

Stevensville Special Town Council Meeting Minutes

for TUESDAY, AUGUST 06, 2024, 6:00 PM 206 Buck Street, Town Hall

CONDENSED MINUTES

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Mayor Michalson called the meeting to order. Councilmembers Barker, Brown, Nelson and Smith were all present.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Public Comments (Public comment from citizens on items that are not on the agenda)

NONE

4. Public Hearings

Mayor Michalson: introduced the public hearing, we will discuss both the water and sewer at the same time.

a. Town of Stevensville Municipal Water Rate Increase

b. Town of Stevensville Municipal Sewer Rate Increase

PUBLIC COMMENT

Marilyn Wolff: Creekside Meadows. I was once a councilmember and am a Creekside HOA member. Interestingly I called Hamilton and Missoula to see what their rates were. I am looking at this resolution it says that the rates must be reasonable and just, I feel that these are not reasonable. I feel that there is money that has come in; CARES and ARPA. where is that money at. There were supposed to be water meters that were to be replaced. That should be looked at. I really feel that someone should come in and audit this increase. (Gave additional comments to the water and sewer rate increases.)

Amy Henry: I just have a few statements, how do we know when water and sewer money has been spent and has there been an audit and how do we know where this money is going to go.

Mayor Michalson: any further comments? Seeing none we will move onto item c, Discontinuation of the Utility Bill Assistance Program.

c. Discontinuation of the Utility Bill Assistance Program

PUBLIC COMMENT

Marilyn Wolff: this is a program I really defended when I was on the council. This is a low-income we need to advertise this program. (Gave comments to discontinuation of the utility bill assistance program.)

Sarah Lucas: I am here for my mother; she has been a resident for over 31 years. We recently lost our father; we were given a list of resources for our mother so that she could

stay in her own home. We reached out to the town of Stevensville, and she is now receiving assistance. (Gave comment about her mother being on the bill assistance programs.) I can say that she is grateful that she has three daughters and family that can help her out but remember that this program is for the elderly and the disabled.

Jim Kalkofen: especially discussing 4c. how many people are receiving this assistance program?

Mayor Michalson: Jim, we are not able to answer those questions at this time, but we can under new business.

Jim Kalkofen: thank you. How many people are in the rears in any given month? I feel that an audit of the water and sewer over the last 10 years.

Amy Henry: I would like to suggest that the city of Stevensville start educating the public on water saving measures.

Becky Sheridan: I live across from Maplewood cemetery. I have inquired about this in the past, the amount of water that is put on the grounds is ridiculous. I have been told that it is on its own well. (Gave additional comments about the watering at Maplewood Cemetery).

Mayor Michalson: any other public comment before I move onto new business item a Jenelle has public comment to be read.

Jenelle Berthoud, Town Clerk: read three public comments. (These public comments will be included in the minutes of this meeting.)

5. New Business

a. Discussion/Decision: Resolution No. 549 a Resolution of the Town of Stevensville, Montana to Increase the Rates for the Users of the Municipal Water System

Mayor Michalson: introduced new business item a. Resolution No. 549 a Resolution of the Town of Stevensville, Montana to Increase the Rates for the Users of the Municipal Water System. Mayor Michalson asked the council if he, Rural Water and Mr. Underwood could first give their presentations to the community first. Council agreed.

Mayor Michalson: I want to apologize to everyone about the rates that were on the letter that went out to the public. Bobbi gave us a rate and with that rate Robert calculated those rates and accidentally added it twice. Gave a background to the reasons why the town needs and has to raise the water and sewer rates.

