



**Cogswell Spring Water Works
Water Commission Meeting
Saturday September 12, 2020
Henniker Community Center**

Members Present: Jerry Gilbert, Chairman; Bill Hall, Commissioner; Jeff Connor, Commissioner; Norm Bumford, Superintendent

Guests: Ryan Bumford, Chief Operator; Selectwoman Tia Hooper, Charlene Story, Charlie Damour, Joe Damour, Danny & Heidi Aucoin, Caleb Dobbins, Ray Mohors, Lorin Mulligan, Paul Whittermore, Ray Rose

Recording Secretary: Kelly McCutcheon

Chair Gilbert opened the meeting to discuss the future of the Water Department which is currently a 2-person operation. Chair Gilbert had spoken with Joe Damour who was the previous Water Operator for 33 years. Selectwoman Tia Hooper asked if Joe Damour could explain \$150,000 estimate as part of service and what it encompasses compared to how the department currently operates.

Chair Gilbert stated it would leave one person on site all day and WSO would carry the licenses and oversee daily operations, with that person being an employee of WSO rather than Cogswell Spring Water Works (CSWW). Additionally, WSO would be on call for emergencies.

Joe Damour clarified that it would depend on the structure the CSWW selects since meter reading would be extra, water turn off is included however if there is a water break that would be cost plus. Joe Damour stated essentially anything that will take more than an hour's time is typically billed separately. He stated in 20 years when the water meters are due to be changed out that would be contracted out separately as they are currently not big enough to handle a 500-meter change out. Water testing is also contracted out. Shoveling of hydrants would also be an additional charge.

Selectwoman Tia Hooper asked what the town of Epsom is paying. Chair Gilbert stated that comparing the two towns is not "apples to apples". Joe Damour stated that the Epsom crew is half the size of CSWW and that should WSO receive the contract, there would be one dedicated WSO employee to the CSWW with the salary and benefits falling on WSO rather than CSWW.

Lorin Mulligan asked CSWW would still be town owned despite being a separate entity from all the other town departments. The CSWW does not fall under town purview. Lorin had previously sued the town specially the CSWW and the only way for her to sue the town is because town entity but not a town department.

Commissioner Hall stated that there is no intent to sell CSWW assets. Charlie Damour confirmed WSO does not want to purchase CSWW but wants to be sub-contractor who runs operations and emergencies.

Caleb Dobbins suggested having a public works director to over see water, waste water, transfer station, highway, etc. while maintaining department heads. He also suggested keeping CSWW with one full time town employee and putting out and RFP (request for proposal) for emergencies to have 2 people as back up moving forward.

Chair Gilbert stated his hesitation at adding another layer of government and taking away autonomy of decisions from the CSWW. Caleb stated the town spends thousands of dollars on engineers, contractors, and consulting fees and feels having one person responsible for high-level long-term operations could benefit the town.

Selectperson Tia Hooper suggested a meeting with the Sewer Commissioners (who are the Board of Selectmen) and Water Commissioners to discuss the possibility of a hybrid option or merging the two departments together.

Commissioner Connor stated the department had been previously merged when Steve Burritt was Public Work Director, but after he retired the position was never filled and the town went back to having only department heads.

Selectperson Tia Hooper asked if the work could be done by a part-time person and sub contract the rest of the work out. The Commissioners stated that job cannot be done by a part-time person given the size of the CSWW system.

Lorin Mulligan asked if the Commissioners had looked at similar sized systems and how many people ran those operations. Chair Gilbert stated they had previously done that a few years ago and found similar sized operations have 5-7 full-time employees where CSWW currently operates with 2 full-time employees.

Commissioner Connor clarified that it does depend on how much the water departments do themselves, for example Boscawen does their own excavations where currently CSWW has to contract out excavation work.

Ray Rose asked how many customers are on the CSWW system. There are 578 water meters with an average of 2.3 people per house with just over 1,100 users. Sewer cost are based on water usage.

Danny Aucoin asked if WSO \$150,000 estimate included a full-time employee. Chair Gilbert confirmed it does but the Water Commission is not asking for money or approval of money at this time. This is merely a discussion session for the publics' information and input.

Charlie Damour clarified this covers workers compensation and WSO will provide a vehicle as well. Lorin Mulligan asked if the one employee would be a town employee. Charlie Damour responded no and that the employee would be a WSO employee who is sub contracted to work specifically for CSWW with the Water Commissioners still running and overseeing the department.

Lorin asked about the earlier mentioned \$189,000 currently spend on 2 salaries for the department, and if whoever wins the bid will also cover workmen's compensations. Commissioner Connor stated the department may also just hire someone to replace the Superintendent before he retires and maintain operations as is.

Chair Gilbert stated they are looking at all the options including Caleb Dobbins & Selectwoman Tia Hooper's suggestions since the Commissioners are merely 3 dudes from the street who don't have all the answers and are looking for suggestions.

Danny Aucoin asked if the hired replacement would need to be sent to school? Commission Hall stated they would advertise for the licensed operator because the position cannot be run without a license.

Paul Whittermore stated he is familiar with the town and does water work in Vermont and Maine. He stated how difficult it is to find experienced operators, let alone operators who care about the system. He supports WSO sub-contracting because of the support staff WSO can put behind that employee so the town really is getting more than one employee. Paul also stated his support for not merging the water department with the rest of the town departments because of how much goes on behind the scenes in making sure when you turn your faucet on clean water is running. The Superintendent and Chief Operator do a lot on a daily basis.

Ryan Bumford, Chief Operator CSWW, stated he is licensed and the town can still operator under him until the Superintendents replacement is found if the Water Commissioners select to maintain operations as is.

Heidi Aucoin stated that quality of service is most important but it sounds like the cost could be much lower than having a town employee especially when considering WSO will supply a vehicle, it seems there are many cost savings included. Chair Gilbert stated that is why the Commissioners stated this process to discuss and look at all the options.

Someone from the crowd asked if it would be a long-term contract or year by year. Commissioner Hall stated typically 3-year contracts subject to negotiations. It is not fair to an operator to be locked into a long-term contract with a fixed salary, so they aim to keep the contacts short with some adjustments and would be listed in the RFP for length of term.

Selectperson Tia Hooper asked how many companies are like WSO. Chair Gilbert stated he can think of 3 off the top of his head. Joe Damour stated the State has a website with a list and there are probably a dozen in state.

Ryan Bumford asked what a hybrid operation would look like. Commissioner Hall stated it would be a full-time CSWW employee with backup through contract for emergency situations with a second person for safety reasons.

Selectperson Hooper asked about who would control repair work. Chair Gilbert stated it would depend on the contract. Commission Hall stated Selectwoman Tia Hooper brought forward a good point since currently CSWW has a casual working relationship with other town departments and can get a street crew to shut off a damaged water main right away, whereas sub-contracting could take time. It is something to consider moving though the process.

Chair Gilbert stated it brings to mind the problems the Fire Department had with Eversource which use to be a local company but is now based in Bedford, NH and it takes 35-45 minutes before a truck can arrive on scene. If a water main breaks and loosing 1,000 gallons a minute can the CSWW wait 45 minutes for a response if someone else can be on scene in 15/20 minutes or less?

The last few years the Superintendent has been upgrading the system to a valve system putting more value into CSWW to ensure one full-time person can isolate a leak in a short time so major leaks will not be an issue.

There was no more public input and Chair Gilbert called the meeting to an end at 8:50am.