

**North Branch Fire District #1
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**THESE MINUTES ARE NOT OFFICIAL UNTIL APPROVED BY THE
PRUDENTIAL COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the North Branch Fire District #1, Prudential Committee, August 24, 2017.

This Meeting, having been duly warned, was called to order at 12:01 p.m. by Chairperson, Cyndee Frere.

Members Present: Cyndee Frere, Thomas Ferrazza, Karl Braunbach, Edward Barber and Brendan Ryan.

Also Present: Rebecca Snow, Bart Howes and Linda Holland.

Public Comment: None.

Other Business: Ferrazza has been thinking about the Hookup rates since the last meeting and after speaking to Howes made the following motion. Ferrazza moved to raise the hookup fees from \$35.00 per gallon to \$40.00 per gallon to be reevaluated every three years which may not be altered by any present or subsequent boards within that three year period. Seconded by Barber. Frere stated that when she left the meeting on August 10th she felt uncomfortable about the \$35.00 figure. She felt it happened very quickly. Ferrazza explained that the hookup fee came in at approximately \$64.00 after discussions with Howes in regards to replacing the plant. Ferrazza stated that if you look at the "B" list at \$50.00 and you look at the "A" list and small gallonage allocations at \$30.00 we need to come to the center at \$40.00 per gallon. (The Committee is considering doing away with the "B" Priority List). Braunbach stated that he thought \$35.00 was already too high. Braunbach stated that we should leave the hookup fee at \$30.00. Ferrazza stated "in reality I feel the \$35.00 is too low". The reason Ferrazza suggested three years in his motion is because we are already coming up on a new year and we are about to hit the users with \$350,000.00 increase based on what Howes and Ferrazza had talked about. You can't really adjust the user's fee in one year because you really don't know what is going to happen to the plant, stated Ferrazza. In a three year period you make "X" amount of dollars in the first year in hookup, sleeping spaces and back taxes the next year a pond blows out, so to adjust the user's fee at that point makes no sense. If we go three years and nothing happens to the treatment facility we have made "X" amount of dollars in hookup and you can say, the third year, we can now adjust the user fee and bring it down \$100,000.00 or 150,000.00. It gives us a little bit of

time to say “yes we can adjust it, five years is way too long stated Ferrazza. Braunbach stated that he feels the user fees should fund the treatment facility, period, and they should be adjusted every year to cover the cost of the plant. Frere stated she liked the three years in the motion because it also reflects the Committee members terms of office. Ferrazza stated that he was not concerned with that, in reference to the terms. The reason Ferrazza stated three years, “I don’t want the Board changing and all of a sudden the Board turning around and making a change before you have given this enough time to work. Once this change is made, or any change, it is going to go into the Ordinance giving this the chance to work. Braunbach stated that a new Committee could go back and change the Ordinance. Braunbach stated the people will vote for the Committee members that are willing to perform how they (the voter’s) want things done. Braunbach stated we are “hamstringing” the public at this point, putting something through that they are not happy with. First they will get rid of us and on top of that they get rid of the Ordinance stated Braunbach. Ferrazza “they have nothing to say about the Ordinance once it has been voted on by the public and put in place the only remedy they have is to vote us out”. Ryan stated that he would like to see the hookup fees and the user rate set at the same time and set for a two year period just in case you needed to react. Ryan strongly opposes the \$40.00 rate and he thinks it is substantially too much and it singles out the large users. Braunbach stated that the hookup fee is a random source of income. No direct correlation as to dollars and cents on what the value is to the plant in other words what the exact cost is to the plant. Howes stated that the hookup fee could be shown to be higher or lower based upon different models. Ferrazza stated he would rescind the above motion.

Ferrazza moved to raise the hookup fees from \$35.00 per gallon to \$40.00 per gallon to be reevaluated every two years and may not be altered by any present or subsequent boards within that two year period. Seconded by Barber. In favor; Frere, Ferrazza and Barber. Opposed: Ryan and Braunbach. (Frere voted to break the tie).

