximate and items may be taken out of order at the discretion of the Chair.

Present: Debra Roberts, Chair, Stephen Cavey, Vice Chair, Scott Carrara, Louis Gitto, Joseph Mokrisky.

Also present: Tom Calter, Town Manager.

**Open Session- Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance**

Chair Roberts called the meeting to order at 7:08 PM. The motion to open the meeting was made by Mr. Carrara and seconded by Vice Chair Cavey. The motion passed.

Members Roberts, Cavey, Carrara, Gitto and Mokrisky responded present to the roll call. Chair Roberts read into the record Governor's Baker declaration on Open Meetings.

Chair Roberts asked Mr. Carrara to speak. Mr. Carrara spoke of the death of Mr. Hank Herbowy, who died June 13, 2023. Mr. Carrara offered condolences to his wife Gloria and family. Mr. Herbowy had served the Town in many ways, as member of the Stoughton Lions, the VFW, the

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Historical Society and as a self-appointed Town photographer. Mr. Carrara commented that Mr. Herbowy will be missed and asked that those present stand in a moment of silence in his honor.

**Authorize the issuance of \$3,200,000.00 Bond Anticipation Note and \$2,685,000.00 General Obligation Bond pursuant to G.L.C. 44 7 44 B - votes may be taken**

Ms. Nute, Town Treasurer, thanked the Board and commented that the Board would be asked to vote to approve the Bond Anticipation Note in the amount of \$3,200,000.00 and the General Obligation Bond in the amount of \$2,685,000.00. The BAN funds would be used to fund the Park Street Sewer project and the Muddy Creek Treatment Plant. Fidelity Capital Markets was the purchaser and had provided a premium of \$21,184 at 3.8%. The funds will be available to the Town on June 16, 2023. Relative to the General Obligation Bond, Robert W. Baird won the bid and funds will be used for various projects. The funds are available June 23, 2023. Ms. Nute mentioned that Hilltop Securities had informed her that the entire motion needs not be read.

Vice Chair Cavey read the motion as follows: I move to approve the among the votes of the Board as prepared by Bond Counsel to the Town and presented to this meeting, which votes, among other things, formally award the Bonds and the Notes to the low bidder determined at a competitive sale held on June 1, 2023, and establish the terms thereof. The formal terms of the votes prepared by the Bond Counsel to the Town, and approved by this motion shall be included in the minutes of this meeting. Mr. Mokrisky seconded the motion. The Board on a roll call vote, approved 5 yes 0 no.

**Public Hearing- to consider adjustments to the Water/Sewer/Solid Waste rates, policies, practices, procedures and operations- Votes will be taken**

Vice Chair Cavey read the public hearing notices for all three public hearings, water/sewer and solid waste and made the motion to open the public hearing. Motion seconded by Mr. Carrara. The Board on a roll call vote, voted 5 yes 0 no.

It was agreed that the public hearing for Solid Waste would be continued until Thursday, June 15, 2023.

Town Manager Calter thanked the members of the committee that worked for the last 4 to 5 weeks to review rates, deficits and potential procedures for elimination of the structural deficit. In 2016 a consulting firm was hired to evaluate the rates and practices. The firm recommended an increase in rates, which the Town did not act upon. He quoted Ms. Christine Howe, Chair of the Board at that time, who warned that the Town would be in trouble if the rates were not raised. The Water/Sewer Enterprise Fund has been underfunded for several years. The taxpayer has paid for subsidies to the Enterprise Funds, and the Town has relied heavily on the MWRA. The FY24 budget shows a deficit of \$1,246,964. Six months of the last 14 years, there had been 0% change in the residential sewer rate. Phil McNulty, Water/Sewer Superintendent, explained the quarterly

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impact on the residential customer would be an additional \$14.71 per quarter for sewer (a rate increase from \$79.97 to \$94.68 proposed for FY2024). Phil McNulty offered comparisons with surrounding Towns, Easton, Canton, Brockton, Sharon, Norwood and Foxboro, noting that the average quarterly cost is \$328.00 compared to \$313.00 for Stoughton. The current water meter rate is \$12.34, and the proposed increase is to \$16.19. An increase of \$3.85. The average household uses 2500 cubic feet, so the proposed increase would be \$34.85 quarterly. Vice Chair Cavey took the opportunity to clarify the explanation stating that one cubic foot represents approximately 7.5 gallons of water which would result in a cost of \$3.97 per cubic foot to residents. Chair Roberts thanked Vice Chair Cavey for the clarification and suggested to Town Manager Calter that perhaps during the public meetings on the rates, the residents should be educated on how to read their bills. Town Manager Calter responded that 2 informational sessions are planned by July 15, 2023. Bill Rowe, Town Account, commented that for FY24, the prior year deficit will have to be funded, and rates may increase to fund the balance of the deficit, increasing dependence on the MWRA. Chair Roberts asked about indirect costs and their allocation. Bill Rowe explained that the costs are spread out through the departments. Ms. Elizabeth DeRoma, 84 Forest Street resident, pointed out that she will experience a 47% increase at her home. Bill Rowe responded that for several years the rates were based on estimates and not on actual costs. Mr. John Malley, 21 Stoughton Street resident, asked why nothing had been done since 2018 in response to the result of the study. Vice Chair Cavey responded that some of those years, the Town was attempting to help residents cope with the financial difficulties of the Covid-19 pandemic. Mr. Carrara added that the Board was also told that federal funds would be available, but the funds were used for other purposes.