(a brief recess to set up a microphone/speaker system)

Mayor Michalson: we will start over with new business item a. (Mayor Michalson restated what was said at the beginning of new business item a.) to answer some of your questions Marilyn, every year an audit is done it goes over everything that the town has spent. Two years ago, that audit said that we needed to raise our water and sewer rates. We need to make sure we are paying out bonds. (referred to the water and sewer bond payment sheet

provided to the citizens and the council). We are currently leaking 15 million gallons a month of treated water. These are things that need to be done, we have an aging infrastructure. We have not had a rate increase since 2015, we did have a small raise in 2019. We are not doing this raise because we want to, we are doing this because we have to. Through the years we have been working on our water rights, former Mayor Steve Gibson worked very hard for the water rights. We have spent a lot of money on the water rights. We did not raise rates responsibly for years. In the 2016 growth study it stated that there would need to be an increase for additional users. It also stated that the storage tank needed to be updated. In regard to the rates in Hamilton they do not have the same bond amounts as us, comparing it to another town just does not work. We have had increases to our wages and expenses for water and sewer. Water meters, we have been working on getting these replaced. The bottom line is that we do not want to raise water and sewer rates, but we have to. everything else is rising but our rates. With that I would like to turn it over to Bobbi with Rural Water.

Bobbi, Rural Water, Montana: thank you for having me here tonight. This is a huge challenge that the town has to face, I go to a lot of the small communities. I am called in to do the audit on the water and sewer rates, it has been 10 years since there has been a proper audit. If you look at what you are proposing, you are right on track. (quoted MCA codes) Water has to be self-supported. Sewer is the same thing; can't pay for it from another place. Codes state that the council has to review the finances, and the water and sewer rates are included in that. This is a big deal; the town council has to make these hard choices. I have been with Montana Rural Water for about 5 years, before that I was a general manager for a water system. EDU stands for equivalent dwelling unit. Your budget does not set your rates, the formula sets the rates. MCA code also states that the rates have to be fair and equitable. Based on a ¾ inch line, that is the most common. Then it goes to 1, 1.5, 2, 3, and 4 inch lines. (Bobbi went over how an EDU is determined and the rate associated). Thank you for bringing up the questions, one of those questions was on Hamilton and Stevensville. Why are there rates lower? Number one that is going to determine your rates is people. Hamilton has more people than Stevensville, loans are going to affect the cost. That is why you can not compare towns and the rates. You want the money in savings so that you can buy a new well pump, for example. Your reserve debt account has to be at one years' worth of payments. One of the things that Stevensville was doing to not raise those rates was they were dipping into those funds.

Robert Underwood: I have been with the town since 2018. We have not had an increase since 2019 I have been discussing this rate increase every year. The same audit for three years in a row stated that we needed to raise our rates. we only have about 1,000 EDU's we have to split those up with everyone. (Discussed how water and sewer funds are used and how water and sewer rates were determined.) we also have reserve asset replacement; we have not done that for a long time. Mission Street project cost us \$1.8 million we had to come up with over \$500,000 for that project. Additional funding came from ARPA. For us to do another one of these projects we need to build our reserve back up and that could take up to 5 years. (went over the calculations for water rates) Sewer is a little bit different, I did

the same thing as I did with water to determine the new rate. This has been a problem going on for years.

Mayor Michalson: one of the questions from Marilyn was about the accounts. Number of water and sewer users.

Andrena Case: 907 people connected to water and 871 connected to sewer. We have a little over \$13,000 in over-due accounts. (broke down the over-due accounts by number of days past due). There are currently 4 people on the help 4 u program and there are another 5 that have not renewed their paperwork. There is currently .24 cents in the help 4 u water and .54 cents in the help 4 u sewer program.

Jenelle Berthoud: you made a comment on the number of meters that need to be fixed. A lot of meter replacement has taken place and Andrena has done a great job at this, and she has also worked hard to get the \$13,000 down from \$30,000.

Councilmember Barker: I make a motion to approve Resolution No. 549 a Resolution of the Town of Stevensville, Montana to Increase the Rates for the Users of the Municipal Water System.

Councilmember Brown: 2nd.

Mayor Michalson: motion and a 2nd. Discussion from the council?

Councilmember Brown: I would like to say that I feel it also. We are out there too. This is going to cause a short fall on my budget as well. I haven't had a raise for so many years. I just want the public to know that we are in that boat also. If we do not do this and something is to go wrong, we do not have the funds to fix it. this is a hardship for the council also.

