

Clark Township Sewer Advisory Board

MEETING MINUTES

Monday January 11, 2021, 1 PM

I. Meeting called to order at 1:04 PM with Pledge of Allegiance.

Members present: Mr. Shoberg, Mr. Clymer, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Keighley

Members absent:

DPW manager: Jim Landreville

Guests: Dave Nordquist, Deputy Supervisor Mr. Murray *Secretary*

Dave Nordquist is to be appointed a member of the SAB at the January 20, 2021, Township Board meeting. He described his 31-years of experience with managing water treatment plants, sewage treatment plants in Marquette and Negaunee, as Director of Public Works in Negaunee and Alpena, and Director of Parks and Recreation in Alpena.

2. Agenda adopted.

Approved by acclamation.

3. Minutes

Approved by acclamation.

4. Correspondence

Mr. Clymer said he received communication regarding beaver activity near Creekside.

5. Agenda items

a. SAW grants (Stormwater Asset Management and Wastewater)

Mr. Clymer said there is "left-over" funding available through SAW and c2ae, the engineering firm working with the Township, is developing the grant application to be available this month.

Mr. Clymer said he and Jim were unable to find a software package to record data at remote sites without cellular or internet cloud storage capability. c2ae holds licenses for software use and GIS in other communities, and they store data on their computers and then email data to a community. For our small system that would work well. Each lift station has flow meters, except Marquette Island. When Jim collects weekly data, he can email it to c2ae to store in their data base which we can access. It gives us a GIS with a data base so we can log all maintenance and repairs on every grinder pump. When a worker goes out to a site, he can review the history of repairs and replacement.

He said this will help in developing a capital budget for a replacement process. Part of the grant calls for inspecting each of the grinder pumps. The grant won't replace everything but is a step towards repairs. Once we have that data, we will have a better vantage point to determine what we need and what it will cost, whether we can spread the work out over years, if we need to replace all the grinder pumps in 10 years, etc. The same for repairs at lift stations. Equipment is

aging and some are failing. Without the data base, it's difficult for the Board to make decisions on what to do.

Mr. O'Brien said we're putting a lot of money into a dead horse. The system is breaking down and we may need to replace the whole system. We can't keep up with the repairs and replacements, and we need to let the people know the system needs replacing. We need to start now to let them know the system is failing us and we need to replace it. We need to make a long-range plan.

Mr. Clymer said he doesn't believe the system is a dead horse per se. There are features and components that need more diligence on the Township's part to be operating more effectively. These grants will give us the funding to start fixing it. In 2010, c2ae prepared a Preliminary Engineering Report (PRE) necessary for USDA grant applications. We can update the numbers, and identify recommendations made in 2010 that weren't implemented. I can review it with Jim and Dave (Nordquist) and develop a concise report of what was recommended and what we can revisit. This work can reduce the cost for a new PRE.

Mr. O'Brien asked how much storm water is coming into the system. Mr. Landreville said earlier it was bad but after repairs to manhole covers and addressing some sump pump issues it was reduced. Biggest problems are spring flows and heavy rain events.

USDA Grants

Mr. Clymer said it will cost tens of thousands of dollars just to apply. Preliminary costs for engineering, bonding agent, selling bonds may be one-half to one million dollars. Rates are good, though, and engineers suggested a 'sweet spot' for access to grants would be if Township charged about \$50 a month per REU (residential equivalency unit). Without that, we could only get loans. A couple of Township Board members suggested to increase rates to \$50 per month instead of incremental increases. Ideally, he said, if Township wants a USDA grant, rates will need to go to \$50 to \$52 a month. That grant is needed to address the whole system. SAW grant will help us develop a capital improvement program. What we need to focus on, Mr. Clymer said, is how much do we want to invest in the program, what will it cost per year, and the how much do we add per user to pay for it. Chances are we will need a combination of loan and grants. But we need specific data and costs before we can apply for USDA funds, and realistic numbers to make a sustainable system.

Mr. Shoberg said if an alternative now is to stay in place until we know the data.

Mr. Clymer said the current sewer fund balance is \$84,536. A year or two ago it was in the \$200,000s, but \$130,000 was used to pay for the Blind Line main repair, and \$65,000 was taken from the Township general fund to pad the sewer fund. So, what's really here is \$20,000. The current sewer fund would not be enough to provide a match for a loan or grant. We would need to raise rates just to recharge the fund for repairs and be able to provide a loan match. The better the fund appears the more capital we have to work with, the better off we'll be. If we have a \$1 million system, we ought to have at least \$200,000 in the fund.

Mr. Shoberg said we need to bite the bullet, and Mr. Keighley agreed saying we need to put money into the system. Mr. O'Brien said we can't function without it.

Brief discussion about REU's at various locations; about Culinary school adding a cold-water line this past autumn to help catch more grease before going to grinder pumps, as DPW replaced about a dozen grinder pumps over the last few years owing to grease issues. Mr. Clymer suggested adopting a policy that if, for example, more than three pumps are replaced the property owner will begin paying for the next ones. He said a few years ago the sewer fund lost \$35,000 because Township wasn't charging enough. The Township increased the rates just to breakeven but needs to move beyond breaking even to get ahead.

Mr. Nordquist asked what kind of public education and notification was in place? Mr. Clymer said a newsletter will be updated to explain how the money will be used and why it is needed. Last newsletter went out in 2007. Mr. Shoberg said information should be published in the St. Ignace News and Soo Evening News as well.

Motion: Mr. Keighley moved to recommend to the Township Board to increase the REU rates to \$150 a quarter, Mr. O'Brien seconded. Vote: All aye. No objections.

TASSIER LAWSUIT

Mr. Clymer said it was a potential \$200,000 problem. Mr. Clymer described how the sewage backup occurred and its extent, and Mr. Landreville described which element within the grinder pump broke down. Mr. Clymer said he had a conference scheduled for that afternoon with the Township attorney to review the issue.

He said how PA22 provides no avenue for homeowners or municipalities to be insured as most homeowner insurance policies do not cover sewer backups. He is looking at ways to educate homeowners about the insurance they need and can afford to help pay for sewer backup events and would like to lobby the legislators to establish an insurance fund that municipalities pay into to help residents.

Mr. Keighley said the individual involved with the lawsuit feels badly about suing the Township, and Mr. Clymer said he would like to find ways to assist him even to help raise money for him.

6. Old Business

7. New Business: none

8. Public Comment

None

9. Adjournment

Mr. Clymer moved to adjourn, Mr. Keighley seconded, and the meeting adjourned at 2:53 pm.