

**LITCHFIELD WATER POLLUTION CONTROL AUTHORITY**

**REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

**Litchfield Firehouse, 258 West Street, Litchfield, CT 06759**

**February 12, 2026, at 7:00 pm**

**1. CALL TO ORDER:** C. Levesque called the special meeting of the Litchfield WPCA to order at 7:09 pm.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Present: Members present were Chris Levesque (Chairman), John Bongiorno (BOS Liaison), Kate Honan, Bill Buckley, Keith Shortsleeve, Raz Alexe PW Director, and Ted Donoghue, Plant Superintendent.

Absent: K. Merz had resigned from the Board.

**3. SEATING ALTERNATIVE (IF NECESSARY)** None seated.

**4. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES OF 1/8/26 MEETING.** K. Shortsleeve brought up concerns for obvious errors using the Plaud AI program, this included word accuracy, especially around billing terminology (corrected bill”) and proper context. Board members emphasized not altering what was said, only clarifying where appropriate. The Plaud errors missed by T. Donoghue were noted, and T. Donoghue assured the Board that he would work to minimize any obvious mistakes. He also explained that he emailed out this version, and no one offered any comments, and if errors were found the minutes could be revised and approved with noted changes at the next meeting.

**Motion:** J. Bongiorno put forth a motion to accept the 1/8/26 regular meeting minutes. W. Buckley second and there was no further discussion. All members voted “aye”, K. Honan abstained, and the motion was carried.

**4a. PUBLIC COMMENTS FOR ITEMS ONLY ON THE AGENDA.**

**Motion:** J. Bongiorno put forth a motion to move up agenda item 12, Public Comments for items on the agenda, to item 4.a. W. Buckley seconded and there was no further discussion. All members voted “aye and the motion carried.

- – Prospect Mountain Properties High Water Usage and Suspected Leaks
  - P. Dowton and his wife Patty, appear before the Board to discuss their multi-building property (495, 499, 503 Bantam Road; includes Patty’s restaurant to Bissell Road toy store) which has a single Aquarion water meter.

- Annual sewer bill increased from ~\$5,700 (14 units) to ~\$15,000 based on usage; owner paid \$5,700 this year while disputing the dramatic increase.
- Prolonged continuous flow reported (approx. 4 gpm after one of two water boxes on the property were turned off. T. Donoghue reached out to Aquarion for the most recent water bills and they averaged ~120 CCF for winter monthly usage); suspected leaks likely not entering sewer.
- Leak isolation: right-hand side feed from meter pit implicated; left-hand side shows no leak. Break in 1" poly repaired; flow dropped then rose again, suggesting additional failures in aging, patchwork lines. State culvert/drain may route leak underground.
- Plan: replace problematic service lines fully (especially to red building) once ground thaws; Aquarion and "Paul" from CT RWWA to support leak detection/line tracing at no cost to P. Dowton.
- Owner requests billing consideration for water proven not entering sewer; property is mixed-use with five residential units. Aquarion data indicates ~1.2 million gallons/year; and the owner disputes plausibility.
- Commission intent: rely on Aquarion's leak determination and consider adopting comparable sewer leak adjustment policy; request to waive interest during investigation due to lack of prior notification.
- Conclusion: Likely leak acknowledged; owner pursuing full line replacement and detection. Motion passed—if the invoice face value is paid in full, finance will pause liens/collections pending Aquarion's findings and board review. No final decision on adjustment criteria yet.
- Policy Development for Disputes, Interest, and Adjustments
  - Recognized absence of formal grievance/appeals process and standard policy for leak adjustments and late-payment interest.
  - Commissioners cautioned about relying solely on Aquarion and noted multiple billing cycles may be needed to confirm post-repair baseline usage.
  - Conclusion: Policy development (leak adjustments, interest forgiveness, appeals, and Aquarion coordination) to be placed on next agenda; board to draft/refine procedures and document interim payment/refund handling.
- Broader Equity Concerns and Rate Structure
  - Owner raised concerns about commercial burden (e.g., tipping fees applied only to commercial users; sudden sewer bill increase).
  - Commissioners discussed fairness of flat residential rates vs. metered usage; alignment of sewer charges with water metering favored.
  - Some customers with wells had rate conversions of 1.2 times what they were charged in the prior billing year; Aquarion can provide data quickly for monitoring, as T. Donoghue now has a direct contact.
  - Conclusion: No specific rate changes decided.