Councilmember Barker: I would like to touch on infrastructure. We hear that everyone wants to build here, we have these different subdivisions Creekside, Burnt Fork Estates, Park as a council we have shut these developments down because we know that we cannot afford to have those people come in here. I am sitting in the same situation as you guys are. We have to raise these rates as a town, and if y we do not do it, we are going to have bigger lawsuits coming down.

Councilmember Smith: we can have some emotions when we have some facts and figures that are spread out like this. One of the things that I have done some research on is the poverty level in the state of MT in 12.1 % Stevensville is 24.4%. I have heard the testimonies, and I understand that. At the proposed rate we have a procedural problem because we were given an agenda change 5 minutes before we got in here, it is a procedural issue. At the proposed rate that was given to us 5 minutes before this meeting would put Stevensville 16th highest rate in the state according to DNRC. That means that 180 cities are doing better than we are. We are looking at a rate of \$133.00 by next June, it is also proposed to go to \$2.50 over 1,000 gallons. I hear that we have not had a rate increase since 2015 and that may not be totally true because I have heard from some of the older residents that at one time there was a 10,000-gallon limit and that was a reduced to 3,000 gallons. That is a backdoor rate increase. When a family of four can use under 3,000 gallons a month and I

am a family of two and I use it. folks 3,000 gallons is just to little. With that I will turn it back to the mayor.

Mayor Michalson: open the floor to public comment.

PULBIC COMMENT

Nancy Lowell: what I wonder is how and when did we get into this situation. It is a revolving fund. I am wondering if it is overspending, meters not working, unexpected costs? I also agree with Wallace about the 10,000 to 3,000. I think that the council should be receiving a financial statement every month.

No name given: what comes to my mind is the 15 million gallons lost every month. 5 years from now the leaks are not going to get better.

Amy Henry: my concern is with the broken meters, if we need to get meters then lets take our business somewhere else.

Marilyn Wolff: I am not familiar with the Public Works Director. How many meters are not reading? How many are sitting in the office to be replaced.

Stephen Lassiter, Public Works Director: about 140 meters do not work currently.

Marilyn Wolff: I am not sure that the war in Gaza has anything to do with the meters.

Stephen Lassiter: it does. We are replacing them as fast as we can. About 4-5 months to replace all of them, we replace about once a week, I only have 5 people, and we are replacing them as fast as we can. Yes, more have been ordered, we keep a constant order and hope that you get some.

Jim Kalkofen: what is the amount that the meter is being billed for?

Stephen Lassiter: there is the base rate, and then when you are watering your lawn you will go over that amount. When a meter is not working, we do not know how much you have gone over.

Marilyn Wolff: I would assume that a business would be a priority, because they use more water. If you compare Stevensville what if we would have kept up with the minimal increase what would we be at now.

Bobbi: what I have found on those systems and when they have to do a huge increase on the average that huge increase is where it would have been now.

Marilyn Wolff: these funds have to be kept separate and that is very important.

Jim Hyde: it was quiet a shock when I got my water bill after watering my lawn. Why are we not fixing those leaks? And where is the water going? And then you guys are talking about those round abouts.

Jenelle Berthoud: the round abouts are not in the town limits.

Bobbi: if you do not know where the leaks are at then you can not fix them. You can do leak detection, but you have to have a pretty good idea of where it is at.

Stephen Lassiter: I am still waiting on the final report for the Mission Street project.

Becky Sheridan: find out who has the broken meters and get them fixed. How long before we break even? Has this been factored?

Robert Underwood: right now, we are playing catch up just to get where we should be at.

Jim Tadvick: that is on 10,000 gallons.

Robert Underwood: no, that changed way before I got here.

(public comment going on but not at the podium).

Robert Underwood: for a couple of years, we had some asset replacements that we could not touch unless we asked USDA. We did some change overs and now we are getting more on the CD's.

Public comment: is there no end in sight to paying back these loans?

Robert Underwood: they are 40-year loans. And we have paid 10 years so far. If we were to do another big project, the people right now that are coming into Stevensville should be paying for those upgrades and I have talked to Bobbi about that. The 2nd increase in June we will break even. But with inflation and if that goes up then what do we do.

