

A workshop of the Town Board of the Town of Moreau was held on December 1, 2021 in the Town of Moreau Municipal building, 351 Reynolds Road, Moreau, New York for the purpose of having discussion on Water Billing.

The Supervisor opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

The meeting was held live as well as broadcast via Zoom.

Town Board Members Present

John Hogan	Councilmember
Kyle Noonan	Councilmember
Alan VanTassel	Councilmember
John Donohue, Jr.	Councilmember
Theodore T. Kusnierz, Jr.	Councilmember

Town Board Members Absent

None

Also present: Leeann McCabe, Town Clerk; Ron Laberge and Don Rhodes, Laberge Group; Jana DeCamilla, Post Star Reporter; Town Residents: Mike Shaver and Jesse Fish

The Supervisor stated that the Town implemented the consolidation of the water districts and that the purpose of this meeting was to have discussion on the new way the Town will handle the billing. He stated that the Town Clerk had put together a list of questions that she's looking for direction on.

Question #1: Who will verify the EDU's calculated by the Town engineer and for those new accounts moving forward.

The Supervisor thought that it should be the Water Department. Mr. Rhodes stated that the ordinance establishes the Water Department as the department in charge of calculating EDU's. The Town Clerk stated that the Water Department consisted of a Water Superintendent and a laborer and asked if they'll be responsible. She stated that she has approximately 400 customers that need to be added into the system who have never been billed before, and that she'll need EDU information to do that. The Supervisor asked if the Building Department would have that information as part of the approval process. Mr. Rhodes stated that some EDU's are calculated on vacant property and that the Assessor could help with that. He stated that it gets tricky with commercial use because it's based on water usage. He stated that you would need to pull those records and establish the EDU's going forward. Mr. Rhodes went over the EDU calculations and stated that restaurants are based on the number of seats, which the Building Department can calculate; Schools will require the Billing Clerk or Water Department to call the School for the number of students; commercial and industrial will require water meter numbers to calculate. Councilmember VanTassel asked if he understood correctly, that the Clerk's office is to determine the EDU's for the commercial and industrial entities. Mr. Rhodes stated that it should be the responsibility of the Water Superintendent.

Question #2: What will the billing structure be, quarterly or semi-annual?

The Town Clerk stated that the Town bills semi-annual right now, with the larger customers being billed monthly. Councilmember Noonan asked the Town Clerk if the program Mr. Mooney described would be something she would like to learn more about and move in that direction for automated billing. She stated that the Town is getting a new utility billing program in January, which she believes will have many new features. She did state that it's not an easy task to do the billing and that it's a very involved process. She stated, that with a quarterly billing it would cost more for paper, more for postage, more for envelopes etc. She stated that it takes time for someone to go back out to read meters that get missed or to make the determination that they aren't working. She stated that she didn't want to do the billing four times per year. She stated that it's a lot of work to do it two times per year. She stated that the monthly bills aren't so bad. There are approximately 100 customers and they don't have too many problems with the meters. The Supervisor stated that he heard from the previous workshop, that there's a program out there, where it's

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automatic. The Clerk stated that Mr. Mooney was referring to the auto bill pay. She stated that they eat the cost of the credit card fees to do that. She stated that up until now, the Town didn't want to absorb the costs and were told that they couldn't absorb the costs. The Supervisor stated, anything that puts the Town into the 21st century that makes it more efficient and reduces the need for personnel, and if it makes the information more accessible to the customer, he's all for it. The Town Clerk asked if he's willing then to eat the cost for those wanting to pay taxes by credit card. He stated that taxes are different than water billing. He stated that water billing is a business and if there are costs for technology to run it, you have to charge for it. He stated that \$28,000 is cheaper than any one full-time employee here. The Town Clerk asked, if she wanted to pay a water bill on-line and the cost was \$5.00, then everyone else in the district would be absorbing the cost? The Supervisor stated that he heard they would all be paying by auto pay. The Town Clerk stated, that out of there 3,500 customers, 2,400 have the auto bill pay set up.

