

TOWN OF RICHLANDS WATER/SEWER WORK SESSION

The Richlands Town Council held a Water/Sewer Work Session on Monday, October 2, 2023, at 6:00 pm in the Richlands Council Chambers with the following present:

Mayor: Rod. D. Cury
Interim Town Manager: Clarence Monday
Finance Manager: Ronnie Campbell
Council Members: Doug Ratliff, Gary Jackson, Jordan Bales, Jan White, and Laura Mollo.
Wastewater Plant Chief Operator: Jimmy Keen
Water Treatment Plant Chief Operator: EJ Johnson
Line Maintenance: Billy Shelton

The Town Meeting was called to order at 6:00pm and opened with the invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance led by Mayor Cury.

IN RE: Additions, Deletions, or Corrections to the Agenda

Upon a motion by Jan White seconded by Gary Jackson and the unanimous roll call vote of all members present, the Council voted to approve the agenda.

IN RE: Presentation

Mr. Monday gave the Council a brief introduction of the presentation.

- Why upgrades are needed at the Water Treatment Plant and the Wastewater Treatment Plant.
- Project Cost Estimates
- Funding Sources
- Rates to support needed improvement.
- Answers to previous questions and discussion.
- Next Steps

Water Treatment Plant Project

- Mandates-
 - a. The Code of Virginia ensures that all Virginians have safe drinking water.
 - b. Provides a simple and effective regulatory program for waterworks.
 - c. Adapts to new health concerns in drinking water treatment and distribution systems.
- Town of Richlands Town Charter **§2.3 Powers relating to public works, utilities, and properties.**

In addition to the powers granted other sections of this Charter, the town is empowered to:

- a. To own, operate, and maintain waterworks...for the purpose of providing an adequate water supply to the Town and of piping and conducting the same; to lay, erect, and maintain all necessary mains and service lines, either within or without the corporate limits of the Town and to charge and collect water rates.

Why upgrades are needed:

- The Water Treatment Plant was constructed in 1939.
- The Water Treatment Plant was last upgraded in 1993.
- The average treatment equipment typically lasts 15-25 years, Richlands is at year 30.
- Sedimentation Basins have been patched to make it until the project updates are completed.
- The Sedimentation Basin contains excessive sludge from raw water intake and is held until released to WWTP.

- Needs a sludge removal system. Exterior
- Wall of Sediment Basins are actively leaking from various cracks.
- Filter Media replacement is imminent.
- The SCADA System is obsolete and needs to be replaced.
- The Filter Console System is outdated.
- The majority of the valves on the pipe gallery needs replacing.
- The Effluent Valve contains valves taken out of service due to mechanical failures.
- The remaining valves are in dire need of replacement.
- The Brick Yard Booster Pump has been mostly inoperable for the past 4-6 years, which results in more staff hours at the Water Plant. Has been sent for repair multiple times, however, the manufacturer no longer recognizes the pump.
- The Airport Storage Tank was recently inspected and determined to need significant rehabilitation.

Wastewater Treatment Plant Project

- Mandates-
 - a. From the Virginia Municipal League: “Local elected officials have a difficult job. They are responsible for operating and maintaining a community’s sewerage system, planning for future needs and ensuring that systems operate in compliance with increasingly complex and stringent regulations, while maintaining affordable rates. In addition, local elected officials must accomplish this in an era where both the federal and state governments have limited money available to assist localities with the rehabilitation of existing systems or mandated improvements.”
 - b. The Town of Richlands Charter says “To establish, construct, and maintain sanitary sewers, sewer lines, and systems, and to require all property owners within the Town to connect therewith; to establish, construct, maintain, and operate sewage disposal plants;...to charge, assess, and collect reasonable fees, tap fees, rentals, assessments, or costs of service for connection with and using the same;”

Why upgrades are needed:

- The Wastewater Treatment Plant was constructed in 1960.
- Last upgraded in 1989.
- The average treatment equipment typically lasts 15-20 years, Richlands is at year 34.
- The Mechanical Bar Screen has fingers starting to separate.
- The Thickener Tank components need repair.
- The Piston Sludge Pumps are in need of replacement, gear boxes are worn out.
- The Aeration Basins electronic monitoring system is outdated and in need of modern technology.
- The Aeration Basin has original gear boxes and parts are no longer available.
- Empty Aeration Basin Cell is inoperable and cannot get replacement parts.
- The Sludge Press’s main frame has rusted at the main belt drum and is subject to failure.
- The Ultraviolet Lamp Control Boxes are no longer manufactured.
- The Glass House needs repaired.

Mayor Cury declared a ten-minute recess.

Mr. Campbell began the next section of the presentation to the Council.

Project Cost Estimates

- There has been a 47% increase in the Project Cost Estimates since 2020.
- Project Cost Estimates for 2023 are \$21,784,775.

Funding Sources

- VDH- Grant
- VDH- Loans
- VRA- Loans
- Business Partners
 1. Tazewell County PSA
 2. Town of Cedar Bluff

Mr. Campbell discussed funding options and requirements with the Council, including the Days Cash on Hand requirement.

Rates to Support Needed Improvements

- Mr. Campbell does not suggest a reduction or increase to the water rates at this time.
- Wastewater proposed rates would increase by around ten dollars per month for each customer. The rate increase is necessary to increase Fund Balance due to the beginning deficit.

Questions and Discussion

- Mr. Bales asked how long it will take for the Town to get their money back to break even on the upgrades. Mr. Campbell said it would depend on which rate the Town decides to charge.
- Mr. Ratliff stated if the Town would stop taking money out of the utilities for other things, the Town would not have to raise rates to make needed upgrades.
- Mayor Cury advised he did not think that the Town was doing this.
- Mrs. Mollo stated that she spoke to the auditor about the “shared costs”, and they advised her that transferring money from utilities was a balancing act.
- Mrs. Mollo asked Mr. Monday if not doing the upgrades was even an option or if it is necessary at this point. Mr. Monday advised the Council that these upgrades are imminent.
- Mr. Monday advised the Council it would be best to move forward with upgrades at this time.
- Mr. Monday asked Mr. Johnson to show the Council a piece of the water tank that had rusted and broken off. The Council passed it around.
- Mayor Cury inquired about a forgivable loan. Mr. Campbell explained this to the Council.
- Mrs. White asked what the projected time frame was for doing these upgrades. Mr. Monday advised it would take 9-12 months to get funding and 18-24 months for construction.
- Mr. Johnson advised the water quality has been 100% safe despite the needed upgrades.
- Mr. Jackson advised he receives the water testing results from the Virginia Department of Health, and everything has been good.
- Mr. Jackson asked when the new rates will be implemented, Mr. Campbell advised it would be around January.

Next Steps


- In order to change the rates, a Public Hearing is required.
- Advised this is a work session, and any proposed action or next steps must be referred to a future agenda for potential action.
- Mayor Cury asked that this be placed on the Agenda for the October Regular Scheduled Meeting.

Mr. Brown commended Mr. Campbell and the staff for the work they have done on this project.

Mayor Cury thanked Mr. Brown for attending (via zoom) and all the staff for their work.

IN RE: Adjournment

Upon a motion by Gary Jackson seconded by Jan White and the unanimous roll call vote of all member present, the meeting was adjourned.


Amanda Beheler, Town Clerk


Rodney D. Cury, Mayor

