CITY OF LAHARPE

SPECIAL MEETING

TOWN HALL PUBLIC MEETING

SEPTEMBER 6, 2023 at 7:00 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: OTHERS PRESENT:

Cynthia Carr Mayor, Ella Mae Crowell

Danny Ware Jr. City Clerk, Michelle Altis

Sharlyn Thompson City Attorney, Fred Works

Austin Lee Police Chief, Joe Stotler

Ron Knavel

Call to order

Mayor Crowell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance with 5 members present.

Mayor Crowell opened the public meeting, stating; the city is looking at water rates for the outside of city limits users. The city council have been in numerous discussions looking at different rate scenarios and our local residents are paying a big chunk for repairs and everything else, and since we sell water to you, and you don’t pay city taxes, we need to recoup some loss in the water fund. By doing so, we have come up with some numbers to share with you. Any of you are welcome to speak, if you have any questions, we will try our best to answer them. What single users are paying now is $27.00 for the first 1,000 gallons of water and then pay $.00525 per gallon after that, we are looking at increasing that to $57.00 and $.00925 for usage. The multi user lines and those that have master meters are paying the same now as the single users and we are looking at raising your rates to $100.00 and $.00925 for usage. Should you choose to have the city read individual meters that are attached to the multi user or master meter line, then you will pay and extra $30.00 per meter but all on that line have to agree to do it that way. What we have are 3 different group figures; those living on the west side of La Harpe will pay $77.00 a meter plus $.00925 for usage, $20.00 of that charge will go to a different fund setup for the line repair that feeds you water. Then we have single users that are not on that line that will pay $57.00 a meter plus $.00925 for usage. And those that are multi users or master meters will pay $100.00 a meter plus $.00925 for usage. No one outside the city limits will be given the first 1,000 gallons.

Don Knavel was concerned he would have to pay $100.00 plus another $30.00 to read his meter. Fred intervene and stated, the city is going to place a master meter at the city limits and anything pass that meter will be the responsibility of those on that line. That master meter would be charge $100.00 plus usage and if someone on that line wants the city to read their meter, you all have to agree in doing so and that would cost an extra $30.00 per meter on top of the $100.00 that is split by all users. Having a master meter, one person would be assigned that line to collect the monthly money as billed and pay the city for water used through that meter. The city auditors are suggesting to make this change because tax payers are subsiding those that don’t pay taxes.

Frankie Chapman was questioning that she would also pay $100.00 and mayor Crowell stated; no, you are a single user so you will pay $57.00 plus usage at $.00925

William Harles was speaking on behalf of Eva Wagner, stating her meter is in city limits so she shouldn’t have to pay the extra. Mayor Crowell stated, she lives outside the city limit and doesn’t pay city tax, therefore she is considered an out of city limit water user.

Danny Ware Jr reminding everyone; the cost of doing business has doubled, parts are higher, pay is higher. This isn’t something we are doing to make money; this is hopefully enough to break even and stop taking money out to support something else. Everything is costing the city more.

Raymond Maloney asked; I thought the city just had a water increase. Mayor Crowell stated that public wholesale raised their rates by $.50 so that is what the city did for the time being because we knew we had to look at our water rates soon, we have been selling at cost and can’t afford to keep doing so.

Mike Knavel questioned why he had a past due amount on his utility bill that wasn’t past due. As he was showing the bill to a couple of council members, Michelle Altis stated, that amount is what is due from last month on Don Knavel and Sylvia Trester’s water bill. They both stated they paid you and Don wasn’t going to pay for it again so I added both of those amounts to your bill following the day after you told the city council you no longer wanted the city to read any meter past the master meter.

Danny Ware Jr stated; the city should have never sold water outside the city limits and now we are here trying to rectify a problem for our city.

Shirley Diehl thanked the city for providing water to her, she stated she was thankful for the benefit for having water and if users don’t agree paying a little extra, then start hauling your water.

Frankie Chapman confused if it was her responsibility to put a meter at the city limits. Mayor Crowell stated; no, the city will do that, you will be responsible for the line after that meter.

Mayor Crowell reminded those in attendance; we are trying our best to rectify a situation that should have never taken place. We are losing a lot of money and having to transfer out of other funds right now and we can’t do that, it is a violation.

Danny Ware Jr. mentioned the city fixed a water leak under 54 highway that costs over $9,000.00 to repair. We were forced to get new utility software that was close to $10,000.00 just so the city could continue sending out utility bills.

Penny Miller encouraged council members to make sure the wording in the contract covers the 4” line feeding those that live west of town and not the 8” line.

Fred stated, the west side has a 4” line that runs from La Harpe to the edge of Gas city. The city can’t relinquish the line to its users because it is an emergency water supply for the city of Gas, so the city has decided to be responsible for it and the people that benefit from it should pay the extra $20.00 to help maintain the line. It was asked if the city of Gas is helping with the line and mayor Crowell stated, the council will be discussing that.

Mayor Crowell stated the increase should have happened years ago, like our attorney stated; we should have never been selling water outside city limits but we are and we want to continue to do so, just need a little help in doing so. If we don’t raise the rates or do something then we won’t have water to sell to you.

Shirley Diehl stated, its time we all start paying. Everything goes up and we have to pay that so why complain about a water increase, if we want water, we need to pay for it, I choose not to be without water. Mayor Crowell appreciated Shirley’s comment.

Mayor Crowell mentioned, there will be contracts for all out of city limit users.

Frankie Chapman asked how soon this change will take place. Mayor Crowell stated, hoping before the 1st of the year.

Danny Ware Jr. stated, this has been in the works for the last 8 years, it’s time to start getting something done. Mayor Crowell agreed and added; yes, we have infrastructure problems that are getting fixed and we are looking at a water tower project well over $100,000.00. All of these issues are only being supported by our local residents that pay sales tax and the outside users are getting the same benefit but aren’t paying any extra and that’s not fair to our tax payers.

Mayor Crowell thanked those that made the meeting and stated if there are no other questions or comments, I need a motion to close the public meeting.

Danny Ware Jr. made the motion to adjourn. Sharlyn Thompson seconded. Motion carried 5-0. Adjourned at 8:18pm.

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City Clerk Mayor