OLD BRIDGE MUNICIPAL UTILITIES AUTHORITY

IN THE MATTER OF:

ORIGINAL

OLD BRIDGE MUNICIPAL UTILITIES AUTHORITY RATE HEARING

:

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20, 2022

BEFORE:

BRUCE WALKER - Chairman FRANK WEBER DR. ANITA GREENBERG EDWARD CASSERLY JOHN MURPHY, III MARK RAZZOLI THOMAS GALANTE

GUY DONATELLI, Executive Director MICHELLE SMITH, Comptroller RONNIE MORRIS, Board Secretary MICHAEL ROY, Engineer

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     APPEARANCES:
 1
         CLEARY, GIACOBBE, ALFIERI, AND JACOBS, LLC
                 Mitchell B. Jacobs, Esq.
         Counsel for the Old Bridge MUA
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    ALSO PRESENT:
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1	CHAIRMAN WALKER: Call to order.
2	(Pledge of Allegiance).
3	CHAIRMAN WALKER: This meeting is
4	being held in conformance with the Open Public
5	Meetings Act. Notice has been published in the
6	Asbury Park Press on March 26, 2022, in the Home News
7	Tribune March 27, 2022, notice of the meeting has
8	been posted at 15 Throckmorton Lane, Old Bridge, at
9	71 Boulevard West, Cliffwood Beach, and on the OBMUA
10	Website. This public meeting is being recorded. Can
11	I have a roll call, please?
12	MS. MORRIS: Chairman Walker?
13	CHAIRMAN WALKER: Here.
14	MS. MORRIS: Dr. Greenberg?
15	DR. GREENBERG: Here.
16	MS. MORRIS: Mr. Murphy?
17	MR. MURPHY: Here.
18	MS. MORRIS: Mr. Razzoli?
19	MR. RAZZOLI: Here.
20	MS. MORRIS: Mr. Weber? Absent. Mr.
21	Galante? Absent. Mr. Casserly? Absent.
22	CHAIRMAN WALKER: At this time, we're
23	gonna need a motion to open the rate hearing.
24	MR. RAZZOLI: Move it.
25	DR. GREENBERG: Second.

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                  CHAIRMAN WALKER: Any discussion?
 1
      Roll call, please.
 2
                  MS. MORRIS: Dr. Greenberg?
 3
                  DR. GREENBERG:
 4
 5
                  MS. MORRIS: Mr. Murphy?
                  MR. MURPHY: Yes.
 6
 7
                  MS. MORRIS: Mr. Razzoli?
                  MR. RAZZOLI:
                                  Yes.
 8
                  MS. MORRIS: Chairman Walker?
 9
                  CHAIRMAN WALKER:
                                        Yes.
10
                  MS. MORRIS: Four ayes, zero nays.
11
                  CHAIRMAN WALKER:
                                        I'm gonna turn it
12
      over to our attorney, and he'll take it from here.
13
                  MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
14
                  This public rate hearing pertains to rate
15
16
      changes for the Water Division of the Old Bridge
      Municipal Utilities Authority. This hearing is for
17
      the purpose of the passthrough rate on water
18
      increases for Middlesex Water Company, and any other
19
20
      rate changes deemed necessary by the Board of
      Commissioners. This public rate hearing is open to
21
      the public, and the public is invited to participate.
22
23
      At this time, I would like to have Michelle Smith
      sworn in as a witness.
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- 1 MICHELE SMITH, S-M-I-T-H, having first been duly
- 2 sworn, testified under her oath as follows:
- 3 MR. JACOBS: Miss Smith, can you just
- 4 state what your position is with the Authority?
- 5 MS. SMITH: Sure, I am the comptroller.
- 6 MR. JACOBS: And how long have you served
- 7 as comptroller?
- 8 MS. SMITH: Seven years.
- 9 MR. JACOBS: And can you please describe
- 10 your duties and responsibilities as comptroller of
- 11 the Authority?
- MS. SMITH: Sure, I maintain all
- financial records including the preparation of the
- 14 financial statements, budgets, bill listings, and I
- oversee the payroll, accounts payable and payroll
- 16 deposits.
- 17 MR. JACOBS: And do you also give advice
- 18 to the commissioners with respect to the setting of
- 19 rates?
- MS. SMITH: Yes, I do.
- MR. JACOBS: And have you provided
- testimony in Authority rate hearings before?
- MS. SMITH: Yes, I have.
- MR. JACOBS: As a matter of fact, you've
- 25 given testimony in rate hearings before this