**Motion:** W. Buckley put forth a motion that for the customer, Prospect Mountain Properties, that they have made an appeal and if they pay the full-face value of the current invoice due, that no further liens or legal actions will be taken if the owner of the property is to receive an adjustment

from Aquarion on their previous water bills. If they do get an adjustment, the WPCA will review that. J. Bongiorno seconded, and the following discussion followed. J. Bongiorno commented that we have had not had many customers with this type of problem, and the other customer who had a high-water consumption bill did not have a leak, but had another issue. He stressed that we have to develop a regulation to work through these types of appeals, as we have nothing at this point in time. C. Levesque commented, that before we can forgive anything regarding water leaks and other high charges, we have to develop a process to do this. He assured P. Dawton that this item would be placed on the next meeting's agenda and requested that he file a claim with Aquarion for possible relief. There was no further discussion and all members voted "aye" and the motion carried.

## **5. REPORT FROM CHAIRMAN.**

C. Levesque had no formal report, but touched on these subjects.

- CT DEEP Priority List for FY 27 was sent out late this year. The grant/loan commitments were discussed for solids handling and secondary treatment; figures referenced (total ~\$12.6 with \$4 and \$8 million components) require clarification from consulting engineer; and are not yet granted nor are we expected to commit to these projects,
- Readiness for FY27 projects debated; reserve portion of revolving fund could be used for planning; kick-off within ~1.5 years.
- Funding allocations are points-based; current system's low loading may reduce scoring compared to larger systems.
- Conclusion: No decision on pursuing FY27 funding; need to clarify commitments and decide whether to submit applications.
- Regulatory Standards and Plant Loading Context
  - Plants in higher-impact environments face stricter standards (e.g., Stamford hypoxia, Danbury low dilution).
  - Standards based on 7-day, 10-year low flow; current system has relatively low loading, affecting prioritization.
  - Conclusion: Context provided; no action determined.

## **6. DISCUSSION OF FY 27 OPERATING BUDGET.**

- FY 27 Budget is largely flat; professional service (3201-52111) reduced slightly due to lower Torrington costs; labor down ~4.5% with staffing changes; new assistant plant operator starts March 2.
- Electricity increased due to PPA rate and updated solar production assumptions (avg 25,000 kWh/month; baseline use ~431,000 kWh/year). YTD solar 191,000 kWh with 5 months remaining; peak ~45,000 kWh in June; winter output is dramatically lower.
- As of the February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2026, ~48% of budget spent seven months into current fiscal year; overall in good shape. Some lines high due to encumbrances or seasonal variation (e.g., sludge processing). Supplies ~75% due to early purchases. Debt service budgeted (e.g., 181,434) currently unspent.

- Conclusion: Budget balanced with adjustments; monitoring electricity and supplies lines.
- Revenue Expectations and Budgeting Methodology
  - Conservative revenue forecasting continues; savings realized via operations or improved collections. R. Alexe mentioned that the Board consider median-based method using 6–8-year averages sans outliers.
  - Projected septage revenue cut by half given reduced activity; future limits (daily/weekly/monthly) to be discussed if resuming in May.
  - Collection rate assumed at 97%; overall budget ~2.65 lower than FY26 (as stated).
  - Conclusion: Maintain conservative approach; evaluate median-based budgeting; septic strategy pending.
- Encumbrances, Line-Item Controls, and Auditor Requirements
  - New auditor requires flagging line-item overspends and permission to reallocate; MUNIS 5-digit subaccounts complicate review.
  - Historically, operations absorbed equipment failures; new rules may limit flexibility.
  - Conclusion: Must comply with stricter controls from the new Town Auditor and plan for reallocation approvals.
- Reporting Format and Commission Focus
  - Commissioners prefer high-level reporting and strategic focus (e.g., wastewater plant replacement) over granular line-items.
  - Desire for one-page aggregated summaries with major categories, YTD percentages, outliers, and on-track status; clarify “sewer capital replacement” and linkage to Fund 66.
  - Conclusion: Consensus to develop simplified, aggregated reports and spend meeting time on YTD status and exceptions.
- Septage Dumping Acceptance: Financial and Operational Impact
  - Profitability uncertain; external advisor suggested it costs money, but no model/data shown to commission that justify that opinion.
  - Historical fund balance reportedly benefited (\$70,000–\$100,000 annually) from septage revenue; operational impacts include chemicals, energy, sludge quality, and denitrification performance; peak capacity for septage is around 15,000 gallons/day.
  - Strategy: proceed only if not losing money; consider aligning rates with nearby facilities (e.g., Torrington at \$09.5 cents); ensure public service while staying within limits of NPDES permit.
  - Conclusion: Commission to conduct cost-benefit analysis and set rates/limits if resuming.

