

**WEST MADISON UTILITY DISTRICT BOARD OF
COMMISSIONERS REGULAR MEETING
April 10, 2018**

BE IT REMEMBERED that the regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the West Madison Utility District was duly convened, held and conducted on April 10, 2018, in the Kearney Park Community Center at 443 Livingston Vernon Road, Flora, MS, as follows to wit:

The President of the Board, Larry Bennett, presided and called the meeting to order.

The following members were present:

Commissioner Larry Bennett
Commissioner Evelyn Brown
Commissioner Letitia Reeves
Commissioner Scott Colson
Commissioner Louvella Lawson

The Board President announced that the members of the Board present constituted a quorum and declared the meeting duly convened. Commissioner Brown opened the meeting with a prayer.

In RE: Approval of the April 10, 2018 Agenda:

Commissioner Colson motioned and Commissioner Brown second, to approve the Agenda for the April 10, 2018 meeting for the Board of Commissioners of the West Madison Utility District.

The vote on the matter being as follows:

Commissioner Scott Colson Aye
Commissioner Larry Bennett Aye
Commissioner Letitia Reeves Aye
Commissioner Evelyn Brown Aye
Commissioner Louvella Lawson Aye

The matter carried unanimously and the Agenda for the April 10, 2018 meeting is hereby approved.

RE: Approval of Consent Items:

Agenda Items, as follows, to wit:

3. Acknowledgement and Acceptance of EOM RVS Report for March, 2018
4. Acceptance of the March 13, 2018 Minutes
5. Confirm acceptance of having Ruralwaterimpact.com host WMUD's website
6. Confirm enrollment and payment of \$11.99/yr for domain name to GoDaddy.com
7. Confirm acceptance and enrollment into IRIS (call notification program for customers)
8. Confirm acceptance and enrollment into Nexbillpay (allows customers to pay via credit card, echeck or debit card)
9. Confirm acceptance and enrollment into Servline (leak insurance for customers which will be reflected as \$2 maximum charge on their monthly bills for up to \$2,500 coverage)

Commissioner Bennett asked if there was any discussion prior to acceptance of the consent agenda items. Commissioner Reeves stated that she learned about these programs while attending the Mississippi Rural Water Association Annual Meeting and she felt they would benefit WMUD's customers. Commissioner Reeves had sent an email to Board members explaining each program, but then added the additional item #6, regarding a domain name that would be \$11.99 per year that could be paid annually to a site such as GoDaddy.com.

Mississippi Rural Water Association had informed all water districts that they needed a website and had recommended the possibility of setting one up through their website service at myruralwater.com. The initial set up-fee is \$299.00 and the annual fee is \$357.00. The website name would be WMUD.myruralwater.com and we would get a search engine domain name through GoDaddy.com that would link the two names.

Comm. Brown asked if in the website, customers would be able to access information regarding West Madison Utility District for example, when there is a boil water notice or water would be turned off due to repairs. Comm. Reeves confirmed that you could post all types of information, you could even put your CCR announcements on there. There is also another program named IRIS that would allow you to use a map that could show where KT would be working on the water and customers in that particular area would be notified that the water would be turned off for a period of time. It would be necessary for WMUD to have a valid phone number and/or email address of customers if they want to be notified. The cost of IRIS is \$1.15 per connection per year. Comm. Reeves consulted with several ladies who used the IRIS system and they all gave good reviews about the system.

Comm. Bennett wanted to know if information about things that were being done to improve the water and sewer system could be announced on the website? Comm. Reeves answered "yes, you can put whatever you want on the site."

Bobby Griffin, a customer in the audience, interrupted and asked if a survey had been done to see what percentage of the customers would have internet access. Commissioner Reeves told her "no, a survey had not been done, but information such as cut off, boil water notices, etc., could be delivered to cellular phones by virtue of the website and IRIS.