Jim Tadvick: how much money do we actually have in the bank right now?

Robert Underwood: that is a good question, in the water fund \$1.2 million for one year of operation costs and we have \$1 million in sewer. You know that I said we would be out about 5 years before we could do another project.

Public comment: how many pumps does the city operate on.

Stephen Lassiter: 5 pumps.

Public comment: and how many of those pumps are currently running.

Stephen Lassiter: 4.

Public comment: what is the reasoning for the one not operating.

Stephen Lassiter: it is outside the place of use at the moment, it is a water right issue.

Public comment: as you mentioned earlier in the meeting, the town does an audit every year how can I get those.

Jenelle Berthoud: they are located on the town website.

Public comment: does the town provide transparency with a monthly newsletter or a financial statement.

Jenelle Berthoud: you can view the audits on the towns website and then you can put in a records request with the town clerk, myself for additional things that would be beyond the month.

Public comment: what I am trying to understand for my own, this roughly \$6.4 million in bonds I just think that it would be helpful to know what the money went to for the water and sewer projects. Is it pretty much broken down?

Mayor Michalson: I can provide that to you after the meeting. I would like to say a couple of things about the meters, I road with Mr. Cody Anderson this winter when I became mayor. How it works is that he drives the streets and has a computer that pings the meters and what I found out why he does not get some of those, is because there are meters that are in crawl spaces or blocked. Another thing is meter pits. We are putting in meter pits on Mission Street, part of the Mission Street project. we are going to look at Pine Street to do meter pits also. Mission Street is the oldest service line in town, so we started with that one. Pine Street is old also. Moving forward our plan is meter pits. (quoted the 2016 growth plan, water supply lines on Middle Burnt Fork Rd. that should have been repaired in 2009. Our infrastructure needs to be fixed and yes, we are doing catch up, I am also on a fixed income. Come to our meetings, see what is being spent and what is going on, this is your town. If we all work together, we can do this. Are there any more questions from the council? Marilyn.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Marilyn Wolff: I know how dedicated you are, I have worked with Bob on the council, he is trying to do his best. I am wondering if by the next increase that all of the meters be replaced. And please do not do away with that low-income program.

Mayor Michalson: thank you, any comments from the council? Seeing none, Jenelle, would you take the vote.

Councilmember Barker: aye.

Councilmember Brown: aye.

Councilmember Nelson: no.

Councilmember Smith: no.

Mayor Michalson: 2-2, tie. I will break the tie. Motion passes 3-2.

b. Discussion/Decision: Resolution No. 550 a Resolution of the Town of Stevensville, Montana to Increase the Rates for the Users of the Municipal Sewer System

Mayor Michalson: introduced new business item b. Discussion/Decision: Resolution No. 550 a Resolution of the Town of Stevensville, Montana to Increase the Rates for the Users of the Municipal Sewer System.

Councilmember Brown: I move that we approve Resolution No. 550 a Resolution of the Town of Stevensville, Montana to Increase the Rates for the Users of the Municipal Sewer System.

Councilmember Barker: 2nd.

Mayor Michalson: motion and a 2nd. Council Discussion?

Councilmember Smith: are talking about these rates that were just given to us? Regarding these rates that we were just given sitting on the desk when we just walked in. This is a procedural issue that is not correct, there has to be 48-hours' notice we were not given that 48-hour notice. There for the last vote that was taken was out of order. And this is out of order as well.

Mayor Michalson: this is not out of order the key word that I told you before the meeting is proposed, proposed, subject to change, you are the council you can change it if you want.

Councilmember Smith: you asked us to approve what was just put here, that is not proposed than. You have a figure here, that is not a proposal.

Mayor Michalson: any other comments from the council?

Councilmember Barker: at any given time, the council has the right to go into the town hall and ask for any other information that was given, you could have gone in and asked for this information the public can go in and ask for this information. Again, it is proposed it is not saying that we have to do this, we can change it any time.

Mayor Michalson: any other comments from the council? Public comments.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Linda Powell: I was in town hall today I was told that this was going to be a discussion to bring forth a resolution.

