

Town of Garfield
TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES Final
Town Hall – Oct. 7th, 2015

CALL TO ORDER: Mayor Ray McCown called the meeting to order at 6:59 PM

ROLL CALL: Mayor Ray McCown, David Jones, Sharon Schnebly, Daymon Marple, Mark Young and Tim Southern. Staff: Clerk/Treasurer Cody Lord, Public Works Assistants Brad Hasenoehrl and Mark Phillips
Absent:

GUESTS: Ellie Key with DOE, Diana Washington with DOE, Don Brown, Scott Bowman, Neal Leon, Dave Ulrick, Roger Million, Joe Handley, Sandra Cavallo and Rebecca Strange.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mayor McCown welcomes everyone to the Special Meeting and states this is open to the public but they will save questions until the end of the meeting for the public. Ellie Key introduces herself and says she is the Dept. of Ecology Permit Manager for the Town of Garfield, and Diana Washington is the Water Quality Permit Unit Supervisor from the Dept. of Ecology and is Ellie's immediate supervisor and they are here to discuss the compliance meeting that took place in 2014 and was followed up by a Notice of Violation issued in July of 2014. Ellie explains the town did respond and there has been an agreed order in place since then. The town has taken many steps to come into compliance including making changes to the chlorination and de-chlorination systems.

Maintenance and operation logs need to be submitted with the DMRs each month to make sure the guidance the O&M manual provides is being followed. Ellie states since January those monthly statements have not been submitted to the DOE. There have been a total of 165 violations since Jan 2014. DOE can assess a \$5,000 to \$10,000 per day per violation for every day the plant is not compliant. The Dept. of Ecology is authorized by the EPA to authorize permits every five years. The main concern about not being in compliance is it allows 3rd party citizen and civil suits to happen which can reach up to \$37,500 for each violation. The town has been working towards getting compliant with the discharge permit. Ellie and Diana are here to help figure out the timeline to make sure compliance is obtainable. The DOE wants to work with the town but at the same time it will take a monetary commitment and labor commitment from the town to bring it all together.

Ellie says the plant really needs someone out there 4-6 hours a couple times a week and then a couple hours each day. Currently the town doesn't have a certified operator that meets the current NPDES permit. This is the support that the town needs to give the public works staff so the plant will run better. It really is kind of an art, you need to look at your basins and know the color and smell of the material which will help with the process testing. The solids management is something that needs to be dialed in. Andy O'Neil is a roving operator he covers central and eastern region of Washington. He is able to come and help but because of the size of his region he can't be out here all the time. It is up to the town to make sure the Public Works know the systems.

Based on the violations the town has it can become a public health risk and the town is at risk for 3rd party citizen suits and potentially more enforcement from the DOE. Working together is really a priority. Ellie and Diana are here to start the discussion on how that can happen. Mark Young asks are there any specific suggestions you can make that will help the town get into compliance. Ellie suggests reaching out to Pomeroy's operator, Willie Graham and see if he can help Brad. Ellie also suggests reading through the operations manual to know the processes saying this conversation took place about that a year ago. Brad Hasenoehrl stated that they are a lot more comfortable with O&M manual now.

Sharon Schnebly asked how many outstanding violations the town has now. Ellie said there has been 165 since Feb 2014. Sharon asked do they accrue. Ellie said those are since Feb. 2014 this month you have 4 violations. Brad said he tried to address them on a monthly basis but they don't go away. Mayor

McCown asked didn't it operate properly in the past. Ellie explains she has been the manager of the facility for 20 months and it has never been in compliance. Ellie doesn't believe this is a new issue. Diana Washington says there were compliance issues for the last several years and it has been on their list as a struggling plant that needs to meet compliance. Diana said we let you down by not addressing this earlier in the process, however they need the town to step up with your operations people or there could be more formal enforcement from them. Currently there is more transparency due to records being placed online and accessible by pretty much anyone. With the new reporting systems and environmental groups in the region it is vital they communicate the need to have a good operator and someone that is helping to move forward the operations of the facility as designed.

Ellie said it may be that they offer help to find funds to upgrade the plant, however if this is an operations issue that is making the town out of compliance it becomes a much bigger issue. Mayor McCown said Dave Ulrich is here tonight and he operated the plant for 15 years but has been away from the plant 5 years now. He is wondering if the town could get him to go out and work with the public works guys explaining the guys have spent more than 6 hours a day out there the last 6 months but it is still not operating correctly. Ellie explains that the plant needs a currently licensed level II operator. Ellie also said with that agreed order that the town sent back to DOE it was agreed to the public works department would send daily activity logs and preventative maintenance logs with the monthly discharge monitoring reports. Those reports have stopped coming. This is the tool Ellie uses to see what is happening at the plant and how time is being spent there.

Ellie said the town must have a Group II certified operator at the plant. Diana said Brad is not a Group II operator and according to the regulations the town must have a particular level of operator with a knowledge of the activated sludge treatment. Lagoons can have a WWTP 1 operator. There is process control testing that needs to be done every day, they have to understand what these things are and what they need to do to keep the plant in compliance. Ellie said there is regional class hosted on activated sludge, it is a 3 day seminar with micro biological activity. It would be a very beneficial class for Brad to attend.

