



**TOWN OF BLANDFORD
WATER DEPARTMENT**

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WATER COMMISSIONERS

Brad Curry, Chairman
Peter Thayer
Michael Keier

Gordon Avery, Superintendent

**COMBINED BLANDFORD AND CHESTER
WATER COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 12, 2023
4:00 PM**

MEETING HELD IN BLANDFORD
SELECTBOARD CHAMBERS

Meeting Opened at 4:10 p.m.

In Attendance:

Ira Brezinsky, Bob Daley, Lyle Snide, Tom Beane, Andy Myers, Don Humason, Christopher Dunne, Brad Curry, Michael Keier, Karen Shaw.

Ira opened the meeting advising of the \$178,123 grant for the implementation of the shared water operator program. He also mentioned that Chester received an additional \$50,000 for the GAC filter. The grant money can be entirely expended, partially expended, or actually not used if shared resources is not the direction in which the Towns want to go.

The consensus for this meeting is to hear what the thoughts are, what the concerns are and what the opportunities may be. No need to discuss the history but to go forward.

The question was raised if it is decided not to go forward with the shared operator, does it mean the money is no longer available to use. Chris Dunne put together a frequently asked question list which will be distributed to everyone and Ira reviewed each question on the list with the answers.

Gordan Avery elaborated on the progress of Blandford over the last several years as to maintenance and upkeep and the setting up of new systems. He discussed the logistics relative to testing and the availability of labs.

Town of Chester representatives reported that they are slowly moving forward, though not in the same place as Blandford. Due to low activity relative to water and water operators much hasn't been addressed and focus is now being placed on this.

Each municipality has a primary water operator and with the grant there will be additional operators shared between the two municipalities. How this will all break down isn't yet set and emphasis will be placed on the rotation of water operators and coverage for weekends, holidays and vacations. Several potential schedules were tossed around and should the program go forward, this will be discussed further and set up. Support is definitely going to be required to cover any unforeseen resignations or illnesses.

Having the interns from the Gateway Regional School District program serve both municipalities, as well as perhaps additional municipalities should benefit both water departments. A floater pool would be advantageous to serve any of the municipalities that experience a shortage of operators. Scheduling was discussed in detail as to the semantics and the possibility of additional towns being a part of the shared operators.

There is concern as to the best way to keep trained operators due to the demand for them and the present wage competitiveness. A review of what will be offered as to wages and benefits will be required to be certain the municipalities sharing the services are offering competitive wages and benefits.

Various scenarios were offered up and a great deal of discussion ensued relating to the logistics of how the shared operators would work, the type of work they would do and the demands of that work.

Gordon Avery reiterated that both towns have a primary operator and a secondary operator. Blandford also has a laborer who will be receiving his treatment operator T-2 license within the next several months. It is required that he be trained in Blandford operations and perhaps this individual can be shared between both the Blandford and Chester plants if he is agreeable to this. He is an OIT and would need

to work with another operator but would be a prime candidate for what is being looked for to start this off. Logistically this candidate is equal distance between both municipalities and could conveniently work at either plant. It would be important that operations in both plants were universal.

Any tasks that are being performed by the commissioners should be delegated to the operators. That they be in the hands of the professional operators and not commissioners. There is a water superintendent in Blandford and not one in Chester. Blandford water superintendent directs the operators relative to the daily work and recently some of the testing/sampling. The superintendent position reports to the Blandford Water Commission. Gordon Avery advised this is fine, however, if DEP continues in the direction they are going as to requirements, this will not be able to be carried out in a four-hour per day time frame. Hour requirements will need to be reviewed as part of this process to have accurate information. When trainees are part of the equation this will be a helpful addition. In the future both towns will have their primary full-time workforce and there will be other fulltime workers swapped between the towns and how it is divvied up would be determined on an as needed basis. The expense of these worker(s) would be borne by the towns participating in the shared agreement. It was raised that presently it's just Blandford and Chester, but Huntington has expressed interest and it was stated they have voted to be included.

Brad Curry elaborated about the need to be competitive as he has seen in other departments larger organizations enticing employees with higher wages and better benefits.

It is suggested that the Blandford laborer who will shortly be receiving his T-2 status be approached to discuss sharing his services between the two municipalities to see how this all might play out. It would be advantageous to have someone trained in both locations as a starting point. Should this be adopted, Blandford would issue the paycheck and Chester could be billed and issue a check to Blandford for their portion of the services. Wages and benefits would be part of this equation and initially it would be a 50/50 split between the towns. That may change and in the first year there will be quarterly meetings to review the process and critique what is working and what might not be working as well as the staffing allocation.

All agreed that a planned intern program at Gateway Regional offered great

possibilities to provide much needed help and flexibility as each department seeks to improve service. This can be an additional opportunity to share staffing, potentially involving additional towns.

Mike Keier's understanding is that the primary water operator for each town will primarily stay "as is" for the time being - he doesn't know the time frame - and the secondary operator would be the shared position. Gordon stated the secondary operators would stay the way they are and that Stephen (laborer soon to be at T-2 status) would be the shared operator. This would be a full-time floating position. This position would have training in distribution and treatment protocols. When the intern role is entered into the program, they could be trained and be secondary in the field.

The workload of each town and how it may not be equal due to the amount of work already done in Blandford was discussed. In addition, the procedures in both plants may be different and this could pose a problem for the shared operator. This will all be reviewed as the project progresses and cross training will be considered. Ira expressed the opinion that while there is a disparity of the present status of both plants and noted Blandford has made considerable progress, that this progress has been attained over several years and can be performed in Chester over perhaps a shorter amount of time. Chris Dunne mentioned based on this discussion, the intern portion of the program is important having that pool, critically important. He will be meeting with Martha Clark who inquired about funding for some of this and given the kind of role that this internship would play in the shared services might it be considered to move some of the grant funds too. He questioned if there is flexibility for this and Ira advised he felt there is and will check on it.

Gordon reviewed present hourly rates of Blandford's present water staff and expressed he feels it is competitive. He also reviewed the steps taken to attain the positions of T-1 – T-4 which is the highest.

Discussion took place on the semantics of how to institute the shared floating secondary operator in training and when it is to occur. It is suggested to bring the floating operator in for the next meeting which will be scheduled in about a month.

The next meeting will be with the two Town Administrators, the Water Commission Chairs and the Blandford Water Superintendent to take place via ZOOM on

Wednesday, January 18th at 4:00 p.m.

The next full meeting was set for February 16 at 4 PM in Blandford Town Hall and the floating operator may be invited to attend.

Meeting adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by Karen Shaw
Administrative Assistant
Blandford Water Department