



## **March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 Meeting**

Present at the March 1 meeting were members Beulah Matczak, Kody Tinnel, Bryan McMillan, and Rod Vargo. In addition, from City Utilities, Matthew Wirtz, Eric Ruppert, and Frank Suarez attended, and special guest, veteran journalist Lisa Long, joined to present the events that led to the Sewer Task Force and the progression of projects.

Kody Tinnel moved to approve the minutes and minute, and Bryan McMillan seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved.

From the construction report, a question came up about the status of the Microgrid project. Matthew Wirtz explained that the project is necessary and shared a story about how a recent ice event had repeatedly caused the power to go out in Ann Arbor at the filtration plant, and the storm made it difficult to get diesel fuel delivered for their backup generators because of the storm. The need for a backup in addition to diesel-powered generators is real. The microgrid will use solar panels on the ponds to generate and store power. Matthew said the project had been bid and is moving forward. Frank shared that we will try to schedule the September meeting to see the progress on the construction project of the panels.

Rod Vargo asked if the Pontiac Street project connected with the streetscape. Matthew said it was independent of that project. The Pontiac Street project is evaluating stormwater infiltration to the sanitary sewer and determining a cost-effective plan to reduce the flow.

Rod also asked about Rothman Road from the construction report.

Rothman is an area that's had sanitary overflows, and the project will eliminate those overflows. A siphon barrel, new pipe and manholes will improve flow capacity.

Lisa Long discussed the history of the Sewer Task Force when the EPA gave the city until June of 1996 to be in compliance of the Clean Water Act to limit discharge into Fort Wayne's rivers. Task Force members recommended to Mayor Helmke that all sewers be inspected and restored every twelve years and increase capacity of combined sewers over ten years. The creation of a committee of Area Partnership representatives and a member of the Chamber to ensure recommendations were carried out and City Utilities Staff were advised of future environmental regulations. To expand development the city needed to increase its sewer capacity.

Matthew asked if the city prioritized where they should do projects for expansion.

Fort Wayne agreed to do several projects in the Northwest area of the city. The infrastructure and topography of that area warranted improvement projects.

Frank asked Lisa if working with Business Weekly has made her look at the way businesses are connected to sewer and water in a different way.

Lisa asked how much combined sewer the city has. Matthew replied around 300 miles.

Matthew discussed Lillian and the history of combined sewers throughout the city and how developments in certain communities throughout the city were carried out. Lillian was the subject of many stories in the news and led to the forming of the Sewer Task Force which is now the Utility Advisory Group. Matthew shared that some of the items that came from the Task Force included, televising the sewers, increasing maintenance, a computerized documentation of complaints related to basement backups. Work to improve Lillian began before the Consent Decree.



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Lisa asked Matthew if there are still a lot of calls about drainage issues from customers. Matthew shared that with work done since 1996 basement backups are down. Since 2020, we've had 665 basement backups, but we've found that more than 70 percent of those are caused by private issues on their own property. Matthew explained how the task force helped with developments in the Water Pollution Control Plant to enhance capacity and stay in on track with the EPA and Long-Term Control Plan.

Lisa asked when the last time there was a sewer rate increase. Frank replied that the council passed a five year one that the city is currently in. Matthew expanded that 2024 the last rate increase will go into effect and moving forward, subject to EPA rulings, rates should be able to stay in the single digits.

Frank gives an update on AMI and meter installation. Results from a survey of the first 33,000 installations show that 84% of people surveyed were happy or very happy with the service. A lot of the general complaints have come from cancellations.

Bryan McMillan asked how many installations have there been so far. There have been just under 33,000 installations performed. The focus going forward for Tribus is to pull back on the amount of installations per day so that expectations can be met and customer complaints on cancellations can be reduced.

There will be a tour of Camp Scott on April 29<sup>th</sup>.

Rod Vargo moved to adjourn the meeting. Kody Tinnel seconded the motion.

**Meeting officially adjourned.**