- 1 Authority, is that correct?
- MS. SMITH: That's correct.
- 3 MR. JACOBS: And are you responsible for
- 4 making sure that public notices for rate hearings are
- 5 posted in local newspapers in accordance with the
- 6 statutes?
- 7 MS. SMITH: Yes, I am.
- 8 MR. JACOBS: And before you, we have
- 9 exhibit A. Can you pick up exhibit A and just
- 10 describe what it is?
- MS. SMITH: Exhibit A is an affidavit of
- 12 publication from the Asbury Park Press showing that
- 13 the advertisement for this rate hearing was published
- in their paper on March 26th.
- 15 MR. JACOBS: And I noticed that exhibit A
- has two pages, just describe what that second page
- 17 is.
- MS. SMITH: The second page is the actual
- 19 advertisement for today.
- MR. JACOBS: And you have exhibit B in
- 21 front of you, can you describe for the commissioners
- 22 what exhibit B is?
- MS. SMITH: Exhibit B is an affidavit of
- 24 publication from the Home News Tribune showing that
- the advertisement for today's rate hearing was

- 1 published in the paper on March 27th.
- 2 MR. JACOBS: And are you familiar with the
- 3 petition filed by Middlesex Water Company with the
- 4 Board of Public Utilities in and around May of 2001?
- 5 MS. SMITH: Yes, I am.
- 6 MR. JACOBS: And did you recall whether
- 7 the Authority intervened in that petition contesting
- and objecting to the rate increase sought by
- 9 Middlesex Water?
- MS. SMITH: Yes, we did, we entered into
- a shared service agreement with the Township of
- 12 Marlboro, and jointly retained legal counsel and a
- rate expert to contest Middlesex Water's proposed
- 14 uses.
- MR. JACOBS: And are you aware of what the
- 16 result of the Board of Public Utility's petition was?
- MS. SMITH: Yes, I am.
- 18 MR. JACOBS: And did the Board of Public
- 19 Utilities issue an order of proving a rate increase
- 20 to Middlesex Water Company?
- MS. SMITH: Yes, they did.
- MR. JACOBS: Can you take a look at what
- has been marked as exhibit C, can you just describe
- for the board what exhibit C is?
- MS. SMITH: That is the order adopting

- the initial decision approving the stipulation of the
- 2 settlement.
- 3 MR. JACOBS: And -- strike that.
- 4 What's the effect of the rate increase granted to
- 5 Middlesex Water Company on the Old Bridge MUA?
- 6 MS. SMITH: The rate increase granted to
- 7 Middlesex Water Company is being implemented in two
- 8 phases, which is shown In Exhibit D. Phase 1, which
- 9 became effective January 1st, 2022, resulted in a
- 10 water rate increase of 24.53 percent for all water
- 11 purchased from Middlesex Water Company. Phase 2,
- which becomes effective January 1, 2023, will
- increase all water purchased from Middlesex Water
- 14 Company an additional 8.87 percent.
- These increases equate to 5.5 percent
- 16 rate increase to OBMUA water users in phase 1, an
- 17 additional 2 and a half percent increase in phase 2.
- 18 MR. JACOBS: In your professional opinion,
- 19 are those increases substantial increases?
- MS. SMITH: Yes, they are.
- 21 MR. JACOBS: And in your professional
- 22 opinion, can the authority absorb the increase, or is
- 23 a rate increase the most fiscally prudent decision to
- 24 make?
- MS. SMITH: In my opinion, increasing the