Mayor Michalson: that resolution is being brought forth.

Linda Powell: we were supposed to be given the opportunity to talk about it not vote on it. that was my understanding from you two people. (mayor and town clerk).

Leslie Tadvick: it is my understanding that we have to have three meetings to discuss what we want to do and that we can not vote with out all of the people knowing we have to have three meeting for the town, right? Three public hearings. How can we do this without having three public meetings.

Mayor Michalson: it is not three meetings; you have to post it three times.

Jenelle Berthoud: this is an item that is set by resolution not by ordinance. So, an ordinance needs two public hearings, an ordinance goes in front of the council two times and the public two times. An increase in our water and sewer rates by MCA code have to be posted in the newspaper for three weeks and providing information to the users via the US mail, and then a meeting being held to discuss those resolutions to be voted on that night. This is not an item that is attached to an ordinance this is just a resolution.

Public comment: can I just say that, you are saying that these are proposed rates and may not be the ones.

Mayor Michalson: these are the rates that are proposed and the council votes on.

Public comment: you said that it can be changed at any time, so it could go up without notice.

Jenelle Berthoud: not without a meeting being held to discuss it again.

Councilmember Barker: sorry, this is tonight, just a proposed. We can change it down the line.

Mayor Michalson: any other comments from the public?

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jim Kalkofen: nobody likes it when our fees get raised but I can understand after the meeting and listening to you people as to why we have the rate increase. I do have a question for the public works supervisor, how much excess capacity do we have for the sewer right now.

Stephen Lassiter: we were just over 6 million gallons in July, and we can go up to 10 million, so we have a ways to go. The water; we have our reservoir; we should maintain that at about 5 ½ feet and one time this summer we were at 3 feet. The hot spell this last week makes our pumps run longer and harder.

Jim Kalkofen: those numbers, there were 871 sewer users and there were 1041 EDU's.

Robert Underwood: we are going to go back and talk about EDU's, when you calculate that you are going off of the size of the pipe. We have 801 ¾ inch pipes using 1 EDU and then you have a 3 inch that uses 16 EDU's. Larger pipe more water.

Mayor Michalson: any other comments from the public?

PUBLIC COMMENT

Becky Sheridan: under new business on all four points, it says discussion/decision it doesn't say discussion and proposed decision. help define what is happening and what we walked in, and thought was happening.

Mayor Michalson: discussion is what we are doing right now, decision is when the council takes it to a vote. A proposal rate is just what it is, a proposed rate, if the council wants to charge less or charge more it is their decision. that is why it is proposed, it is not set in stone. If the council wants to charge a different rate they can. If it was set in stone and not proposed, then they would not be able to change that rate. Does that clarify it for you.

Becky Sheridan: it does I just thought that it would be appropriate that the word proposed be in there.

Jenelle Berthoud: the resolution that they are voting on would not be able to have the word proposed in it. The resolution that will be signed tomorrow states the new rate and the word proposed will be removed and then it will state new water rate.

Councilmember Barker: I just want everyone to know again we would not be doing it if we weren't told that we have to do it. It goes back quite a ways to other councils and mayors, not just us. Do I like sitting up here, no. But we have to come together as a community and figure out how to make it right and this is how we have to do it to make it right tonight.

Councilmember Smith: We were given these numbers just a few minutes before we came into this meeting. That means that everything that was posted by the letter is wrong, on the agenda that was posted and the newspaper, all of those numbers are wrong. And the numbers that we have right here how do we know that they are right. So, until I can see some kind of expenditure income all of that, this whole thing is out of order there has not been enough time to post this in our posted agenda as a procedural error we can not do this.

Mayor Michalson: you had a good amount of time to come in and look at the numbers with Robert.

Councilmember Smtih: you have to have 48 hours. That is MCA.

Mayor Michalson: proposed.

