

UTILITIES COMMITTEE MINUTES

OF JANUARY 8, 2018

Municipal Council of the City of Vermilion
Municipal Complex, 685 Decatur Street, Vermilion, Ohio 44089

In Attendance:

Vermilion City Council:

Steve Herron, President of Council; Monica Stark, Council at Large; John Gabriel, Ward One; Frank Loucka, Ward Two; Steve Holoavcs, Ward Three; Barb Brady, Ward Four; Brian Holmes, Ward Five.

Administration:

Jim Forthofer, Mayor; Tony Valerius, Service Director; Chris Howard, City Engineer; Chris Hartung, Police Chief.

Call to Order:

Steve Holoavcs, Chairman, RESOLVED THAT this Utilities Committee comprised of the committee of the whole does now come to order.

TOPIC ONE:

Infiltration – Vermilion on the Lake

B. Brady reminded council that she would keep this issue on the agenda until they started some movement. She explained they are still getting overflows in their sanitary sewers in the VOL area (west end only & at Lansing). She had been requesting that maybe they televisue the line and pop some manholes to see if they can isolate where the problem is.

T. Valerius said he spoke with the building inspector and asked him this winter to go up and down all the VOL streets and have him look and note the address of any homes where their downspouts are tied into something, and then in the spring they could follow up with that address and send a letter out, and perform an inspection on where that downspout goes. A lot of them go into the ditch, but there are probably some that are tied into the sanitary. Also, he showed council an elevation map of Edgewater from Rowland to the pump station. He said Barb's concern is that they are popping manholes at Lansing and at the west end. However, he showed council where the sanitary line is and explained that based on the elevation they can see that the water level goes up and it will hit Lansing first and then hit the manholes on the west end. This is why those are popping before any of the other ones. B. Brady noted the former engineer had shown her this elevation map and doesn't argue with this, but when she popped manholes there wasn't even rushing water in between. She would just like them to camera the line to make sure there isn't a blockage.

C. Howard said when the sewer was relined they didn't replace the sewer because there were no dollars to do so. It was just designed to handle the sanitary. They had an I/I problem in that area and they knew about it. However, the problem is the laterals and they did smoke tests 10 years ago and a lot of the tests showed smoke coming out of the ditches. He still believes there is an issue with the laterals where some are cracked and separated and you have a lot of storm water into it. The system isn't designed to handle

the storm sewer too. B. Brady said they need to do something because there is raw sewage in the streets which is unacceptable.

TOPIC TWO: Water Bill Fee Charge

B. Brady said it's a continued frustration because again this month they got an email saying their water bill was due on the day it was due, so it was impossible to pay it on time from the email that was sent out. She said there is definitely something broken and her argument is that they are charging residents late fees for something they can't pay on time which doesn't seem fair. So until they get this issue fixed, they owe the residents some leeway whether it's extending it to a 30 day time period.

B. Holmes said he also received a phone call on this matter because the person received an email at 7:00 am and then they went to pay the bill downtown but nobody was there to accept their payment, so they put it in the night deposit box.

B. Brady said maybe they should do a short term moratorium until they have somebody who can look into it. They are charging people an \$11 late fee which seems unreasonable and unfair. S. Herron agreed and didn't feel they should impose those late fees until they figure this out. S. Holovacs said when you make a payment online it tells you at the end there is a service charge. He wondered if the website could be redesigned to notify the public what the fee will be. He said he got a notice his bill was due and 18 minutes later he got a second notice, then he got his paper one that said it wasn't due for a while.

B. Brady asked if these bugs are from a new system and G. Fisher said it was a new software system. She believed another company sends out the bills and the utilities clerk prepares the billing. J. Gabriel asked if the decision is to put a moratorium on the late fee for now or waive it until they can sort this out. S. Herron said to him it comes down to a communication issue. G. Fisher suggested having the administration talk to the utilities clerk first on how the system works. B. Brady said it's apparent there are timing problems and now they are expected to pay in two days, and then they get the email the day it's due. She said people need 30 days to pay a bill.

B. Holmes said the former finance director explained to him that the charge was added to the online payment method because the credit card company charges the city. S. Holovacs said they need to know this upfront so they have an option to send their payment by mail or drop it off at the office. G. Fisher noted it was on the website about the charge.

Council asked the administration to check with the utilities clerk on the process and what they could do at this time to address the problem, and then report back to council at the next meeting.

TOPIC THREE: Water/Sewer Transfers

J. Gabriel said one issue he has always been opposed against is administrative fee transfers from the water and sewer fund to the general fund. From his standpoint, when

they don't charge a parks department for their various aspects of payroll and the service director's and mayor's time involving grant writing and other things, they have to remember these are enterprise funds which are supposed to be self-sufficient. His issue is that if they do water and sewer increases, this hits the rich and the poor alike and if they come at the heels of an administrative transfer, then to him this is wrong; especially when you have funds that are in need of capital improvement money. Before they get into a budget discussion at any length he wants to think about taking any money in the past that was considered for administrative fees and save it in those funds for capital improvements. Both plants are in dire need of equipment and repairs.

B. Brady said the other side of this is that some of these people that pay into these accounts are outside the city limits, so they need to make their rates different than the ones that live inside the city or the transfers make more sense because people in the city are paying the administrative fees for everybody. J. Gabriel doesn't disagree but he didn't believe council ever asked the law director to sit down and review those contracts. He wondered if it was something they could sit down and renegotiate or review to see if there is a better way to manage it. He believed it was written in the 80s.

S. Hologacs suggested putting this item under 'New Business' at the next council meeting so they can make a motion to have the law director review the contract and ordinance. J. Gabriel said they can make a motion now for him to review the contract. He said he is not out to offend any negotiating partner in any of these agreements. He thought as civilized parties they can talk about it.

J. Gabriel MOVED; F. Loucka seconded to send the current agreement to the law director for review involving the both sanitary and water contracts. Roll Call Vote 7 YEAS. MOTION CARRIED.

B. Brady MOVED; S. Hologacs seconded to recess into executive session for the purpose of compensation at the conclusion of all committee meetings. Roll Call Vote 7 YEAS. MOTION CARRIED.

S. Hologacs adjourned the meeting after no further discussion came before the committee.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 12, 2018 at 7:00 p.m.

Gwen Fisher, Certified Municipal Clerk