Servline allows customers to pay bills with a credit card, debit card and/or e-check. Bobbie Griffin again interrupted and stated she understood technology but she just wanted to make sure everyone would have access to the internet because a lot of people still do not have a computer. Commissioner Bennett asked her if she didn't agree that these services would be an improvement over posting signs on the door. She stated that if the person/people don't have access to internet then "no, it would not be an improvement." Pres. Bennett said that was not his question, and explained that there are people that may not have internet or text messaging capability and those customers will still have the ability to see postings on the door, but customers that have the technology will be able to have a new and more effective way of receiving information from WMUD. Ms. Griffin rebuttal was "so you didn't do a survey."

Rosie King, another customer in the audience, stated that "technology is wonderful but we will still miss some people because signs being placed on the office are not seen by all the customers." A lot of times there was no communication on the TV about disruption of services to customers but with these services it will be heard or seen by most of the customers. Bobbie Griffin said she was not trying to be negative but only wanted to explore all aspects of the services. She then asked to have the cost for the services restated. Those prices were given again for the benefit of the customers in the audience.

Comm. Brown asked if item #9 regarding insurance could be explained a bit more. Comm. Reeves said, Servline is an insurance that provide coverage for customers that have leaks and receive a large water/sewer bill. The cost estimate for customers would be about \$2.00, or less, per month for a maximum coverage of \$2,500 per year; Customers could only file one claim per year. For example, the customer who had a leak in January and received a bill for over \$1,000.00 would notify WMUD that he wanted to file on his insurance as he had a leak and had the receipts where he had it fixed. WMUD would average his previous three months' bills and charge him only the average bill. The customer would then notify Servline that he wanted to file a claim and Servline would pay the rest of his bill to WMUD. The customer would need to provide proof to Servline that he/she had fixed his leak. Comm. Colson emphasized that the customer must have the leak repaired and present receipts to Servline in order to have the claim balance paid. Another customer in the audience, Kay Retha McField, interrupted and wanted to know what happens if a customer have several large bills in a year. Comm. Reeves explained that the customer could only file one claim per year. Ms. McField said "well, that's \$24/year for only one large bill. I don't know if it's worth it."

Pres. Bennett stated now that the Agenda items 5 thru 9 had been discussed is there a motion to accept? Comm. Colson motioned and Comm. Brown second that items 5 thru 9 be accepted. The vote on the matter being as follows:
Commissioner Scott Colson Aye

Commissioner Larry Bennett Aye
Commissioner Letitia Reeves Aye
Commissioner Evelyn Brown Aye
Commissioner Louvella Lawson Aye
The vote on the matter carried

RE: Approval for Jordan's Janitorial Services to wax and buff the Community Center floors.

Commissioner Bennett stated that the next item on the agenda was approval of Jordan's Janitorial Services to wax and buff the Community Center. Customer Kay Retha McField interrupted and asked if WMUD accepted bids for this type of service. Commissioner Reeves told her that according to the laws governing public bodies, WMUD only had to obtain two quotes if the cost was over \$5,000 but less than \$50,000. If it was over \$50,000, it would require advertisement for bids. Commissioner Reeves asked Ms. McField how much she would charge to buff and wax the Community Center floors and Ms. McField stated "\$500." Commissioner Colson stated that WMUD would accept Jordan's estimate. Ms. McField asked how much that was and Commissioner Colson informed her that it was \$200. Ms. McField then made the comment that she did this type of work for a living and mentioned that any tile that was cracked or broken would probably come up if they are not repaired prior to the waxing and buffing.

Comm. Colson motioned that we approve Jordan Janitorial to buff and wax the Community Center floors and Comm. Lawson second. The vote was passed unanimously by the WMUD Board of Commissioners.

RE: Operators Report

KT stated that he wanted to mention the fact that the CCR is due prior to July 1, 2018 and since the possibility of a website was mentioned, did WMUD want to post the report on Mississippi Rural Water Association's site or put it on the new site. Comm. Reeves said the WMUD website should be up in a few weeks, but if our website is not up and running by July 1st, then we will post the CCR on Mississippi Rural Water's website.

KT mentioned that one of the two submersible pumps at the lagoon was probably hit by lightning last week and had stopped working. We have a spare pump that he will install and pull the non-working pump to have it repaired. Pres. Bennett asked if we are running the By-pass pump in the meantime, and KT responded that if the water level gets high enough it will cut on, but it has not been running.