Councilmember Smtih: you can't go on one word. It is an agenda change.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Pat Gronniger: my big thing is, this council and this mayor. This is the toughest crap to have to do, it is not fair to anybody. I have been in both chairs. The bickering back and forth is Stevensville. For you saying yes (Councilmember Brown and Barker) that is tough and I commend you. these water rates have been shoved under the rug for years. We have to start somewhere; we have no choice, and we have to get it done. We can't wait anymore we have to get it done. My suggestion is pass this and get on with life. We don't need to pass this on to the next day.

Councilmember Nelson: this is more of a statement not a question. I do love this town; I talk to people and I listen to all of you. I did not know what the numbers were until I sat down, maybe different numbers, I like to know what I am voting on. There have been so many changes I want to see stabilization before I vote. That is where my vote came from, I just believe that you should know where I come from.

Mayor Michalson: any other questions from the council? Seeing none, Jenelle take the vote.

Councilmember Barker: aye.

Councilmember Brown: aye.

Councilmember Nelson: no.

Councilmember Smith: for the people of the town, no.

Mayor Michalson: I break the tie again.

Mayor Michalson: Motion passes, 3-2.

c. Discussion/Decision: Rescind Resolution No. 380 a Resolution Creating and Funding a Water/Sewer Bill Reduced Rate Program

Mayor Michalson: introduced new business item c. Rescind Resolution No. 380 a Resolution Creating and Funding a Water/Sewer Bill Reduced Rate Program. The reason that this is on here is because when we went to conference this spring, we all heard that we can not use this program and that we have to let it go. We were told that we could not charge .40 cents on the bill.

Councilmember Brown: I move that we terminate Resolution No. 380 a Resolution Creating and Funding a Water/Sewer Bill Reduced Rate Program.

Councilmember Smith: 2nd.

Mayor Michalson: motion and a 2nd. Council discussion?

Councilmember Brown: they told us that we could not, the mayor is correct they told us that we had to terminate these two programs and what we need to do is meet, get some ideas and then bring it back to the council.

Mayor Michalson: any further comments from the council? Public comment?

PUBLIC COMMENT

Pat Gronniger: on that, if we can voluntarily make a payment how do we know that it is going to them.

Councilmember Barker: right now, we have a fund that is set up for the pool that was set up by another organization we can come back in the discussion with the council and set it up so that they can not use that fund for anything else but that. As a council we can come back and that is what we would like to do and have this discussion and do it the right way.

Pat Gronniger: how low do you think it is going to take to set that up?

Jenelle Berthoud: at this Thursdays town council meeting the council will pick a meeting date to hold a COW meeting to discuss a utility billing assistance program.

Pat Gronniger: is that already set for the meeting?

Jenelle Berthoud: yes, it is already on the agenda.

Pat Gronniger: so, the concern of eliminating that program is not there anymore because we are going to work on something to change that program.

Councilmember Barker: correct. Legally not the way that it was set up before.

Sarah Lucas: just clarification, we are speaking of two programs.

Jenelle Berthoud: through the years the programs were put in place and then a new administration would change the name of it they would not rescind the previous name,

tonight's meeting has two different one, one is a reduced rate program and the other that the town had in place was a water bill assistance program which became the new word, help for you. And that is what became help for you. You now see help for you sewer and help for you water; they just renamed them along the way.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Sarah Lucas: from my earlier statements of course, I am understanding that costs go up and lack of movement from previous councils I understand that rates have to go up and the reason that I am here today is for the assistance program is I am hearing now is set up illegally and more importantly that you guys are going to look into a more legal process for that. I will be attending future meetings. I can imagine that the process can take a while and not be on the forefront of your minds so I will be here to remind you. I am here for my mom.

(unclear audio of public comment).

Mayor Michalson: gave an explanation of what MMIA is and stands for.

Marilyn Wolff: is that collection of .40 cents coming off of our bill?

Councilmember Barker: we are going to terminate and then going to replace it that is correct.

Andrena Case, Deputy Clerk: .26 cents in water and .54 cents in sewer.

Mayor Michalson: any other questions.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jim Kalkofen: Stacie, I think that it is great that you are going to look at how to replace this I would suggest that instead of rescinding this tonight find something to replace it first.

