

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL SESSION MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF JERSEY VILLAGE, TEXAS, HELD ON NOVEMBER 20, 2023, AT 7:00 P.M. IN THE CIVIC CENTER AUDITORIUM, 16327 LAKEVIEW, JERSEY VILLAGE, TEXAS.

A. CALL TO ORDER AND ANNOUNCE A QUORUM IS PRESENT

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Warren at 7:03 p.m. with the following present:

Mayor, Bobby Warren	City Secretary, Lorri Coody
Council Member, Drew Wasson	City Attorney, Justin Pruitt
Council Member, Sheri Sheppard	
Council Member, Michelle Mitcham	
Council Member, James Singleton	
Council Member, Jennifer McCrea	

Robert Basford; Assistant City Manager, Danielle Cordova; Public Works Manager, and Taryn Modisette, Utility Billing Clerk.

Austin Blees; City Manager, attended the meeting via video conference.

B. CITIZENS' COMMENTS

Any person who desires to address City Council regarding an item on the agenda will be heard at this time. In compliance with the Texas Open Meetings Act, unless the subject matter of the comment is on the agenda, the City staff and City Council Members are not allowed to discuss the subject. Each person is limited to five (5) minutes for comments to the City Council.

Fred Ziehe, 8409 Hawaii Lane, Jersey Village, Texas (713) 870-4162 – Mr. Ziehe spoke to City Council. He gave a handout concerning his concerns. He stated that there were some problems with the November water bill. His bill was \$118 for six gallons of water. He did not have a second meter at the time, but has since installed one. He calculates that his bill was over by about \$6, which is not too concerning; however, he stated that in September of 2022 when he used 6,000 gallons his bill was only \$78. That is quite a bit of a difference from last year. He has concerns about the increased rates and the burden that it may cause the residents. He would like to have the rate increase implemented on a schedule over time in order to temper the increase for residents. He also mentioned that that the overall cost of getting a second meter is more than expected. The meter itself only costs about \$300 but does not include the plumbing costs needed to implement the second meter. He explained the plumbing implementation process for adding a second meter, stating the cost could be as much as an additional \$2200, and that is if the resident does not have to go under the street. He is concerned that City Council does not know or understand these costs. He also wants to know if there will be a monthly fee for the second meter if water is not used during the month.

Kim Clements, 15926 Lakeview Drive, Jersey Village, Texas (713) 899-0099 – Ms. Clements spoke to City Council about the water bills. She agrees with Mr. Ziehe. She stated that she used 17,000 gallons one month and 19,000 the next but the cost between the two months was about \$200 for the additional 200 gallons. She felt that that is too drastic. She understands that the increases by the City of Houston will trickle down to Jersey Village; nonetheless, she felt the increases are a bit aggressive. She wants to know what the City is doing to mitigate the increased costs. She wants to work with the City to help find ways to save money. She wants to know what else the City can do in order to reduce these costs. She states a \$165 water bill compared to \$225 sewer bill does not make sense to her.

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Judy Yarberry, Jersey Village, Texas (832) 233-6748 – Ms. Yarberry spoke to City Council about the water bills. She agrees with Mr. Ziehe and Ms. Clements. She loves living in Jersey Village and acknowledges that it is necessary at times to have a rate increase for water and sewer services as well as the need for a second meter. However, “the double whammy” was a bit much to tolerate. She felt that something less aggressive may have worked better. In the past, she mentioned that the utility study was done by an outside consultant. She feels that the outside study would provide information that can be compared to the study performed in house.

C. Discuss and take appropriate action concerning water meter readings and accuracy testing.

City Attorney Pruitt advised City Council that based upon the agenda posting, if City Council mentions rates, it must be tied to meter readings and/or accuracy testing.

Mayor Warren stated that he had hoped to have more information to address the residents’ concerns; however, we will only be able to speak about meter readings and accuracy testing tonight. There will be an item on next week’s agenda concerning the water bill rates.

Some Council Members wanted to know if it is appropriate to address some of the Citizens’ Comments made this evening. City Attorney Pruitt stated that it would be permissible but cautioned about rate increase discussions.

Michelle Mitcham, City Council Member, introduced the item. She thanked everyone for coming. She voiced her concern for the residents. She stated that she would like to have a discussion regarding water bills given that it has been brought to Council’s attention that many residents found an un-expected higher bill. Council Member Mitcham stated that she would like Council to analyze possible factors that may have contributed to the higher bills such as: the recent adjustments from water and sewerage separation, water and sewer rate changes, removing the averaging rating system for bills, and the possibility of there being another unknown factor. She explained that calling this Special Session was the best way to address residents’ concerns.

Some members stated their concern that meters are not reading accurately and consistently. Examples were given to support these concerns. Some felt that there needs to be something in place to address these fluctuations aside from testing the meter only to find out the meter is working fine, but still appears to be inaccurate. It was also pointed out that one can no longer reconcile their bill with their meter as was once possible.

It was mentioned that the City of Houston uses the same type meters we do, and they have acknowledged that they have a problem with inaccurate meters. Other members stated that the City of Houston still uses a manual meter reading system. However, other members stated that not all of the City of Houston’s meters are read manually.