KT also mentioned that during the same time of this storm, the effluent chlorine pump stopped working and needs to be replaced. The cost to replace the chlorine pump would be about \$900.00. The motion was made by Comm. Colson and second by Comm. Brown to purchase a chlorine pump. The vote carried unanimously by the Board.

KT stated that the increase in water loss for this month is due primarily to one leak that went on for several days before it could be located. The leak was coming from a warehouse located on Griffin Street and has been repaired.

KT stated that earlier last year, it was brought to the Board's attention to consider purchasing an Automatic Transfer Switch. This would eliminate having to call an electrician and rewiring everything each time we needed to attach a generator to the well in the case of an electrical outage. If WMUD has an Automatic Transfer Switch, you just have to plug the generator in without having an electrician and having to go through the rewiring procedure.. Comm. Brown said she thought that we had discussed and agreed to purchase a generator before. Comm. Colson informed her that we had discussed the fact that WMUD needed one but they cost between \$60,000 to \$100,000. He reminded Commissioner Brown that the Board did agree on getting the Automatic Transfer Switch. Comm. Colson made the motion and Comm. Reeves second to buy an Automatic Transfer Switch at a cost of no more than \$6,000.00. If the switch cost more than \$6,000, the Board would need to discuss further regarding the purchase. The vote was passed unanimously by the Board members.

Comm. Reeves informed the Board that during the Mississippi Rural Water Association's Annual Meeting she was informed that when a disaster is declared in the State by the Governor, there is money available

in all counties and not just the one hit by the disaster. WMUD could go to the local Emergency Management person and ask them for a generator, and those disaster funds could pay for its purchase. This money is provided to assist other areas that were not affected by a disaster to be more proactive in the event they have a disaster in their area. Pres. Bennett reminded the Board about last year when a tornado hit the Flora area that he, KT and his electrician, Tony, had to wait quite a while for a generator to come from the county. Fortunately, KT was proactive in calling for the generator ahead of time. Due to his actions we did not lose water at the well. KT asked who was the new Emergency Management person and Comm. Reeves said Minor Norman was now in charge of that department.

Comm. Reeves had noticed a notation on the Operator Report about the water tower overflowing on Echols Street and asked KT about it. KT said the water tank located on Echols overflowed due possibly to a power surge or something that threw it out of sync as both the well and the water tank work off satellite controls. They could overflow for about 15 minutes before they would shut off.

Kay Retha McField interrupted and stated that when it rains real hard and the manhole overflows, would it make the water back up in a house? KT said if it has been "raining very hard for a long time and the system fills up, then it is possible that the manholes could fill up and overflow." Ms. McField stated that the water in her commode had backed up and was bubbling. Commissioner Bennett informed her, "If you have clean-outs in your yard then you would take the top off and that should prevent the back-up in your house."

Comm. Lawson asked KT about an issue concerning one of her relatives on Madison Street. Susan Watson, the relative, had called the office to have the water turned on. Susan Watson was told that she would have to pay another deposit. KT said that two ladies were involved in that incident. The lady that called in was not the person in whose name the account was listed. There were two options in order for the water to be turned on: (a), the person in whose name the account was listed would have to come in and pay the past due balance of \$53.00; or (b), the person who called in would have to come in and start a new account which would require all of the required start up fees. The water had been off for a very long time and he did not know if the person whose name was on the account was authorizing the water to be turned back on. Mary Ingrid's name was on the account but Susan Watson was the lady that called for the water to be turned on in this location.

RE: Customers Concerns

(1) Rosie King - 613 St. Charles

Rosie King Medlock stated that she was there to represent the community. She was concerned about the sewer lines. To make sure she understood exactly what sewage was she looked up the meaning which stated that it was waste material that went through the sewer lines. When you look at the amount of water you use versus the amount of water going down the sewer, and comparing the rate increases, things don't add up. Back in June of 2017, when the increase had started, she had emailed KT acknowledging that she had done some pressure washing on her house and her bill was exceptionally high but the water had not gone thru the sewer system. She was asking the Board to reconsider their decision regarding sewer charges and making them almost as high as the water charges. She knew that three of the Board members were on septic tanks and that they are not bearing the same cost as the people in this area. The Magnolia Heights area is not abusive of using water but the higher sewer rates does cause a financial strain for the elderly and those on fixed incomes.