Mayor Michalson: the problem is that we do not have any money in the accounts.

Pat Gronniger: did I not just hear you say that it is illegal?

Councilmember Barker: yes, it is illegal.

Mayor Michalson: any other questions , seeing none Jenell take the vote.

Councilmember Barker: aye.

Councilmember Brown: aye.

Councilmember Nelson: abstain.

Councilmember Smith: aye.

Mayor Michalson: passes 3-1.

d. Discussion/Decision: Rescind Resolution No. 486 a Resolution Reinstating Funding for the Water/Sewer Bill Assistance Program

Mayor Michalson: introduced new business item d. Rescind Resolution No. 486 a Resolution Reinstating Funding for the Water/Sewer Bill Assistance Program.

Councilmember Brown: I move that we terminate Resolution No. 486 a Resolution Reinstating Funding for the Water/Sewer Bill Assistance Program.

Councilmember Smith: 2nd.

Mayor Michalson: motion and a 2nd. Discussion from the council? Public comment? Seeing none, Jenell take the vote.

Councilmember Barker: aye.

Councilmember Brown: aye.

Councilmember Nelson: abstain

Councilmember Smith: aye.

Mayor Michalson: passes 3-1

Mayor Michalson: I want to thank each and every one of you for coming to the meeting. This has been hard, it has been stressful for me, the council, for Robert, for Andrena and Jenelle because it is those girls that have to hear it every day. When the public comes in and has concerns or complaints, they have to hear it and be nice about it. I want to say please start coming to the council meetings, this is your town.

6. Adjournment

Councilmember Barker: move.

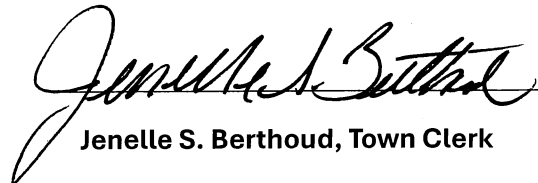
Councilmember Nelson: 2nd.

APPROVE:



Bob Michalson, Mayor

ATTEST:



Jenelle S. Berthoud, Town Clerk

Jenelle Berthoud

From: Jovick <rsjovick@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, August 5, 2024 12:56 PM
To: Jenelle Berthoud
Subject: Water and Sewer Public Hearing

Town of Stevensville

August 5, 2024

RE: Proposed Water and Sewer Rate Increases

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to state that I am opposed to the water and sewer rate increases proposed for January 2025 of 26.00 and that the proposed 35.4% increase in September will be hard for most people to pay.

The current proposed increase for both water and sewer for the average ¾" pipe user is \$29.56 which is a 35.4% increase.

This is more than an annual average 5 % rate increase had one been imposed annually since 2019.

To add an additional rate increase four months later in January 2025 for another \$26.00 is asking too much from the public. Combined together, this is a 58% increase within six months!

In addition, I thought that your public notice lacked clarity on what you were proposing. There was

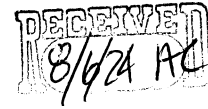
- No glossary for terms
- No explanation or example that the most common meter line size is ¾" within the Town of Stevensville
- No explanation for who/when the multiplier is used
- No column in the chart for existing costs as compared to proposed increase
- No example of cost for proposed average user in either the water or sewer table.
- No place that stated the excess of 3,000 gallons/month and any additional 1,000 gallons used over 3,000 gallons goes from \$1.85 to \$2.50/month.

I understand that infrastructure needs to be replaced and that costs have increased everywhere. This proposed increase for water and sewer is way outside what is affordable for most people. As a compromise, I suggest you drop the increase in January and take another look at this in a year.

Sincerely,

Stacy Jovick, Apple Core Properties LLC

252 Barbara, Stevensville, MT



RE: Proposed Water and Sewer Rate Increase Notice

Public Hearing: Tuesday, August 6, 2024, 6:00 p.m.