- 1 rates is the best fiscally prudent decision.
- 2 MR. JACOBS: And what would the effect of
- 3 the rate increase be on the minimum bill of each Old
- 4 Bridge MUA Water customer?
- 5 MS. SMITH: The minimum bill in the first
- 6 phase would go from \$72.46 to \$76.45 cents a quarter,
- 7 an increase of \$1.33 per month. The minimum bill for
- 8 the qualified seniors and disabled person would go
- 9 from \$57.97 to \$61.16 per quarter, which is a monthly
- 10 increase of \$1.06.
- In the second phase, the minimum bill
- would increase to \$78.36 per quarter, or 64 cents per
- month, and for the qualified seniors and disabled
- 14 persons, it would increase to \$62.69 per quarter, or
- 15 51 cents per month.
- MR. JACOBS: Do you recall when the last
- 17 time the Authority increased it's water rates?
- 18 MS. SMITH: It was four years ago.
- MR. JACOBS: And during those four years,
- 20 was the Authority subjected to increases in Middlesex
- 21 Water Company rates?
- MS. SMITH: Yes, during that period, the
- 23 Authority was subjected to three different rate
- 24 increases.
- MR. JACOBS: And were those rate increases

- passed on to the Authority's ratepayers, or were they
- 2 absorbed by the Authority?
- MS. SMITH: No, the Authority absorbed
- 4 those rate increases without passing the cost onto
- 5 the ratepayers.
- 6 MR. JACOBS: However, with this Middlesex
- 7 Water rate increase, you are advising the board to
- 8 approve a rate increase, why is that?
- 9 MS. SMITH: Because this rate increase is
- 10 substantial. The Authority does not have the
- 11 sufficient retained earnings to absorb this increased
- 12 cost. So, in order to keep a balanced budget, and to
- be able to continue to provide a safe and reliable
- water system, we need to pass this rate increase onto
- 15 our ratepayers.
- MR. JACOBS: And before you is what we
- 17 marked as exhibit E, which is a proposed resolution.
- 18 Are the new rates inclusive of the proposed increases
- included in the resolution of the commissioners to
- 20 consider?
- MS. SMITH: Yes, they are.
- MR. JACOBS: And are the rates and
- 23 information contained in the resolution for the rate
- 24 structure of the Authority's water division compliant
- 25 with New Jersey statutes?

- 1 MS. SMITH: Yes, they do.
- 2 MR. JACOBS: And finally, in your
- 3 professional opinion, is the rate structure embodied
- 4 in the proposed resolution based on fiscally sound
- 5 principles and in the best interest and financial
- 6 wellbeing of the Authority?
- 7 MS. SMITH: Yes, it is.
- 8 MR. JACOBS: I don't have any more
- guestions for Michelle at this point, so I would like
- 10 to now have Courtney Winters sworn in.
- 11
- 12 COURTNEY WINTERS, W-I-N-T-E-R-S, having first been
- duly sworn, testified under her oath as follows:
- MR. JACOBS: Ms. Winters, you're currently
- employed by the Authority's auditors, Holman, Frenia,
- 16 and Allison, is that correct?
- 17 MS. WINTERS: That is correct.
- 18 MR. JACOBS: And as the auditors for the
- 19 Authority, can you provide a brief description of the
- 20 services you provide as part of your auditing duties?
- MS. WINTERS: Each year we provide an
- 22 annual audit of the fiscal year, and we provide an
- opinion on the financial statements that Michelle
- 24 presents to us.
- MR. JACOBS: And do Holman, Frenia, and

- 1 Allison serve as auditors for several other
- 2 governmental entities in New Jersey including other
- 3 authorities?
- 4 MS. WINTERS: Yes, we do.
- 5 MR. JACOBS: And did you have the
- opportunity to review the documents relative to the
- 7 Middlesex Water Company rate increase prior to this
- 8 hearing?
- 9 MS. WINTERS: Yes, I have.
- MR. JACOBS: And have you had the
- opportunity to discuss the approved W -- MWC rate
- increase with the Authority's comptroller, Michelle
- 13 Smith?
- MS. WINTERS: Yes, I have.
- MR. JACOBS: And have you had the
- opportunity to review the resolution which we've
- marked as exhibit A, setting forth the rate structure
- 18 being proposed tonight in consideration of passage by
- 19 the commissioners?
- MS. WINTERS: Yes.
- MR. JACOBS: And do the calculation of the
- 22 rates reflected therein conform with New Jersey
- 23 statutes?
- MS. WINTERS: Yes.
- MR. JACOBS: And after your review of