Brad explains it was thought our digester was full however he got a sludge judge and discovered it wasn't actually full. Brad is starting to waste more constantly, he needs more understanding of food to micro-organisms. Mark asks is this the information that should have been forwarded to you in the reports the DOE was asking for. Ellie said yes some of these numbers should be reflected in those reports. Ellie said most importantly she wants to make sure that Brad is getting the support from the council to be learning and growing in his position. Tim Southern said basically the town needs a dedicated guy out there. Ellie said yes that is where they are heading. Tim said he was good with that. David Jones said so you are recommending we hire a level II operator. Diana said they can tell the town that their permit requires them to have one. Tim asked can the town still contract with someone. Diana said yes but to be sure to talk with the community they work for and find someone that already works well with their community. You probably know some folks are good at what they do and some are not. Where the town is at now, the town needs someone great. Someone who can also come out and help educate the person running the system. Each level gets more complex.

Mark said he thought the public works guys were on track to go to those classes. Mark asks are there other classes that can help them. Ellie said this isn't a class to prepare them for a test, this is more of processes and a fundamental understanding class. The next available class is early December in Corvallis, OR. It will be an additional expense associated with the plant but money well spent. Tim asks what the details are on the Pomeroy operator and why he was suggested. Ellie explains the plant is almost identical and it was designed by the same engineer when built. Tim asks are there any similar plants with good operators that are closer, like Palouse. There are other treatment plants in the Palouse with good operators, Don in Palouse is a good operator but it is a totally different system. Diana says the engineers designed these plants specifically for your community. The plants are slightly different throughout the communities.

It is explained when the facility is operating well it is a whole different picture of the time it takes to operate

it. Right now it takes a lot more time. Diana says the DOE wants to make sure the town's money stays in your community. Sharon Schnebly asks, what kind of time constraint is the town looking at. Ellie said they don't wish to put a time restriction on it yet, they want to see how the town is going to move forward. Mark says you mentioned the Pomeroy facility are there others, and secondly if the town does decide we want to bring in a class II operator, can the council call you and ask questions about the operator's experience. Diana said they can't do that, you need to go to the community and get references from the community they work for. Also she said be sure when you write the contract for those folks you have specific things you hold them accountable for.

Mayor McCown said the town is currently contracted with David Tysz, he was working 3 hours a day and 3 days a week but the town didn't see much difference in the status of the plant. Brad said Chad Short is willing to come down from Omak to help. Sharon thinks the town would have to make sure to have a solid contract in place spelling out the mileage and expectations to make it worthwhile to travel that distance. Brad said he could possibly come a couple days a week and teach him. Ellie said that Chad is very smart and good at what he does. Tim said he seems to be hearing the most significant thing is the amount of time that is needing to be spent at the plant. Mayor McCown says he doesn't agree with that, if the public works guys don't have someone there to teach them how they could learn anything. The mayor would like to get Dave Ulrick who operated the plant for years to work with the guys' one on one.

Sharon says you still need the level II operator. Mark thinks maybe to expedite the process the town might be able to do that immediately until the town can get a level II operator there. Sharon said it is obvious they need someone to oversee what is happening at the plant and so the operator can watch over and train the guys. Tim said with the public works guys out there seeing it every day it becomes on the job training. Mayor McCown said unless someone shows him he doesn't retain what he is supposed to be learning. Brad said I can tell you right now I can eliminate two of the violation. Mark said let's do what we can to support them and reduce the violations at the plant, it doesn't mean that Dave can't come in and help with the tools to teach them. Sharon asked is the plant operated under state guidelines. Ellie responded yes.

Daymon says you see the ponds everywhere now, is that what everyone is moving towards. Ellie explains the lagoons were popular in the 70's in the late 80's and 90's they started moving to secondary treatment facilities. Mayor McCown said the original plant was built in 1948 and there a few pieces that are part of the original plant foot print. Daymon asked about Connell. Ellie said they are treatment lagoons they have a storage facility and discharge to land treatment. Diana said when you discharge to surface water then you are dealing with Federal Laws. Diana said she would be happy if the town was a state waste discharge permit instead of the NPDES, but to change out is pretty significant. Diana said once the plant is operating correctly the town will have a good plant.

Ellie said each state has their own water quality standards. Daymon said he checked Idaho and it is much less stringent than Washington State. Diana responds she is not sure what facility he was looking at in Idaho but they have certain limits for BOD, TSS and ammonia. Daymon asks what Palouse has. Ellie said they have a bio-stack system and they discharge to north fork of Palouse River during certain times of the year. They are having to redesign their facility as they won't be able to continue to discharge into the Palouse River. They are looking at going to land application. Tim said this plant is paid off in 2020 and maybe some replacement may be needed in the future, but what he is sensing is the best route to go is to get this one fully functional.