Mr. Rhodes stated that the Town won't have a new system in place by January 1st and recommended that we check with our current vendor and solicit other companies for quotes. The Town Clerk stated that the Town has already interviewed a couple different companies. She stated that one company from Texas had an exorbitant fee. Councilmember Noonan asked if it was RES and the Town Clerk replied that she didn't recall. The Town Clerk stated that there is no way to have this up and running by January 1st because there are 3,500 customers that they'll need to add EDU's to, and about 400 new customers that will have to be added because they haven't been billed before. Councilmember Noonan asked how long it takes to put in a customer. The Town Clerk replied, about 10 minutes, however, they still need other things to add to those accounts, which would make it take a bit longer, such as the EDU's. She stated that they haven't been able to add those yet because she's waiting on the rate and she's waiting on someone to verify the data from Laberge Group. Councilmember Noonan asked if there was a way for the current software vendor to batch enter this information. The Town Clerk replied no. She stated that she had already asked them that question. Councilmember VanTassel asked if it would help the Town Clerk if the Town shifted resources and gave her another full-time person to help. She stated that it may help because starting January 1st her staff will be working on tax collection. She also stated that the data has to be in place by February 1st before they go out to read meters for a March 1st bill. She stated that the hard part right now is verifying all the EDU's before they can get them entered into the accounts. The Supervisor stated that they have an employee who was hired, and part of her function is to work on the water. The Town Clerk stated that the employee has been working with her Deputy Clerk to get these new accounts set up. He stated that he had no problem providing that person for anything the Town Clerk needs to get this accomplished. She stated that she understood that and reiterated that the EDU's need to be verified before they can all start entering the data. Mr. Rhodes stated that the information was provided to the Town based on the information they had from 2019. He stated that he's been working with the Assessor and the Town Clerk to gather any information that happened since then. He stated that he was happy to help, but that ultimately the Water Superintendent is responsible to approve the EDU's. He stated that the Town Board would need to give him direction. He also didn't think it was 400 customers that needed EDU's set. He stated that the Water Superintendent would just need to take a look at the list of the changed EDU's. He suggested that the parcels that have been subdivided will have to be looked at. She asked Mr. Rhodes if he was comfortable with the EDU's that he had listed. Mr. Rhodes stated that they were based on the schedule. She stated that his letter recommended that they all be verified, and her question was who will verify. She asked, that if he's saying his numbers are good, can they can go with what he has. Mr. Rhodes stated that they're ultimately the Town's numbers. Mr. Laberge stated that the numbers can be tweaked. Councilmember VanTassel asked the Supervisor if he wanted someone to have a conversation with Mr. Mooney tomorrow to see how he can run this project. The Supervisor replied yes. Councilmember VanTassel stated that Mr. Mooney can lean on the other departments to assist him. The Town Clerk asked if they're leaving the billing at semi-annual. The Supervisor stated that they'll be leaving the billing as is for now.

Councilmember Hogan asked if with Master Meter, you would have the capability of getting a reading without leaving the office. Councilmember VanTassel stated that Wilton went out and built a wireless reading network. So, where the Town is using equipment to drive around and get readings, they don't have to. They rely on the wireless network to get the readings. Mr. Laberge stated that it would require towers around the Town that would provide the radio readings. He stated that the Town would have to build out that fixed base system and commented that it's not cheap. Mr. Rhodes stated that they could

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look at that when determining their rate schedule. Mr. Laberge stated that he didn't know if it would be worth it, depending on how many reads the Town has. The Town Clerk stated that they do about two final readings per week. Mr. Rhodes stated that the Town can charge to transfer the meters to new owners.

Question #3. Will there be different rates for different uses, such as, Agricultural, Industrial, Municipal?

Mr. Rhodes stated that there was only one rate listed in the final consolidation order.

Question #4. What will the penalty rate be? Currently it's 10% after 30 days and an additional 1.5% each month thereafter. The Town Clerk noted that she strongly opposes the additional 1.5%.

Mr. Laberge stated, that without penalty, there's no incentive to pay. The Town Clerk stated that she relieves hundreds of accounts each year. She stated that they don't care about the 1.5% additional penalty. She stated that it's very time consuming to bill out the 1.5% each month. Councilmember VanTassel asked if the new program will automate this process. The Town Clerk stated that it wouldn't. She stated that she would still have to go into a billing cycle and apply penalties. Councilmember Noonan thought that the 1.5% had been removed and the Town Clerk replied that it hadn't. She stated that by having the 1.5% right now, you have to bill it for each billing cycle. So, if they don't pay their March bill by May 1st, 1.5% has to be applied and then again in June, July etc. After the September bill is produced, if they still haven't paid the March bill, you have to apply 10% to that bill and 1.5% to the March bill. She stated that it was a pain. She also stated, that if there were a true Water Department, and if there were someone there that all they did was the billing, it wouldn't be a problem. She stated that her office has way too much to do to try and keep up. Mr. Rhodes agreed with her statement, he stated especially with software not being set up to post penalties automatically. He also stated that it was a financial issue for the Town. Councilmember Hogan suggested a 10% penalty after 30 days and then again after 6 months before the second billing. He asked if that would make it easier. The Town Clerk stated it would be easier than applying penalties each month. The Town Clerk also explained that the bills only have so much information that can be put on them. She stated that there isn't enough space to put what's due after 30 days and what's due after 60 days, so they've had to leave the penalty amounts off all together. What happens, because the penalty amounts aren't on the bill, they end up paying the base amount. She stated many times the penalty amounts get relieved. She stated it was much easier with the flat 10% because that amount could be put on the bill. There was a brief discussion on how the penalty was worded in the Town Code and if it could be changed. It was explained that it was put in the code as a local law and that the consolidation was a local law that replaced that section of the code. The Supervisor stated that they would discontinue the 1.5%.