- 1 the documents, your conversations with Miss Smith,
- and in examination of the financial records of the
- 3 Authority, do you concur with Miss Smith's opinion
- 4 that a passthrough of the increase of water charges
- from Middlesex Water Company should be passed through
- 6 to the ratepayers?
- 7 MS. WINTERS: I do.
- 8 MR. JACOBS: And based on your
- 9 professional opinion and expertise, do you recommend
- that the commissioners approve the rate structure for
- 11 the Authority's Water Division as reflected in
- 12 Exhibit E, which is the proposed resolution?
- MS. WINTERS: I do.
- MR. JACOBS: Okay, thank you very much.
- 15 At this time, we don't have any more witness
- 16 testimony. Is there any member of the public who
- 17 would like to make a comment or question the
- 18 witnesses? Seeing none, do you want to open it up to
- 19 the commissioners to make any statements, ask any
- 20 questions of the witnesses?
- DR. GREENBERG: I would just like to say
- 22 that what you presented was very clear, and
- 23 basically, for no fault of the utility authority,
- that we have an increase. And this is a passthrough
- 25 rate for Middlesex County Water. As our comptroller

- iust explained, for four years we were able to absorb
- it, but now this is such a high rate that it's not
- 3 sustained for us to do that any longer.
- 4 So I just want to make it clear that it
- is a passthrough, and it's from Middlesex Water. And
- 6 then basically on May 20, 2021, Middlesex Water
- 7 Company filed a petition with the New Jersey State
- 8 Board of Public Utilities to increase the rate.
- 9 The company first requested a 37.8
- 10 increase in the revenues. The matter was brought
- 11 before the judge in the Office of Administrative Law
- for a hearing, at which time the revenue increase was
- reduced from 37.8 percent to 33.63 percent, and that
- 14 percentage was agreed to by the New Jersey State Rate
- 15 Advocate.
- 16 The rate increase that the company first
- 17 wanted to pass on to the Old Bridge MUA was a total
- 18 rate increase of 53 percent, that's outrageous. The
- 19 MUA staff, Mitch Jacobs from the office of our
- general counsel, along with the Township of Marlboro
- 21 that we jointly hired a rate counsel and a rate
- 22 expert, notified Middlesex County Water Company that
- 23 we officially opposed this rate increase, which
- 24 started a series of virtual conference negotiations.
- These virtual conferences include a WMC

- 1 key employees, representatives from the ratepayer
- 2 advocate's office, Marlboro, and Old Bridge MUA
- 3 representatives, and various attorneys representing
- 4 all parties.
- 5 So I want to make it clear, really to the
- 6 public, that this isn't taken lightly. We take it
- 7 very strong when these rates come in, and honestly,
- 8 we hear about them at the 11th hour, after it's
- 9 already been decided what percentage they're gonna
- increase, but we do our due diligence, and we try to
- 11 make it better for the ratepayer.
- 12 So, we partner with Marlboro and try to
- get this done. Through these negotiations, it was
- 14 result in convincing Middlesex Water Company to lower
- our rate increase from approximately 53 to 36
- 16 percent. So, we worked hard to get that. I'm sure
- we're all not satisfied, but it was done through a
- 18 collaborative effort to make an improvement, which
- 19 was then spread out over two years, so everyone is
- 20 not hit right up front in the first year.
- 21 Our negotiations were successful in that
- we were able to reduce our rate increase about 17
- percent, while the company's revenue increase was
- only reduced approximately 4 percent from 37.8 to
- 25 33.63 percent. This water rate increases entirely,