Progressive Engineering was a regional engineer at the time of the plant design and there are some plants in Idaho that are similar. Ellie will talk with some people at DEQ and see if there are some similar to the Town of Garfield. Ellie said just understand everyone is dealing with these issues throughout the watershed. Diana said what these guys can do better is running and fully understanding the process testing, doing that better and learning more about it will help the plant out immensely. There are things they can do that will help them build their skills. Diana said she can tell by the smell and look of the plant material what is wrong with the plant.

Tim said this is kind of what Ellie and Andy were telling us at their last meeting, run the tests and then do their operations. Brad said he does a D.O. test and mixed liquor test twice a week. Tim asked Brad, how much time are you there after those tests are done. Brad said there are a few times when he does get to stay out there, and obviously there are things he needs to receive more training on. He thinks having Chad Short come out a couple days a week would greatly benefit his learning. David Jones asks how far is Omak away and it is determined about 4 hours. Pomeroy is only 2 hours away. Mark asked Ellie and Diana if they have copies of contracts that the town can take a look at. Diana said she doesn't believe they have samples of contract operators in house but possibly they can request some. Tim said it is obvious from the conversation that continuing education is also important and Brad and Mark should be attending classes that would help their development. Ellie said yes, Andy O'Neil has taken a lot of these classes, he knows which classes will be the best for your folks to operate your facility, and we really want it to fit what you are trying to do.

Mark asks does the mayor and council want to discuss the amount of money the town has stuck in to this plant. Mayor McCown said in the last two years roughly \$78,000 and these are expenses above and beyond the normal plant operations. Tim said yes the bio-cell broke, and the lift stations needed repaired and these were the major expenses among many other things repaired and upgraded at the plant. Mayor McCown said the town has had enormous problems with the pumps. Daymon said some are rebuilt and some are new. Diana asked are you having problems with diapers and baby wipes. Brad explained that there is a lot of items coming to the plant other than normal toilet paper and human waste. Diana suggests sending a notice to all the residents of the town explaining; if you don't want to see rate increases then you have got to stop putting these items into the system.

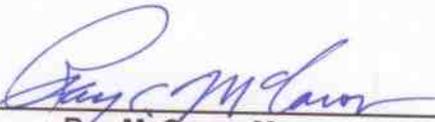
Mayor McCown said the town is also having an issue with grease. Ellie says this is where the town's pre-treatment ordinance can come in helpful, it explains if you can trace back where the grease is coming from then you can fine them for putting it into the system. Typically it is a basic education issue for your community. Diana says the older the system the more you will see these issues and they will have a bigger impact on the smooth operation of your plant and it really starts to affect your operating budget. You have to look at how you are paying for the system and looking at replacement parts which are much higher than original equipment you bought for the plant. Figuring it out and fixing it is much less expensive than paying for violations for each day out of compliance.

Daymon asked Ecology, how a town funds these things with the high amount of senior citizens and lower income families making up the majority of the population, where does the town get the money. Tim mentions that the town did a rate study, and raised the rate. The goal was to be in the black but it has been just keeping up. Daymon asks so if the town gets the plant up to speed are there some funds available. Ellie responded, yes they have grant and loan programs which are funded by the state revolving fund or Federal dollars, however these don't pay for maintenance and operation. Mark says we will have this plant paid for in 2021, but we wouldn't want to encumber the community with loans, is it feasible to get this plant up and running to keep it operational by DOE standards, try to stay in the black and handle what we can. Ellie said absolutely, the facility you have you have is a good one and you can steer the ship in the right direction by working with the right people and getting Brad the knowledge he needs to be able to operate it. The facility will go through the life of that loan and beyond but Brad will have to be out there several hours a day, it may mean bringing someone else on to cover the other jobs that are needing to be done in town.

Tim asked with the chlorine chamber changed on the end will it help. Ellie confirmed it will as long as the solids issues are dealt with, you can't get the contact time and disinfectant that you need if it doesn't have adequate contact time. Diana reiterated DOE wants to work with the Town of Garfield, they are here to say this is the reality of the situation the town is in and this is a way to get out of the current situation. Mayor McCown asked is the guy in Pomeroy is the only operator you know of that could assist the town. Ellie will talk with DEQ in Idaho and see if there is another one closer. Sharon asked is there license reciprocity between states. Ellie believes there are several Idaho people that have Idaho and Washington Licenses.

Mayor McCown asked are there any questions from the audience. Rebecca Strange said her concern is less about raising the sewer rates. She said with tax payer money the town should be looking at making the longest term fix as possible for the smallest amount of money. She said it is not what Brad is not doing but what the town should be investing in him to be able to conduct his work. Rebecca said no more patches and no more fines. Sandra stated if the town is going to take out a big loan then put a septic tank in everyone's yard. Sharon asked what the timeline for the town being fined is. Ellie said she doesn't want to set a timeline they want to help but the town needs to seek corrective action. Diana said if it doesn't go in the right direction we would come back and tell you that you are not helping DOE and they would then need to take the next step.

ADJOURNMENT: Daymon Marple **MOVED** to adjourn the meeting at 7:57 PM. Sharon Schnebly seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.



Ray McCown, Mayor

ATTEST: 

Cody Lord, Clerk/Treasurer