

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Service Committee of Council
Held in Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Monday, September 12, 2016 at 6:00 P.M.**

Service Committee Members Present:

Chairman, Ward 1 Councilman Bob Butkowski
Ward 3 Councilwoman Mary Berges, Ward 4 Councilman Scott Radcliffe

Others in Attendance:

Councilman-at-Large Brian Fischer; Law Director John Gasior; Mayor Bryan Jensen; Councilwoman-at-Large Tammy Holtzmeier; Ward 2 Councilman Dennis McBride; Service Director Mike Farmer; Utilities Billing Clerk Natalie Cifranic; Finance Director Bill Logan; Utilities Supt. Anthony Lorenzo; Several Avon Residents

The Chairman, Bob Butkowski, called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

Discussion of Water Bills After Installation of New Meters

Mr. Butkowski stated that this Service Committee meeting was planned from 6:00 – 6:30 P.M. because there is a Finance Committee meeting that follows at 6:30 P.M. but rest assured, if we do not get the issues addressed at this meeting there are resources that will be here up until 7:30 P.M. to be able to handle any of those individual issues. Mr. Butkowski thanked everyone for coming out and said that the City understands the important nature of this and that was the reason for calling the Service Committee meeting together as quickly as possible to try to address any of those questions.

Mayor Jensen explained that when something comes before the City that has to do with service, such as utilities, it is handled with the Service Committee. In his role, he is the Administrator so whatever takes place in terms of what Council legislates, he runs the operational part of it. But Council legislates.

The Mayor said, regarding the water meter change-out, the Administration tried to look at people's usage and saw early on that there were many people who had a lot of high usage, so we looked at past histories, back to 2012 for most of them, to see if it was possible that this could happen. There has been a huge outcry from residents saying that could not possibly have used the amount of water they were billed for. So we had a meeting with Mr. Lorenzo and Mr. Logan to determine how we could assure people that these are accurate readings. With the urging of Council members, all of whom have been very concerned about what is going on, we have decided to independently audit what is happening. So we are in the process right now of trying to find an audit team that can come in and not only audit the meters themselves but also the accounting part of it, the software part of it, and look at all those issues.

The Mayor continued by saying that we changed out almost 10,000 meters and with that being said, we cannot believe that there is not a problem with some meters. But what we have to look at is on an individual basis of where we think that issue is and so we have taken every phone call that has come in and written down every name, and we are in the process now of going through each one. With some of the people who have called in, the readings were off from their old meters. The word out there was the fact that as soon as we implemented the new meters, this is when the issue came up and that is not correct in a lot of the cases. In some of the cases, it absolutely is and so we are going to look at those individually but for the most part, it is off an old meter. We had old meters that were in place; we also had old systems for getting readings. Some of you can remember back a couple years when you were getting an estimated bill,

an estimated bill, and then an actual bill. Some people were just getting quarterly bills. Today we are just looking at water usage. If you want to look at your bill pertaining to the dollar amounts, that is something that is really difficult in terms of what we are doing today. Council passed some water increases because we have some maintenance issues that are coming up and Mr. Lorenzo can address some of those.

The Mayor stated that, from our standpoint in the Administration, and Council feels the same way, if there is a problem we are going to fix it. We want to find out what the problem is, what we need to do to correct it if there is a problem, and then move forward. We are hoping that people will use the website of eyeonwater.com like they use their online banking. They can see if there is a surge in their water and adjust what they are doing in terms of water usage. The Mayor said he thought a lot of people would be surprised once they get on eyeonwater to see how much water is used for showers, etc.

Mayor Jensen said, but most of you are here not to learn about eyeonwater but because of concerns about your water bills. He stated that anybody who has signed up through the audit process will be a part of the audit. Normally in an audit, they will pick a certain percentage of water meters to evaluate but anybody who has signed up will be part of whatever percentage that is. Again, anybody who wants to stay after this meeting can talk to the Utilities Billing Clerk to go over their water usage or have her help them in signing up for eyeonwater. If you do not want to stay, anybody who signed up we are going to look at your usage and will contact you if you want to come in and look at it. We will send you your previous usage so you can look at just your gallon usage.