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

The letter that was sent out to the residents regarding the above proposed increases was confusing. It took a while to do all the math and figure out the new totals that would be charged monthly. It also was not stated in the letter that the first increase was to take effect with the September 2024 billing. As far as I can tell, based on a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch line, which most residents have, the first increase would bring the total to \$113 per month base rate which is a 36% increase. The second increase would take effect 4 months later with the January 2025 billing and would bring our base rate total to \$140 per month which equals over a 68% increase from what we are currently paying. And then add on top of that an additional increase in the excess usage over 3,000 gallons. When I shared these numbers with my neighbors, they were in absolute shock, as am I.

To spring an increase of this magnitude on us residents, especially with such short notice, shows little concern for us. How are so many people on fixed incomes going to be able to afford a 68% increase? Many can barely afford the current \$83 monthly base rate.

I agree that the rates need to be raised, but not 68%! Have all other avenues of funding, such as state and federal grants, been investigated and pursued for the infrastructure repairs and upgrades?

Both I, and my neighbors, ask that the council members do not approve these increases as proposed. We request that all those involved in coming up with the rate increases go back to the drawing board and reduce the amount of the upcoming increase. And then, come up with a plan and a schedule of future annual increases that will be shared with the residents well in advance so we can all know what's coming and make every effort to plan accordingly.

The other issue that I would like to address is the statement that the O&M and the Bond will now be a combined number instead of being broken out separately. I am opposed to this, and so are all the neighbors that I spoke with. We want to continue to see the amount for the water and sewer bond separate from the amount we are billed for our usage. We want to be able to look at our bill, as we do now, and see exactly what we are being charged for our usage, separate from the bond. No need to muddy the waters, so to speak.

Thank you for the opportunity to express these concerns. I pray that the "powers to be" will come up with a better plan.

Sue Kardaras

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sue Kardaras".

501 Central Avenue

To Whom it may concern:

About the proposed (already done) more than doubling (**122 PERCENT INCREASE**) of the water rates in Stevensville, just a quick question... Where are the Citizens (we) supposed to get the money from???

It seems that everyone in government, at all levels, thinks that money just grows on trees, hence the arbitrary raising of utility rates or taxes for that matter. Unlike government, we Citizens have no one to arbitrarily increase rates on when our own personal costs go up. **We have to eat those costs.** We are at the end of the line. As the saying goes, crap rolls downhill and we are at the bottom.

My family has a fixed monthly budget to work with, as do hundreds of other families and businesses that live and operate here, especially those on Social Security and retired folks. As a matter of fact, in the last 4 years, I have gotten ONE-that's right ONE raise, which amounts to **2% or a total of 70 Dollars a month** (or 17 dollars a week or just about 5 dollars a day) which doesn't really cover anything, especially since in the same timeframe:

- Fuel is up **80%** (200 dollars more/month)
- Homeowners Insurance is up **55%** (30 dollars more/month)
- Food is up **50%** (400 dollars more/month)
- Car Insurance is up **45%** (35 dollars more/month)
- Electricity/Nat Gas is up **25%** (35 dollars more/month)
- Property taxes are up **55%** (75 dollars more/month)

-Internet costs are up **58%** (35 dollars more/month)

-Water up nearly **125%** (As of August 83 dollars more/month and in January 2025 another 27 dollars more/month for a total of 110 dollars extra)

The list goes on and on but these are some that affect me and mine personally to the tune of over **920 extra dollars per month!**

Again, there's little to no room in any budget for increases like this (unless you're government), so where are we supposed to get the money from? Oh, I suppose we could cancel Christmas, the Fair and Independence Day, but try telling that to our kids, or we could cancel our yearly vacation (oh wait-we already did that). Others may have to cancel kids' activities (soccer, football, etc.) or worse-eat less food or even go without medications or even medical care.

We and hundreds of others like us are trying our best to live within our means, with everything skyrocketing it is exceedingly difficult with each passing month, but then again you are already gonna get yours and we are gonna get screwed and left twisting in the wind and hung out to dry, with no recourse, either we pay or the water gets shut off, but at least we get to "air our grievances" to make us feel better about getting screwed...

You see, this is what happens when you go off an already established gravity feed water system and go to a "new" well/pump system. Or fixing something that aint broke...