(2) Keith Winters - 106 Hilltop Drive

Wants to know why his sewer is so high. Keith Winters was not in attendance.

Bobbie Griffin stated that to add on to what Ms. King had said that she thought the \$20 late fee was way too much. Also, she wanted to know if WMUD was operating in the black then who would be the one getting the revenue from WMUD? Who is the actual owner of WMUD? Pres. Bennett said even though this was not on the agenda he would try to address her question. He informed Ms. Griffin that West Madison Utility District is an entity unto itself and it is regulated by three different agencies. It is required to make an annual profit, which means the district should take in more money than it spends. Currently

this district has considerable debt, and it also has considerable needs for upgrades. He told Ms. Griffin that "You may have been present when we have discussed water tower repairs, upgrade sewer lines, etc." Ms. Griffin interrupted by saying there was no need to go back over the improvement. She then said, "To make it simple, who are the agencies that regulate WMUD?" Pres. Bennett replied they are the Board of Health, Board of Supervisors (they appoint commissioners), DEQ that regulates the lagoon/sewage and Rural Development, a division of the Dept. of Agriculture. This is not to be confused with MS Rural Water Assoc. As far as who benefits from the profits, all money stays within this organization and it is used for the improvements and repairs in the WMUD area. Also the rates that we charge are reviewed periodically by MS Rural Water Assoc. who will make suggestions regarding rate increases. Since rates has been stagnate, this organization ran deeper and deeper in debt. The water rates only went up in June, 2017. Ms. Rural Water Assoc. recommended that the sewer rates be raised higher than what WMUD actually increased. The sewer rates should be 100% of what your water rates are, even if the water is not going down into the sewer. Comm. Reeves said the sewer rates were not raised 100%. Mrs. King replied the rates were raised 98% so will it be more feasible to check on getting septic tanks in the area. Comm. Reeves said Madison County regulations are that septic tanks must be on a minimum of two- acre lots. Pres. Bennett said septic tanks are not what they were 50 years ago. You are not allowed to have just a septic tank in your yard but you must also have a waste water treatment system in your yard. In my case I have a mechanical aerator that will last for a certain amount time and then it must be rebuilt or replaced. Every three years you must also have it pumped out. In the last year, I spent \$1,700 pumping it out and having new equipment put in. Ms. Griffin stated she has a septic tank and only had to have repairs done on it twice in twenty-five years.

Pres. Bennett said one other thing he would like to add is that in today's meeting you heard there were two items that had failure during the recent storm. One was for the chlorine pump and the other was the lagoon pump. Both of these items cost money to replace and they deal with sewer. As a district, we are also faced with the situation where we will need to replace the sewage lagoon because it is so close to the Big Black River which is eroding the levy between the lagoon and the River. That lagoon will not be viable in five to ten years. Bobbie Griffin stated that she heard and understands the situation that WMUD is currently facing but her biggest concern is about the whole community. There are so many in the community that cannot afford these increases. We need water to survive and that is why she was gearing her questions toward who is going to profit for overcharging "me, in a sense. It may be worth this but I can't afford it. So why charge me something that I need, but I can't afford? Water is a necessity for life. So if you continue to increase rates what is going to happen? That is my point, we must consider the whole community and not just a few."

Pres. Bennett said that, with all due respect, the cost of everything goes up. Ms. Griffin said that is true but when she can't afford something she cuts back but there are people who can't cut back since they are living on fixed incomes. Pres. Bennett said then there is something that must be done outside of this district if possible. This district must be able to pay for it operations and its equipment so it can continue to run. Ms. Griffin said she understood that the district has been operating in the "red" for a long time. "Where there is a more productive or better quality of life in income, there the district is working fine and charging them less. No pun intended but the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The ones that can pay in other districts don't have to pay the higher rates while the poorer district must bear the cost of higher rates. Also, in these other districts, I will check around, they don't have to pay a high late fee of \$20.00."

