

**EMERGENCY MEETING OF THE JEFFERSON UTILITIES COMMISSION, HELD MARCH 19, 2020**

On call of the roll, commissioners present were: Adams, Brandel, Horn, Pieters, Ganser, Bristol and Oppermann. Also present: Utility Manager Adler, Office Manager Statz and City Attorney Rogers. The meeting began at 4:02 p.m. The meeting was held via teleconference.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None

**UPDATE FROM STAFF ON COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS TAKEN SO FAR**

Utility Manager Adler and Office Manager Statz shared the actions taken thus far to reduce the exposure of the COVID-19 virus to staff and customers. Utility Manager Adler explained that the water and electric crews have been split up into groups, in the event that someone becomes sick, the goal is to minimize exposure to the whole crew.

Utility Manager stated, staff was taking the COVID -19 issue very seriously, and wants to protect the safety of our employees and the public, but still provide services to our customers. We don't want to be caught sitting on our hands on this.

Comm. Adams asked if staff was using the breakroom.

Utility Manager Adler explained that staff has been instructed not to congregate in the break room. They are allowed to warm up their food, but may not eat in or gather in that space.

Comm. Ganser questioned if in the event of an emergency call out, would more than two field staff be needed.

Utility Manager Adler explained that as of now, each field staff has been assigned one vehicle and in the event that more than two staff is needed at a site, they would split up as necessary to keep social distancing.

Comm. Adams clarified that one employee is in a vehicle each day and the vehicles are being wiped down at the end of the shift.

Comm. Bristol asked if office staff was using gloves when handling the mail.

Office Manager Statz explained that was occurring yes. Staff was working to get more gloves on hand.

Comm. Adams asked if Lake Mills would be able to loan us help in the event of an emergency.

Utility Manager Adler stated that was correct. The utility belongs to MEUW (Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin) and there is a mutual aid agreement already in place.

**DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION TO WAIVE LATE FEES FOR CUSTOMER ACCOUNTS**

Office Manager Statz explained that since the creation of the agenda, she has reached out to the Public Service Commission (PSC) for guidance on this topic. It was explained that the utility would not be able to waive late penalties, as the law does not allow it. However, the PSC did make mention that in light of the Public Health Emergency, there may be guidance coming on this issue in the future. She will keep the commission updated if that should arise.

No action was taken.

**DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION TO TEMPORARILY ABSORB CREDIT CARD PROCESSING FEES**

Office Manager Statz explained that she also reached out to the PSC on the utility absorbing credit card fees on a temporary basis. The response was that outside of a rate case, if the utility absorbed the fees, it would not be a recoverable cost. This means that the utility would not get back the money spent. She explained that her goal is to have as few customers coming to our facility as possible to help stop the spread of the virus.

Office Manager Statz went on to explain that she had reached out to Payment Service Network (PSN) and they provided a cost estimate of about \$2.16 for a \$150.00 bill. If all 4,000 customers paid with credit card, it would cost the utility roughly \$9,000 per month. Costs to pay with an e-check or a debit card are lower than \$2.16, so the estimate of \$9,000 is likely on the high end.

Comm. Oppermann stated he thought it was a great idea and was in favor of it.

Comm. Adams stated he also thought it was a great idea and the utility should help out our customers as much as we can.

Comm. Oppermann suggested that we get the word out via radio, print and Facebook.

Comm. Bristol suggested contacting the Daily Union and request that they place the information on their Facebook page.

Office Manager Statz stated that she will reach out to all those media platforms and will also request that the City place it on their Facebook page. City Administrator Freitag requested that the City's Facebook page be the main source of information for residents regarding COVID-19.

It was moved by Comm. Oppermann and seconded by Comm. Brandel to approve the utility to recover the credit card processing fees on a temporary basis. On call of the roll, motion carried. (Oppermann – Aye, Adams - Aye, Pieters – Aye, Brandel – Aye, Horn – Aye, Ganser – Aye, Bristol - Aye)

**DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION TO ALLOW OFFICE STAFF TO WORK REMOTELY ON A ROTATING BASIS AND TO ALLOW FLEX SCHEDULING FOR HOURLY STAFF**

Office Manager Statz explained that she has great fears of an office staff, or their family, contracting the virus. Given there are only three of them making up the team, if one member contracts the virus and infects the other two, operations essentially come to a standstill. This, for obvious reasons, cannot happen. She would like to see office staff separated as much as possible, where only one staff member reports to the office per day to answer phones, process payments etc. The other two staff would work remotely from home. She would like to set up an understanding that if X numbers of cases are confirmed in Jefferson County, this plan would be set into place.