Some members explained that residents who have had increased usage had their meters tested and it was found that the meters are accurate.

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Information was provided based upon City Records that the jump in usage/cost is attributed to irrigation usage. There were only 24 homes with these jumps in usage/cost, which appeared to be directly associated with increased irrigation. Some members wondered if there could be more than 24 instances given the number of complaints the Council has received.

Further discussion was had concerning the information used to calculate the 24 homes that had a jump in usage/cost. There was also discussion about how a resident can no longer compare their bill to their meter reading. Some members stated that it is possible to read one's meter as there are a few data points on the meter that will help one read the meter and make comparisons to the water bill. The process of reading the meter was explained. Some members wondered if we could put something on the City website instructing residents how to read their own meters so they can compare the meter readings to their bills.

There was also discussion about the City of Houston's issues from last month. There was discussion that when our water comes into the City from the City of Houston does the City receive a bill for the amount of water that goes through the interconnect. Assistant City Manager Basford stated that Jersey Village is billed by the City of Houston for water it receives. With this in mind, it was asked if the water the residents use ties back to the amount of water we are being charged for from the City of Houston. Some members wanted to see these numbers, because it was felt that we should be able to understand if these numbers zero out. It was pointed out that main breaks would skew these numbers because the water expelled from a main break would not be registered by any meter. City Manager Bleess stated that we have looked at the City of Houston data, but we have found out that in the past the meter registering this usage failed so our bills from the City of Houston have been estimated.

There was discussion about failing meters. It was pointed out that failed meters are typically in the favor of the resident and not the provider.

Discussion was had about when a resident's meter fails or a meter reading is missed, what is the resident's recourse. Staff explained that when this happens, the City sends out a staff member to manually read the meter. It was mentioned that there was an incident for one resident that did not get a bill for 3 months and when they finally were billed it was for more than 50,000 gallons. Assistant City Manager Basford explained that when this happens, the usage is distributed across the three months in order to avoid excessive charges.

Some members want to discuss the pattern of inconsistencies. It was stated that if the City of Houston is having these problems and we have the same meters it is very possible that we are having the same issues. So, what are the options of testing our meters for inaccuracy.

The City charges \$100 to test meters on site. In the past, no fee was charged for this service. However, when testing was done without a fee, the City had to pay the fee on the backend. Accordingly, the fee was implemented.

There was discussion about the Utility Fund, which is used to provide safe and clean drinking water and to ensure that wastewater is removed in a sanitary manner. Every dollar we spend out

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of the fund to do something has to come from somewhere. It either comes from the person experiencing issues or all of the residents will have to pay to insure the funds are available to operate and maintain the system.

In terms of inaccurate meters at the City of Houston, City Manager Bless stated that they have had issues in estimating the water bills versus actual readings. Some members stated that if residents have an issue with a zero bill or an estimated bill, they can call the City to come out and manually read the meter.

Some members wanted to know what is the installation timeline of the new equipment that will provide instantaneous meter readings. Assistant City Manager Basford explained that the new equipment will provide instantaneous meter reads and is currently underway. Usage information will be available online.

Some members felt that for most residents, the meters are accurate, but for a small few there is possibly some kind of issue. Some wanted to know if the City has a method to check into this. Mr. Basford stated that it is possible with a third-party service. Other members wanted a well-defined problem before money is spent on a third-party service.

When residents disagree with a water bill, they have no recourse other than having the meter tested. It was felt that we need to reach out to the City of Houston to determine what their issue was with the meters and to see if something like that is happening here.

It was discussed that the new system being installed will provide residents with instant information concerning their usage. It was also mentioned that usage complaints are resolved on a case-by-case basis.

Some members suggested that we have a work session to work through the data and come up with a solution to these issues.

Some members felt that when the second meter does not have any water passing through it in any given month, that the monthly service fee should not be charged.

Is a formal Resolution needed to waive late fees for this month? City Attorney Pruitt explained that it can be done but it is a bit more complicated than just waiving the fees.

The corrective rate change Ordinance is set for November 27. These rates were basically already approved by City Council and the Ordinance is just to correct the clerical errors. However, City Attorney Pruitt stated that the Council is permitted to change the rates if they desire at that time.

It was the consensus of Council that a Work Session Meeting for this topic is needed.

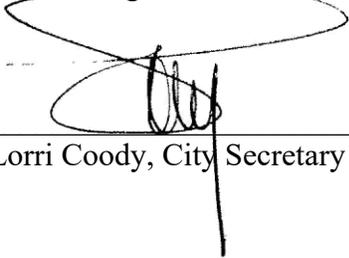
City Attorney Pruitt stated that customer billing/usage information is confidential. However, he explained how the gathered data still can be used, stating that no identifying information can be used that would tie the information back to an individual.

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Residents are customers. So, when there is a problem, the City needs to find a way to improve the process to help residents.

D. ADJOURN

~~There being no further business on the agenda the meeting was adjourned at 8:19 p.m.~~



Lorri Coody, City Secretary

