Sewer and Water Utilities Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, August 12, 2025
VIA Video Conference
(Approved Version)

1. Call Meeting to Order

The Sewer and Water Utilities Committee meeting was called to order on Tuesday, August 12, 2025, at 3 PM by Denise Bhirdo, Chair.

2. Roll Call

A roll call was conducted, with the following members present: Chairperson Denise Bhirdo and members Nate Bell and Kurt Harff.

Staff present: Village Administrator Julie Schmelzer, Utilities Director Megan Barnes, Finance Director/Treasurer Vlad Gannik, Utilities Clerk Kara Kroll

Others: Richard Burress, Trustee Louise Howson, and Laurel Harff

3. Approval of Agenda

A motion was made to approve the agenda as presented.

Motion by Harff, seconded by Bell. All in favor. Motion carried.

4. Approval of Minutes of the July 14, 2025 Meeting, as Published

During the review of the July 14, 2025 meeting minutes, Bhirdo noted two corrections to the minutes:

1) On page 3, line 71, a clarification was needed regarding whether reed beds would extend the buffer zone.

2) On line 76, a correction was needed to change "landfill leachate" to "Going Garbage leachate."

A motion was made to approve the minutes as amended per Bhirdo’ s request.

Motion by Harff, seconded by Bell. All in favor. Motion carried.

5. Comments, Correspondence and Concerns from the Public

No correspondence was received. Richard Burress addressed the committee, expressing concerns about the biosolids project. He asked whether the village was still evaluating and actively seeking solutions, and whether the project was intended to manage biosolids or seek new revenue streams, or both.

Burress expressed significant concern about PFAS (forever chemicals) contamination, noting he had been following contamination issues in Wisconsin communities for over three years. He emphasized the fragile nature of the community's water system and urged the village to "move slowly and to be certain that the contamination of our water is absolutely assured not to happen." He referenced communities throughout the state that cannot use their drinking water and must bring in water, warning that contaminating the water table would make all other municipal issues "pale in comparison."

Burress requested that if the village proceeds with this initiative, public hearings should be held to allow for community discussion. He concluded by asking the committee to "seriously consider our most precious resource, our water."

6. Discussion/Action Items

a. Wastewater Treatment Plant Operations Report

Bhirdo questioned the internet issue cited on page 6 of the Director's Report and asked who would have ordered work done at the plant. Barnes explained she did not order the work and was surprised someone showed up to do work. Bell said he is the one who contacted former coworker, Tim Wright, at Bertram to tell him there was an internet problem at the wastewater treatment plant and asked him to see that it got addressed. Bell stated he told Wright, "There's a problem there. You do with that information what you want to, but there is a problem there and you need to deal with it." He acknowledged that communication from Bertram's side "was not fantastic" and that the issue "was not dealt with very well." In regard to the Director's concerns about someone wanting access to the water tower, Bell clarified that access to the water tower does indeed require the Utilities Department permission and that there are no keys provided for independent access; any access requires calling staff members. Chair Bhirdo inquired about the identity of the unnamed "higher up individual" mentioned in the report that ordered the work. Bell confirmed it was him. Bell emphasized that vendors should be contacted when issues arise. A discussion ensued about proper chain of command, with Bhirdo suggesting issues should go through Megan, who would contact Julie, who would then contact Bertram. Bell responded that he only stepped in because "if the chain of command had worked, I wouldn't have stepped in there." Staff was not concerned with the issue because the vender would be replaced in a couple of months.

The committee discussed the Parks Maintenance Facility sewer service installation on Autumn Court, where individuals drove through an active construction zone. Barnes reported that multiple people, including a village official who identified themselves as a trustee, insisted on accessing the closed road, causing significant delays and frustration. Schmelzer provided additional details explaining a contractor reported, "It was a woman who was a trustee that was trying to get to the dog park." The trustee reportedly didn't want to park in the parking lot and walk across the sports complex, so "she had them open the road for her so she could get to the dog park." Barnes described the frustrating two-day experience where utility department employees spent their time "literally just chasing people out of the active construction zone." People moved signs and barricades, drove on the grass, and consistently argued that the road closure didn't apply to them. The contractor, who was already reluctant to take the small project and had driven a long distance, faced additional delays due to equipment issues and constant interruptions from people demanding access. Schmelzer noted it was "embarrassing" because the village's own people were delaying the project. Chair Bhirdo stated this was "unacceptable" and suggested they might need a police presence for future road closures.

Bell inquired about SCADA connectivity issues. Barnes explained the system uses a wireless modem with a Verizon SIM card connecting through cell towers. The connection issues occur when cell towers become overloaded, particularly during summer when tourists carry multiple devices. Bell noted that as a cell communications network user, the village is "deprioritized" and placed at "the lowest tier of priority." Barnes indicated they're exploring options including switching to FirstNet (AT&T) cellular communications. Bell offered technical suggestions about IoT-based systems and more affordable connection options. He also questioned why the system routes from the water tower through the cellular network to Chicago and back, rather than using the existing 900-megahertz telemetry system with line-of-sight capabilities. Barnes acknowledged they're in the beginning stages of looking at changes to address these issues.

Louise Howson joined the meeting and interjected to clarify that she was not the female trustee who had demanded access to the dog park during the construction zone incident, stating "I just want to go on the record that it was not me."

Shortly after, Burress and Howson left the meeting.

c. Budget Discussion on 2026 Water, Wastewater and Sewer Collection Funds and Storm Sewer Portion of General Fund

Barnes presented the updated budget incorporating changes from the previous meeting, including updated sewer revenues and employee costs calculated by the Finance Director.