## **7.DISCUSSION RE: LWPCA BOOKKEEPER INTERGRATION INTO TOWN HALL.**

R. Alexe update the group that we are still moving forward, and that the online bill pay is still not operational. M. Seaman sent out statement and collections YTD are strong, just over \$1.1 million dollars.

## **8. DISCUSSION: 2026 ANNUAL REPROT.**

### **9. STATUS: RE: FST TANK COVER.**

#### **1. UPDATE ON REMOVAL OF FST COVER.**

T. Donoghue updated the Board that the efforts by Spectrum Environmental and their sub – contractors were successful on 1/7/26 to dislodge the stuck FST cover and to rest it properly on the existing haunches. During this work, one haunch had to be removed, by jack hammering it, and two others had to be shaved off to allow the cover to be freed and thus moved. Spectrum Environment submitted a proposal for additional work to repair the three haunches and to clean out debris that has fallen into the tank. This proposal was between \$34,00 and \$36,000. K. Shortsleeve asked for clarification on fabrication for the tank cover. T. Donoghue agreed that stainless steel haunches would surface for the repair, this was the least inexpensive of the three proposals.

Unfortunately, the water, from rain and snow melt, is now frozen solid in the cone of the FST tank and we will have to wait until late April or early May for it to thaw out, before this work can be done. As a result of the cold, we cannot also use the frac tank, so we have had to go back to pump out unthicken sludge from the BST tank. Our costs are still much lower than last year at this time, but T. Donoghue will continue to monitor it and inform the Board if we need to submit these future expenses to CIRMA.

#### **2. INSURANCE/ENFORCEMENTT UPDATE.**

The Spectrum Environmental proposal was submitted to our insurance adjuster Darren Toff, who will present it to CIRMA for approval,

## **10. REPORT: RE: PUBLIC WORKS/TREATMENT PLANT SUMMARY.**

### **1. UPDATE ON ASSISTANT PALNT OPERATOR POSITION.**

T. Donoghue had emailed out the report, earlier in the week, and the following discussion occurred.

- Process Performance: Nitrates, Mixed Liquor, and Denitrification
  - High SVI (280s–290) consistent with seasonal norms; currently not thickening; no septic accepted now either, so solving this problem is very important.
  - Nitrates elevated at 5–8 mg/L for ~8 months (previously ~0.5 mg/L); not in violation but degraded performance likely from insufficient carbon and/or anoxic retention time.
  - Instrumentation/control questions: DO probe coverage, mixing, equalization, recycle strategies; more automation could help but risks complexity. Anoxic effectiveness is critical for filament control here too.

- Conclusion: Further analysis needed; outline options for carbon addition, anoxic optimization, and instrumentation improvements.
- Monthly performance was good with average daily flow being 0.406 MGD and the peak daily flow being 0.577 MGD and no operational problems reported.
- Woodard and Curran and CT DEEP Coordination
  - Confusion over whether “Scope 6” (including Woodard and Curran) was removed or reinstated; minutes reportedly showed it was put back; some dispute that.
  - Concern about consistent communication to DEEP; one member informed DEEP contacts; staff notes DEP reads minutes. Woodridge Lake Sewer District is now under subsurface group, not POTW compliance currently.
  - Stance: open to participate if state participates/funds; reluctance for users to pay.
  - Conclusion: Should we send formal clarification to CT DEEP; others suggest no further action since DEEP was informed.
- Topic Title: UV System and ARPA Funding
  - UV installation nearly complete; startup scheduled soon.
  - ARPA funds fully utilized and submitted over a month ago; project on track.
  - Conclusion: Proceed to commissioning and report at next meeting.

**2. NEW VEHICLE.** No update.

**11. REPORT: RE: FINANCIAL REPORT SUMMARY.**

T. Donoghue gave a quick overview and explained that we are in good position YTD, with about 49 % of the operation budget spent YTD. The typical large line items, such as supplies and professional services, are over this trend, but are typical of where we are at this stage of each FY. Some items, such as QSR for manhole rehab work are already purchased and ready for the spring road work season. We have to replace 7 manhole frames and covers on South Street-Rt 63, due to a total milling and repaving CT DOT project, so that will be an expense we will incur.

**12. PUBLIC COMMENTS FOR ITEMS ONLY ON THE AGENDA.** Moved to item 4.a

**13. COMMISSIONER REQUESTS FOR CONSIDERATION OF FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS.**

- A \$340 Optimum bill referenced; follow-up delayed due to budget season priorities.
- Conclusion: Pending; no action completed.

**14. ADJOURNMENT.**

**Motion:** W. Buckley moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 pm. J. Bongiorno seconded and there was no further discussion. All members voted “aye,” and the motion was carried.

Terrence Donoghue, Interim Recording Secretary