Comm. Reeves asked Ms. Griffin how many people are in that district that she is using as a comparison. Ms. Griffin said it is more than what is in our community. Comm. Reeves said that is the problem right there. Ms Griffin responded "no, that is not a problem and I understand where you are trying to go. I am not trying to compare apples against oranges. What I want you to understand and think about is if you are over here and your bill is cheaper but you can afford to pay more, and I am over here and can't afford to pay more. So if you are saying that the Dept. of Health, Rural Water District, and MS Rural Water Assoc and the Department of Environmental Quality, then we need to go to these four agencies and talk to them and let them know that there are other places that can eat the cost." Comm. Reeves said this is a small district and the cost is separated out to 500 people and not a thousand. The system is old and there are a lot of problems. Unlike Bear Creek who has a large number of customers or the Town of Flora

who has grown up all around us, WMUD is boxed in. We have no way of getting more people unless they come move in along Livingston Vernon or Virilia. The only other option is to dissolve this district and try to get someone else to absorb it. Ms. Griffin said that may be a feasible option. "Five hundred people cannot eat this cost, that is the point that we are trying to make. Again, these five hundred people are not able to afford the high rates." Comm. Reeves said the only way we can be dissolved is if another district wants to take us and currently there is no district who wants us.

Pres. Bennett asked if the legislature controls the district as far as defining it. Comm. Reeves said this district is a political subdivision of Madison County, which is a political subdivision of the State of MS. Therefore, we fall under all of the same laws. It began when the people in the area petitioned the Supervisors to make a Utility District out of this area, and that is what they did. Pres. Bennett suggested that instead of going to the aforementioned agencies, go to the State Legislature. Comm. Lawson said there is a Charter that was created and Mississippi Legislature (senate bill), set up this district. There are four other districts just like WMUD. Commissioner Lawson stated that you need to petition the State Legislature to redo the Charter and get rid of the district A, B, C, and D. When you go over to Board of Supervisors they can't do anything. The bottom line is dollars so we need to try and become something other than a district." Comm Reeves again stated that as it stands now, the only way you can get rid of this district is try to get someone to absorb us.

Comm. Brown said we have a Supervisor who is our representative for the County and he should be able to represent us at the Legislature. Comm. Reeves said "no, the best bet is to try and get either the Town of Flora or Bear Creek to absorb us." Comm Lawson said Jim Herring said no one can absorb us. Comm. Reeves said no, there is a way that it can be done because she read about it in the Statute and if we want to be dissolved then another district must be willing to absorb us. Pres. Bennett said the second suggestion that he would make other than going through the State Legislature is using the various agencies that help with food, electric and even rent payment that don't pay for water. Commissioner Bennett stated, "We can't sink the ship because we are all on it together."

Ms. McField said, "you have talked about a website which is going to cost more money so why get them?" Ms. King stated, "There have been grants from Rural Development and funds were misused. Aren't there other grants that we can get?" Pres. Bennett said that we are currently working on getting grants to help with the issues of water/sewage, lead pipe replacement and the water tower. Comm. Reeves explained that at one point, there were plans to push the sewage to Beattie's Bluff. Beattie's Bluff is a huge treatment plant off Virilia Road, and the sewage from the City of Madison, Canton and the City of Ridgeland use this facility. One of the things WMUD has been talking about in the past has been to try to get the Magnolia Heights and its surrounding area on the sewer system to push their flow to that treatment plant. However, convincing Madison County Wastewater Authority to undertake this type of venture is difficult when people want to know how they will get their money back for the expense they will incur by running the lines to this area.

Old Business

Cassandra Jones - 3008 Center Street - money order lost; She paid her past bill.

Ms. McField asked if a decision had been made about videoing the meetings. Pres. Bennett stated that it is a public meeting and as long as it does not interrupt the meeting it could be taped.

New Business

No new business.

Pres. Bennett thanked everyone for their input and stated that the Board would be entering Executive Session to discuss possible litigation.

Executive Session

After Executive Session ended Pres. Bennett asked if there was anything further to discuss. There was no further discussions. Comm. Colson made a motion to adjourn and Comm. Brown second. All Board members voted "aye."

West Madison Utility District

By: 

Commissioner Larry Bennett, President

Minutes Prepared by:

Commissioner Evelyn Brown, Secretary