The committee conducted a detailed line-by-line review of the budget with the following key discussions and adjustments:

Page 12 - Water Fund:

- Internet costs: Discussion about switching to Spectrum in mid-November. Vlad confirmed costs would be between $100-150 per month, with pricing locked in for 36 months.
- Firewall addition: $5,000 budgeted for a SCADA-specific firewall. Barnes explained this would also address integrating Well 1 and the main lift station into the complete SCADA system.
- Wages Admin Allocation: No actuals shown for first six months because Vlad performs manual allocation at year-end due to Cassell system issues.
- Audit and Consulting: Increased from $3,700 to $7,000 based on increased CLA charges, HR consulting allocation, and Adam's time.

- Equipment gas and oil pumping: Kept at $200 as generator filling occurs every other year.

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- Computer hardware/software: Increased from $7,500 to $9,000 due to George's 100% rate increase (from $90 to potentially $180/hour) and Stantec's 5% increase.
- Tools and minor equipment - T&D: Reduced from $2,500 to $1,000 based on recent purchases and historical spending.
- Miscellaneous system op supply - T&D: Reduced from $1,000 to $250 based on minimal usage.
- Distribution maintenance storage: Maintained at $5,000 for water tower inspection this year and standpipe inspection next year.
- Distribution maintenance meters: Reduced from $2,750 to $1,500 while maintaining contingency for problems.
- Water plant wells and storage: $65,000 budgeted for Well 2 ($35,000) and Well 3 ($30,000) refurbishment, confirmed in CIP.

Discussion arose about consolidating small budget items into contingency funds. Vlad and Barnes agreed to explore this while ensuring compliance with PSC regulations.

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- Fixed charges/Insurance: Vlad confirmed property insurance is annual while liability, vehicle equipment, and workers' compensation are quarterly. Workers' compensation rates are complicated by combining park (highest risk) and wastewater treatment (medium risk) classifications. Vlad is working with auditors to potentially reclassify for cost savings.
- Liberty Grove utility district costs: Maintained at current levels with no major water-side projects anticipated.

Page 17 - Wastewater Fund:

- Septic and holding revenues: Sister Bay budgeted at $11,000 (25% increase over 2024 actuals). Other areas budgeted at $5,000 with potential to reopen acceptance next year depending on sludge disposal comfort levels. Liberty Grove confirmed back to 100% participation.
- Employee costs: Vlad noted wages and overtime allocations need to be looked at with Kara and Megan and spreadsheets will need to be updated. Julie pointed out typos: "retirement" spelled as "retirment" and "HSA" as "HAS."

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- Wages admin wastewater: Vlad explained allocation changes will occur at year-end based on actual time calculations, noting Megan is "doing an amazing job covering lots of work that Tasha did."
- Rubbish disposal: Reduced from $7,000 to $5,000 based on elimination of lower building contents, reduction from three garbage cans to one smaller dumpster, and elimination of dedicated screen dumpster.
- Audit and consulting: Increased from $7,850 to $13,000 for regular audit costs (no rate study for wastewater).
- Engineering: $50,000 maintained for grant writing related to potential dryer project and small projects from facility study.

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- Computer hardware/software: $9,000 budgeted, with 2025 overage due to PLC battery replacements (needed every two years). Bell offered to research lithium-ion alternatives.
- Information technology: Increased from $1,500 to $2,500 for George's fee increases and GIS subscription ($500/user).

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- Chemicals: Confirmed bulk purchase with two tankers per year, one received last month. Barnes confirmed registration with Door County Emergency Management through annual meetings with Jeff.

Page 23 - Collection Fund:

- Audit and consulting: Set at $4,500 per Vlad's recommendation.
- Tools and minor equipment: Reduced from $1,000 to $500 based on historical spending.
- Miscellaneous other supplies: Maintained at $2,000 despite no current year spending, as a safety measure.

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- Sewer system maintenance: 2025 budget of $310,000 included televising, main relining, and contingency for parks building lateral (unused). 2026 budget of $32,000 for sewer televising only.

Bell spoke of the value of consolidating small line items into contingency accounts for readability and to benefit from the law of averages. Julie noted some detail was required by the rate calculation template but might be reduced with the new rate calculation methodology. Chair Bhirdo concluded the budget discussion by expressing frustration with the lack of participation in reviewing or asking questions about the budget from other committee members, stating "I'm really tired of it being the Denise show. We were all elected to do a job, and I'd like all of us to do the job."

7. Matters to be Placed on a Future Agenda or Referred to a Committee, Official, or Employee

Barnes requested guidance on the September 9th meeting presentation by Chad Olson on the facility study. The committee agreed to:

- Conduct the presentation via Zoom rather than in-person
- Maintain the 7:45 AM meeting time
- Have only the facility study presentation in September
- Consider the BCR dryer presentation for October after time to "marinate" on the facility study

Bell suggested waiting to see the facility study results before committing to the dryer presentation. Schmelzer raised a strategic consideration about public participation during the facility study presentation. She noted that Sister Bay is receiving criticism from other communities for "thinking of ourselves" rather than immediately pursuing a regional facility. She explained the village needs to know what is needed at the plant first, and what steps can be taken to help reduce our costs, and then if a regional facility is needed. Schmelzer recommended the committee become fully educated on the study before engaging the public, warning that once people see it on the agenda, “we're going to get all these people that are negative towards Sister Bay for doing a study." She emphasized, "Education is key. We have to know what it's all about before we invite others into further comment on it… I think we have to think of ourselves first."

8. Adjournment

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting.

Motion by Bell, seconded by Harff. All in favor. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:06 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kara Kroll
Utilities Clerk