Question #5. It was asked if the Town Board wanted a rate schedule, like the sample provided by Mr. Rhodes.

Mr. Rhodes stated that many municipalities set rates for turning on or off water or draining meters. He suggested that the Town consult with Mike Mooney to give some guidance. Mr. Rhodes stated, that the ordinance is set up so that if a customer isn't happy with their water usage, they would make an application and pay a fee to have their meter inspected. If it shows to be correct, they wouldn't get their money back. If it isn't correct, they would. Mr. Rhodes stated that there are penalties listed in the fee structure as well, that the Town should consider. He stated there are penalties for those who tap into the Town's line without permission and steal water as well as penalties for not complying with a conservation order. The Supervisor stated that he would have the Water Committee look at the fee schedule. Mr. Rhodes asked if they were going to allow contractors to do the taps. Councilmember VanTassel liked the logic behind that. He stated that the Town would just inspect the work. The Supervisor stated that the Town would have oversight of the tap. Councilmember Noonan asked a question on behalf of Councilmember Elect Mark Stewart. He asked who would be responsible if a contractor had to dig up a road. Mr. Rhodes stated that they would need a permit from the State. The Supervisor stated that the Town should require the contractor to do a directional drilling under the road. The Supervisor asked if the Town would make that a part of the requirement, that they couldn't dig up the road. Mr. Rhodes stated no, but that they would need to get a permit. He stated that the Town only controls the tap.

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Question #6. The Town Clerk stated that a notice should go out to all of those in the consolidated district advising that the fee structure would be changing.

After a brief discussion the Supervisor stated that he would have his office prepare a notice.

Question #7. The Town Clerk suggested having a Water Department Clerk, who can oversee all reporting and handle all billing. She stated that right now everything is too scattered.

The Supervisor stated, that he thought it was part of the structure, that the individual they hired would be responsible for a lot of that. The Town Clerk stated that she was suggesting reports to DOH and such. She stated that it would be nice if the Water Department had a Clerk to do all of their letters, reporting and such. She stated, that right now a lot comes back to the Town Hall. She stated that the Supervisor's Clerk has to do some things, her office has to do some things, and they really shouldn't have to. She stated that it was just a suggestion.

The Town Clerk stated that they skipped over the rate question and asked if they were going to go with the rate in the Map, Plan and Report. Mr. Rhodes stated that the rate is in the final order. He stated that the rate can also be changed mid-year if need be. He suggested that if the revenue isn't covering the expenses, the rate can be raised. The Town Clerk stated that she wanted to make sure that they were all on the same page. She showed the rate for EDU's to be \$36.47 for the debt and \$2.60/1,000 for operation and maintenance. Mr. Rhodes stated that he would verify the figures. The Supervisor stated that this information would be in the notice that's sent out to those in the water district.

Question #1 Sewer: The Clerk asked about the time frame for the first billing. She asked for the rate and billing structure to start getting accounts set up.

Mr. Rhodes stated that the Town Board will need to decide if bills are sent to those who aren't connected yet. The Supervisor stated that they'll have to collect the revenue because the Town will be responsible for the loan debt. Mr. Rhodes stated that he wasn't sure when the first payment would be due. He did say that the Town would receive the debt service fees annually. He didn't know how the Town Board wanted to set up the operation side. Mr. Rhodes stated that he would work with the Principal Account Clerk to see when the first payment is expected.

Councilmember VanTassel stated that he would speak with the Town Clerk tomorrow regarding the EDU's for the water billing.

The workshop concluded at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Leeann McCabe
Town Clerk