Ms. Pat Colburn, precinct 4, said people on septic systems should not have to subsidize the sewer cost. She stated further that water and trash should not be enterprise funds. Town Manager Calter offered a correction, indicating that water is an enterprise fund, solid waste is not. In addition, at present, residents pay to subsidize the enterprise funds. The rate proposal would eliminate the subsidies. Mr. Peter Ventresco, Canton Street resident, remarked that the Town pays millions out of the general operating fund to subsidize the water/sewer enterprise funds. Mr. Ventresco suggested encouraging residents with wells to hook up to Town water. Phil McNulty agreed, noting that the hook-up fee had been reduced from \$2500 to \$2000 as an incentive. Mr. Gitto commented that as an MWRA community, the Town is expected to increase residential housing. The Town should look forward 40 or 50 years and future water availability. Mr. George Dolinsky, precinct 2, asked if the proposal would wipe out the deficit. He also questioned if consideration could be given to senior citizens on fixed incomes. Bill Rowe responded that the rate increase proposed will eliminate the deficit. Town Manager Calter said it is guaranteed to reduce the subsidy being paid out of the general fund. Mr. Cohen, 134 Kotlik Street resident, asked if the Town would be compensated for water used by abutting Towns. Town Manager Calter responded that any changes in current agreements would require the re-writing of current inter-community agreements. Ms. Cynthia Walsh, 1096 Park Street resident, reminded all that there are discounts currently available, such as 15% on water/trash usage; the circuit breaker discount on real estate and the opportunity for senior citizens to volunteer and thereby receive reduction on their property taxes. Mr. John Anzivino, Vice Chair of the Finance Committee, precinct 4, asked Phil McNulty to explain the term Liens under user fees. Bill Rowe responded that Liens are charged when water/sewer payments are not received on time. Mr. Ventresco, 587 Canton Street resident, asked if the Town would continue to maintain a line from Westwood. Phil McNulty said yes. The line

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is currently used for emergencies. Town Manager Calter said the proposal will continue to decrease dependency on MWRA funding. Ms. Elizabeth DeRoma, 84 Forest Street resident, noted that her household will have an 18.5 % sewer rate increase. She asked why not base the increase on the number of bathrooms or bedrooms. Phil McNulty responded that the costs are based on usage. He suggested that a meter be placed on her well and usage monitored.

Vice Chair Cavey made the motion to close the public hearing on sewer/water rate increases. Mr. Carrara seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Mr. Cavey made the motion to continue the public hearing on solid wastes on Thursday, June 15, 2023 7:00 PM. Mr. Mokrisky seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Select Board discussion.

Vice Chair Cavey said the math here is straight forward. The increases must be implemented. He understood that some households will have difficulty. He noted that the increases will be approximately 80 to 100 dollars quarterly. Town Manager Calter stated that public hearings will be held on state funding; assets available for veterans. The Town will work with the VNA and COA to find financial aid for those needing assistance. Mr. Gitto agreed that this needs to be done. To not do it will mean that other essential projects will not be done. Mr. Carrara remarked that in the past he had made a motion to increase the rates by 3.5%, but it was rejected. It needs to be done. Chair Roberts agreed, remarking that the assessment was the result of an extensive in-depth analysis. Mr. Mokrisky added that some decisions are difficult. Rates should have been increased in prior years. The Town has been generous with abatements. They should be more closely scrutinized.

Mr. Gitto made the motion to approve the rate increase in sewer in accordance with Mass General Law, the Town Charter and the charge of the Select Board as Sewer Commissioners; the flow rate to increase from \$10.58 to \$12.53 per 100 cubic feet. Vice Chair Cavey seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously to approve, 5 yes 0 no.

Mr. Gitto made the motion to approve the increase in water rates in accordance with Mass General Laws, the Town Charter and the charge of the Select Board as Sewer Commissioners, for FY24: 0-2600 cubic feet increase from \$3.97 to \$5.21 per 100 cubic feet; 2601-5900 cubic feet increase from \$5.85 to \$7.68 per 100 cubic feet and 5900 cubic feet plus increase from \$8.10 to \$10.63 per 100 cubic feet. All other fees and charges increase by the same percentage. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Cavey. The Board voted to approve unanimously 5 yes 0 no.

Vice Chair Cavey made the motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Carrara. On a roll call vote, the Board voted 5 yes 0 no. The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 PM.

### **Documents Used During the Meeting**

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1. Item#2 Authorize issuance of \$3,200,000.00 Bond Anticipation Notes and \$2,685,000 General Obligation Bond pursuant to G.L.C. 44 and 44B - 54 pages
2. Item#3 To consider adjustments to the Water/Sewer/Solid Waste rates, policies, practices, procedures and operations: Water rates - 11 pages; Sewer rates - 6 pages

Approved on:

Signed by:

07 / 25 / 2023

Debra C Roberts

Debra C. Roberts, Chair