The Mayor said we knew there were going to be a lot of phone calls because people were not going to expect these bills. There are two different phases in the number 3 zone, where this took place. There were a lot of people who got quarterly bills; they got estimated, estimated, and then an actual in either July or in August and then they would get another one in either October or November. So if some of you look back in your history, you will notice back in 2012 (and that is the one the Mayor used because the weather was similar), that there were some people who used over 100,000 gallons of water in those months but it was split up – one was 60,000 one month and 40,000 or 50,000 the next month. So as he looked at it individually, he cannot believe someone did not come in in November and say there is no way they could have possibly used 50,000 gallons of water. But back in those years, it was happening and we have the records to prove it. We have also not thrown away anybody's meters so if there is a question of what their meter reading was before, Badger Meter was required to keep meters for 6 months or until everybody is satisfied or feels like we have done everything we can do to correct an issue they see as a problem. We will keep those meters to show that. The Mayor said that he appreciated everybody's patience and would now have people come up and talk for a minute if they want to ask questions.

Wendy Wyse of Saddle Creek Drive, stated that her house is 12 years old and she has two lines to her house. She does not have a deduction meter but there are two outside shutoff valves; she does not know where the two lines separate. The reason this has become a concern is because the second month after her new water meter went in, she was billed for 75,000 gallons on the inside and 75,000 on the outside. She does not know if this is a common thing to have two separate water lines. She did not get charged for double sewers. She asked if someone could investigate how her water is plumbed into her house because that could very well be an issue if it is double counting. She said that she does not use 75,000 gallons in six months let alone in the 25 day cycle that she was billed for. Mayor Jensen said that Mr. Lorenzo would send out his crew to look at everything and Mr. Lorenzo said to Ms. Wyse that they would be glad to come out to her house whenever she is available.

Ralph Lunt stated that the average water bill for his office on Colorado Drive was about \$20. a month. Then imagine what it was like when he received a bill for \$359. for 31,000 gallons of water and all he uses water for is the bathroom. There is no sprinkler system, no anything. He said that it was not a changed meter unless it was changed without his knowing it. Also, he said that the water charge was \$144. and the sewer was \$215. and that ratio seems off to him. Mayor Jensen said that we will definitely take a look at that.

Mike Musser of Kensington Drive stated that his concern is the bill itself, not necessarily the rates. The bill is very vague. He sprinkles the yard but the bill shows just one amount for water and one for sewer. He did get his meter changed out, but there is no prior usage history on the bill like there is with the electric bill. He asked if there was a plan to update this bill because he knows there are different water rates for the first 75,000 gallons and after that it drops down. Mr. Logan stated that that has changed. 25,000 is now the break point for the rates. Mr. Musser said there is nothing on his bill that states anything like that. And the break issue is not the point; the point is when he gets a bill, he would like to know what he is paying for. Mr. Logan said that on the City's website, if you sign up to make a payment online, in there is the history of all the bills, month by month, your billing and your payments. You can look at past history going back three years. Mrs. Holtzmeier added so that is a tool for Mr. Musser to be able to see the history. It shows the actual bill and there is a decent graph. She recommends that Mr. Musser look at the table in addition to the graph. It is a table that provides you with actual data and a good historical account. Mr. Logan said if Mr. Musser wanted to know how to access that on the website to please email or call him or Ms. Cifranic.

Philip Mercio of Pine Drive stated that the residents appreciate the Administration's and Council's time and efforts and taking this seriously. Mr. Logan was kind enough to meet with him this afternoon and he greatly appreciates it. This is very serious for residents; to have people go from an average bill of \$20. to \$350. is incredible. He said that there was some confusion about his meter change, with three different visits from the company doing the install. He was led to believe that in early 2015 there was a software change in the billing. The billing was rounded to thousands of gallons; his bills going back years and years show that his estimated and actual readings were always in thousands of gallons. His bills switched over to actual gallons used in June of this year. He said that he was pointing all this out to show that there is a little bit of inconsistency with the whole install: the personal issues he has seen, going from rounding to thousands of gallons to individual gallons. We need to be shown what is going on. If there is a problem, we appreciate your getting to the bottom of it and getting this audit going.

Mr. Logan stated that in May we switched from billing in thousands to billing down to the actual gallons, which is exact. The billing system would not allow us to do that any differently any earlier than that.

Mayor Jensen stated that at this point he was going to let Council members go to the Finance Committee meeting in the Caucus Room. He said that he and Mr. Lorenzo and Ms. Cifranic would stay in Council Chambers so they would continue to hear what the residents have going on. He said that residents can still continue to contact Council members, whether they are at Large or Ward and he also encourages them to call either Mr. Lorenzo or himself because, again, most of these issues in terms of gallon usage are administrative issues. If you are not getting the satisfaction you want, Council can always legislate him to do something different.

Transcribed by Gail Hayden, Assistant Clerk of Council