- and I want to stress that, entirely due to the rate
- increase that was passed on to us from the Middlesex
- 3 Water Company. And it was improved by various state
- 4 agencies, including the State Board of Public
- 5 Utilities. And that is the problem right there. We
- 6 need people to help us on that level, so this doesn't
- 7 continue to happen. They are a public company, and
- 8 we're servicing our residents, and it's really just
- 9 wrong to treat a local utility like this, we're not a
- 10 public utility. We don't have stockholders, we don't
- 11 have people getting dividends and things like that,
- and that's a big chunk this year for us to do, and I
- 13 just want to make it be on record and explain to the
- 14 public why this is happening. Because a lot of
- 15 times, these are the concerns, as commissioners, that
- 16 we hear.
- 17 So, I thank you for your job and your
- 18 service and for your explanation also. Thank you.
- MR. WEBER: I don't know if you discussed
- 20 it before I got here. Did you talk about the fact
- 21 that we're, how much are we buying our water from
- 22 Middlesex County?
- MR. JACOBS: None of that is discussed.
- 24 If you want to direct that question to somebody,
- we'll swear them in, Guy, Mike? Is that what you

- 1 want to do?
- 2 MR. WEBER: No, I just want to
- acknowledge to the public that it's my understanding
- 4 that when this change took place where they capped
- 5 the -- to us, they've never increased it since then.
- Just in the last 20 years, this town has only grown
- 7 about 1500 people, and if it wasn't for that
- 8 remarkable small growth, we would be a lot worse off.
- 9 So I want people to be aware of it.
- 10 MR. JACOBS: Thank you. Any other
- 11 commissioners have any other comments, questions? If
- not, we need a motion for the commission to adopt the
- new rates, which the resolution increases the water
- 14 rates by 5.5 percent effective April 21, 2022, an
- additional 2.5 effective January 1st, 2023, along
- 16 with all the other rates which is set forth in the
- 17 resolution that has been prepared. So it's been
- 18 first and second?
- 19 MR. RAZZOLI: I moved it.
- MR. WEBER: Second.
- 21 CHAIRMAN WALKER: Any other
- 22 discussion?
- 23 MR. MURPHY: I have a question. Guy,
- 24 basically, in the last, probably since I've been
- here, we've used all the water, we have used all of

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Page 20
      the water in our underground water wells, so
 7
      everything else is coming from Middlesex, right?
                  MR. DONATELLI:
                                  Correct.
                  MR. MURPHY: So, still 100 percent of our
      own water every year?
 5
                  MR. DONATELLI: Yep.
 6
                  CHAIRMAN WALKER:
                                       Anyone else?
 7
                  MR. WEBER: Yeah, I would just observe
 8
      that this is only half of the two products that we
      deal with. So, even though it's five and a half
10
      percent for the water, depending on what the ratio is
11
      for sewage and all that, it's not five and a half
12
      percent on your whole account.
13
                  MR. MURPHY: That's a good point.
14
                  CHAIRMAN WALKER: Anyone else have any
15
      comments? Can I ask for a roll call?
16
                  MS. MORRIS: Dr. Greenberg?
17
                  DR. GREENBERG:
18
                  MS. MORRIS: Mr. Murphy?
19
                  MR. MURPHY: Yes.
20
                  MS. MORRIS: Mr. Razzoli?
21
                  MR. RAZZOLI:
22
                                  Yes.
                  MS. MORRIS: Mr. Weber?
23
                  MR. WEBER: Yes.
24
                  MS. MORRIS: Chairman Walker?
25
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	Page 21
1	CHAIRMAN WALKER: Yes.
2	MS. MORRIS: Five ayes, zero nays.
3	MR. JACOBS: We can adjourn the public
4	rate hearing. All in favor?
5	BOARD MEMBERS: Aye.
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7	(Hearing was adjourned at 6:46 p.m.)
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Page 22 CERTIFICATE 1 2 I, DEANNA WIZBICKI, a Registered Court Reporter 3 of the State of New Jersey, certify that the foregoing is a true and accurate verbatim transcript of testimony provided under oath by and before me on the date and place hereinbefore set forth. 7 I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am neither attorney, 8 nor counsel for, nor related to or employed by, any of the parties to the action in which this deposition 10 was taken, and further that I am not a relative or 11 employee of any attorney or counsel employed in this 12 action, nor am I financially interested in this case. 13 14 Deanna Wizbicki 15 DEANNA WIZBICKI, Registered License No: 30CY00001700 16 Notary ID No: 2330518 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

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