Ryan will reevaluate the model that was presented on August 10, 2017 for the September 14, 2017 meeting. Ryan feels this is a short term gain for a long term loss. Ryan stated “this whole thing annoys me.” If you have a major motion don’t blind side the room. The \$365,000.00 has to be voted by the voters at the Annual meeting under raise and appropriate, stated Ferrazza. Ryan feels that he was strong-armed into this two year decision and feels it is ridiculous. Braunbach added that he is not thrilled with this at all.

Approve the Bear Creek Proposal: Ryan moved to spend \$8,229.00 to have Bear Creek Environmental, LLC perform a special water chemistry and biomonitoring study of the Ellis Brook. Seconded by Braunbach. Passed unanimously.

Executive Session: Ferrazza moved to go into Executive Session at 12:30 p.m. to perform the employee reviews. Seconded by Ryan. Passed unanimously. Ferrazza moved to come out of Executive Session at 3:02 p.m. Seconded by Ryan. Passed unanimously.

Other Business: (continued). Ferrazza stated that in conversations he has had with Howes, Howes indicated that he believes the hookup fee was too low. Ryan stated his understanding was that we were going to build a model based on users paying 75% and the hookup fees would be 25%. Ryan is disappointed and strongly feels we have taken a step backwards. Frere stated that she was not a fan of the fluctuating user fees, not only do they change every year, but every six months. Ryan stated that the model is based on the worst year North Branch has had. This is a revenue model based on two sources of income. What we have done is making us more reliant on the big user hooking up. With the higher user fee we are less reliant on the big user hooking up and we were more reliant on just the normal course of business. Ryan is an advocate of setting the user rates. Ryan stated the above vote makes us more reliant on hookup fees. Ryan is also concerned that higher hookup fees may turn developers away. Ferrazza stated we don't know that but we will shortly, we have contract renewals coming up and we will get feedback from that. Ryan asked how we justify to a person waiting to build a house a fee of \$40.00 per gallon per bedroom. Ferrazza stated that the justification is the fact that the public (users) expect North Branch to pick up the cost of any future repairs, replacements and the cost of the meters, beyond the point of the proposed 4.7 million dollar proposed bond.

Ryan asked Frere the logic behind her vote to break the tie. Frere responded that she was not happy the way the last vote went. It happened too quickly and I believed that the hookup fee needed to be higher. She also stated that she would partly rely on the expertise of her two long term Committee members. She also believes that this is a necessary step toward raising funds for Capital funding and if it doesn't work in two years, it can be reconsidered.

Braunbach stated the last meeting we had the ability to change it. This one, no one knew it was coming up. I came in at 12:00 in the afternoon, the first thing on the agenda was "other business" and literally within fifteen minutes we put something through that we have no ability to change. I am livid.

Braunbach stated the Committee has just made this valley less competitive and I want the Committee to know that I am livid about this vote, I am curtailing my anger, I am livid. Ferrazza and Frere stated they understand Brumbach's frustration.

Ryan stated that we must have mutual respect for each other.

Holland will contact Sarah Shippee and ask her to attend the September 26th meeting as well as the November 2, 2017 Hearing.

Frere adjourned the meeting at 3:54 p.m.

FYI

September 14, 2017 at 12:00 Noon. Regular Meeting of the Prudential Committee.

September 26, 2017 at 12:00 Noon. Special Meeting of the Prudential Committee.

October 12, 2017 at 12:00 Noon. Regular Meeting of the Prudential Committee.

November 2, 2017 at 7:00 p.m. Hearing Regarding the Proposed Bond/Dover Town Hall.

November 9, 2017 Bond Vote from 10:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. North Branch Fire District.

Respectfully Submitted:

Linda L. Holland,
Administrative Manager

cc: C. Frere, E. Barber, K. Braunbach, T. Ferrazza, B. Ryan, Bart Howes, Ed Floyd, H. Terhune, Joe Mahon, Amiee Pritcher, Arlene Palmiter, D. Facilla, Linda Anelli, Adam Levine, Jeannie Flanagan, Leslie Fraser, Ashleigh Havreluk, Laurie Newton, Robert Rubin, Ray Reed, John Densmore, Cliff Turpin, Rolf Parker-Houghton, G. Golet, S. Mac Dougall, L. Harkawik, R. William, Deerfield Valley News and the Brattleboro Reformer.

Posted: North Branch Fire District #1, Wastewater Treatment Facility & Administrations Building. Dover Town Office.