In addition, Office Manager Statz was asking for hourly staff to have the ability to flex their schedules as needed, at the discretion of her or the Utility Manager. The goal is that we could allow staff to work outside of normal hours and not pay them overtime, but allow them to get in their normal 40 hours per week, should the need arise.

Comm. Bristol stated he did not see the point in waiting to implement the office staff working remotely. He stated that once the confirmed cases were announced, the damage was already done

Comm. Adams stated he agreed with Comm. Bristol and would like to see the office staff work remotely on a rotating basis effective immediately.

It was moved by Comm. Pieters and seconded by Comm. Bristol to approve the office staff to work remotely on a rotating basis and to allow for flex scheduling for all staff. On call of the roll, motion carried. (Oppermann – Aye, Adams - Aye, Pieters – Aye, Brandel – Aye, Horn – Aye, Ganser – Aye, Bristol - Aye)

## **DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION TO ROTATE ELECTRIC AND WATER STAFF REPORTING TO THE UTILITY**

Utility Manager Adler explained that much like separating the office staff, he would like to also rotate the electric and water staff. The goal is that we would only have half of the staff report each week. One week they would come into work, the other week they would stay at home. The staff remaining at home would be paid, with the understanding that they must stay home and be ready to report in the event of an emergency. The goal is to reduce contact with others as much as possible.

Comm. Ganser questioned if there would be any changes to the on-call schedule.

Utility Manager Adler explained that there would be no changes.

Office Manager Statz explained that Utility Manager Adler has reached out to our after-hours answering service to discuss how they would handle our calls in the event of a shut down or short staff. They informed us that they do not foresee being unable to answer our emergency calls.

Utility Manager Adler explained that the plan is to rely on the Police Department to answer our emergency calls in the event that the answering service is unable to provide that service.

Comm. Oppermann clarified that the plan is to keep electric and water crews at home and to pay them not to come in.

Office Manager Statz stated that was correct.

Comm. Oppermann stated unless there was an eminent threat, he could not agree with that policy. He stated things are changing quickly and that practice is not consistent with other city departments.

Comm. Adams questioned if we could keep things the way they are now and reassess if we run into this situation in the future.

Comm. Bristol asked if staff could be isolated from each other.

Utility Manager Adler explained that they could be. He explained that he was on a conference call with many other utilities and keeping staff home on a rotating basis was the direction many utilities were taking. He suggested that maybe we could have staff report to different locations, rather than all coming to the shop.

Comm. Bristol stated there should be enough work to do where they can split up.

Comm. Pieters stated at this point he was in favor of having electric and water staff report to work and splitting them up.

Comm. Bristol stated he felt this situation was different than the office staff, as the office staff would not be home doing nothing, they would still be working.

Comm. Adams stated his neighbor works for WE Energies and takes his truck home each day.

Utility Manager Adler explained that the individual is most likely a trouble man who works long hours and takes his vehicle home.

Comm. Brandel stated he believed it was already in our policy for staff to be able to take vehicles home, so he did not think action was necessary.

Comm. Horn clarified his understanding was that electric and water crews would be taking vehicles home and would continue to report to work each day.

No action was taken.

### **DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION FOR ADDITIONAL CLEANING SERVICES**

Office Manager Statz explained that she had reached out to our cleaning company and asked for additional deep cleaning services. They responded they could do a top to bottom deep cleaning of our facility for a cost of somewhere between \$1,000 to \$2,000m, but would not be available until early April. For the time being, staff has been directed to wipe down their areas daily and as needed. She also asked if the commission would like to add an additional cleaning day.

Comm. Bristol questioned why an additional cleaning day would be necessary since we have closed the front window, separating office staff and not allowing staff to congregate in the breakroom.

Office Manager Statz explained that the front lobby is still open as the Police Department cannot close down. She stated that the utility covers the cost to have that space cleaned, not the Police Department. She explained that the utility could relay to the Police Department that they would need to cover the additional cleaning, if desired.

Comm. Brandel stated he was in favor of the deep cleaning.

