

DULUTH PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
September 19, 2017

Members Present: Jen Julsrud, Chris McIntosh, Rob Prusak, Councilor Joel Sipress, Jason Thorsell, Councilor Em Westerlund; Councilor Noah Hobbs arrived at 5:19 p.m.

Members Absent: none

Staff Present: Bob Asleson, Liz Bieter, Leanna Gilbert, Howard Jacobson, Eric Shaffer, Glenn Strid, Kerry Venier

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 5:18 p.m. by President Prusak.

Public hearing:

17PUC-004 - RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING WATER RATES EFFECTIVE WITH METER READINGS AFTER DECEMBER 31, 2017; SUPERSEDING ALL PRIOR INCONSISTENT OR CONFLICTING RATES AS OF JANUARY 1, 2018.

The Commission held a public hearing on water rate resolution 17PUC-004. Comments were heard from the public. The hearing was closed and the Commission moved on to the regular meeting.

Approval of previous meeting minutes

New business:

17PUC-004 - RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING WATER RATES EFFECTIVE WITH METER READINGS AFTER DECEMBER 31, 2017; SUPERSEDING ALL PRIOR INCONSISTENT OR CONFLICTING RATES AS OF JANUARY 1, 2018.

Vice President Julsrud motioned to approve resolution 17PUC-004, and the motion was seconded. Commissioner Sipress made some clarifying statements for the benefit of the public. Vice President Julsrud acknowledged the need for further conversation with our municipal neighbors and mentioned that City staff has been getting some financial information together for further discussion on that topic. Commissioner Westerlund noted that Commissioner McIntosh has put together a list of resources for low-income customers and suggested discussing this next month. Liz Bieter talked about resources available to customers and conservation incentives and opportunities for landlords. Resolution 17PUC-004 passed unanimously.

17PUC-007 - RESOLUTION AMENDING ARTICLE V SECTION 5 SUBSECTION (b) OF THE BYLAWS CLARIFYING HEARING REQUIREMENTS.

Eric Shaffer stated that this resolution clarifies that a public hearing is not required to set a fee. This will have no effect on public hearing requirements for utility rate increases. Commissioner Hobbs motioned to approve resolution 17PUC-007, and the motion was seconded. Resolution 17PUC-007 passed unanimously.

17PUC-005 - RESOLUTION APPROVING AND RECOMMENDING 2018 UTILITY BUDGET.

Commissioner Hobbs motioned to approve resolution 17PUC-005, and the motion was seconded. After some comments, resolution 17PUC-005 passed unanimously.

17PUC-006 - RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING FEES FOR VARIOUS UTILITY-RELATED SERVICES.

Liz Bieter explained the proposed increases to utility fees and also noted a new fee for meter data monitoring. After some discussion, Vice President Julsrud motioned to approve resolution 17PUC-006, and the motion was seconded. Resolution 17PUC-006 passed unanimously.

Updates from staff

Eric Shaffer reported on the status of various utility projects including the Michigan Street water main, the Lakeside water main, the airport natural gas regulator, the gas project out east, 4th Street, the gas blanket project, meter relocation, sewer lining on Michigan Street, and anthracite filter replacement. Things will be wrapping up in the next month.

Upcoming Council actions

Eric Shaffer stated that the budget would be going to City Council soon. Council may choose to discuss the rate resolution that was just passed. Some member of the City Council could introduce a resolution to veto the rate resolution, but a super-majority vote would be required. Commissioner Sipress will notify President Prusak if a veto resolution is proposed.

Howard Jacobson reported that the Public Works & Utilities Department proposed 2018 budget would be presented to City Council on Monday, September 25th if commissioners want to attend.

Commissioner questions or comments

President Prusak would like to look at the water rates for municipalities next month. He would like to come up with a solution before January 1, 2018. Vice President Julsrud agrees and hopes to reach out to the municipalities and invite them to join us.

President Prusak asked Council members to support the utility budget when it is presented.

Preview of upcoming business

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 17, 2017, at 5:15 p.m. in City Council Chambers. The Commission will discuss water rates for municipalities and resources for low-income customers.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 6:24 p.m.