It was moved by Comm. Brandel and seconded by Comm. Ganser to approve a deep cleaning of the utility facility at a cost estimated to be between \$1,000 to \$2,000. On call of the roll, motion carried. (Oppermann – Aye, Adams - Aye, Pieters – Aye, Brandel – Aye, Horn – Aye, Ganser – Aye, Bristol - Aye)

### **DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON QUARANTINING EMPLOYEES RETURNING FROM TIME OFF**

Utility Manager Adler explained there is one employee currently in Florida. He stated other utilities have taken steps to not allow staff back until they self-quarantine for two weeks after returning from travel from another state. If the travel had already occurred before this decision was made, the utility would pay the employee to be home during that time. However, moving forward, should an employee choose to travel outside of the state, they would be required to self-quarantine, but they would have to substitute their own benefit hours for pay.

Comm. Bristol didn't think it was necessary to have the employee quarantine, as we have already decided to split up staff so they would not infect each other.

Comm. Horn asked if there was a requirement to have employees quarantine.

Utility Manager Adler stated there was not a requirement at this time.

Comm. Bristol questioned if staff could split up tools.

Utility Manager Adler stated in some situations yes, but others no. He explained that staff could clean the tools after they use them.

Comm. Bristol asked if the utility could require a test once the employee returned to ensure they did not have the virus.

Office Manager Statz explained that given the shortage of tests available right now, she didn't think that the utility would be able to order a staff member be tested.

Comm. Oppermann stated staff should be tested if there is a suspicion of infection.

Comm. Horn stated he was in favor of extra cleaning methods and thought staff was making a bigger deal than necessary about quarantining employees.

Comm. Oppermann asked what the city's policy stated about quarantining employees.

Office Manager Statz explained that the city's policy does not address quarantining employees after travel. It was her understanding they were allowing all staff to return from travel. She stated the utility was looking to take a more aggressive approach.

Comm. Oppermann stated he would like to see the utility adopt the city's COVID-19 policy. At this time, the city is not quarantining employees unless they show signs of infection. He did not want to see anything different than how the city is currently handling the situation.

Comm. Adams was in favor of adopting the city's policy.

Comm. Bristol agreed and stated it would eliminate the need for a special meeting if changes need to be made.

Comm. Brandel was in agreement.

Utility Manager Adler clarified that the commission was in favor of employees returning to work after being out of state.

Comm. Adams stated that was correct.

Comm. Brandel stated staff was being quarantined at work by isolating the crews.

It was moved by Comm. Bristol and seconded by Comm. Pieters to adopt the city's COVID-19 policy. On call of the roll, motion carried. (Oppermann – Aye, Adams - Aye, Pieters – Aye, Brandel – Aye, Horn – Aye, Ganser – Aye, Bristol - Aye)

#### **DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON HOLDING OFF 2020 CAPITAL PROJECTS**

Utility Manager Adler explained that in light of the coronavirus, he would be postponing some capital projects for 2020, except for contracts with projects, such as the Marshall Avenue water main replacement.

Utility Manager Adler went on to say that in addition we would hold off on scheduled routine replacements, like poles.

Comm. Brandel and Comm. Adams stated it was a good idea.

Comm. Bristol explained that in his line of work he has started to see disruption in the supply chain.

Utility Manager Adler stated it was now 14 weeks out to get a transformer, and was anticipating even longer lead times.

Comm. Horn asked if there were projects that are not affected by supply shortages.

Utility Manager Adler explained that it was only temporary, as he did not want to be short of poles or transformers in the event that an emergency comes up and we cannot order more supplies.

It was moved by Comm. Brandel and seconded by Comm. Ganser to approve the delay of the 2020 capital projects and scheduled routine maintenance. On call of the roll, motion carried. (Oppermann – Aye, Adams - Aye, Pieters – Aye, Brandel – Aye, Horn – Abstained, Ganser – Aye, Bristol - Aye)

Comm. Adams wished to thank the commission members for calling in for the emergency meeting.

Comm. Oppermann wished to thank Comm. Horn for his service on the Utilities Commission, as he only had one meeting left before leaving his post on the Common Council.

It was moved by Comm. Pieters and seconded by Comm. Oppermann to adjourn. Motion carried on a voice vote. The meeting adjourned at 5:01 p.m.