

Ramah Water and Sanitation District regular meeting called to order by board chairman Robert Montague at 7:10pm on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

The board members present are Robert Montague, Michael Croley and Whitney River-Croley

Also present are operator Flint Tietjen and the secretary Michele Macias

Michael Croley offers opening prayer

Board member Shawna Grassie shows up to the meeting and leads the pledge of allegiance.

The **first item** on the agenda is the vote to approve the minutes from the February 11<sup>th</sup> and February 18<sup>th</sup> meetings. Board Chairman asks board members present if they had a chance to read over the minutes, everyone says they did. Board chairman asks if there are any changes that need to be made, board members agree no changes need to be made.

**Shawna Grassie makes a motion to approve the February 11<sup>th</sup> 2025 and the February 18<sup>th</sup> 2025 meeting minutes. Whitney River Croley seconded the motion. Board Chairman calls for a vote. All in favor say "Aye." Motion carries unanimously.**

**Next item** on the agenda is the operators report given by Flint Tietjen. The operator says we got the woodchipper delivered, he got it put together and then had some trouble with it running/starting but figured out that it was a bad safety feature connection that was hindering starting the woodchipper. Now the woodchipper is working well and will chip limbs approximately 5 inches in diameter. Any limbs bigger than that the operator usually leaves for firewood. He says it is nice to be able to chip up limbs while they are cleaning up on the sides of the roads instead of having to haul those limbs away. The operator says the intern is working out well, but they realized that the intern, due to cultural reasons, is not able to physically go into the cemetery to help measure distances (perimeter) and do work within the cemetery, so the operator will need to get someone else to help him with those tasks. The

operator says he likes having the intern's help, they have been able to get a lot of work done. The board members and operator discuss the safest way and place to store the RW&SD woodchipper and agree on the safest place to store it.

**Next item** on the agenda is the secretary's report. Michele presents the monthly summary for the month of February, the deposits and expenses, each board member has a copy to look over. Update on properly reporting the DOT carry forward from FY24 to FY25. The secretary had multiple online teams meetings with the budget analyst at the state and the matter was so complicated that the budget analyst's boss joined in on the conversation to help us figure out the proper way to report that amount, eventually the head person at the local government division at the department of finance figured out the best way to report that DOT carryforward amount, and she had to get the tech people with the software change something to make the investments option available to RW&SD. The secretary feels more confident in the way in which we are reporting those funds now because the head person got involved and showed us the correct way. Once the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarterly report is due, the secretary will most likely need guidance on how to enter that information into LGBMS again, but the budget analyst says she would be available to help with that.

Update concerning All Funeral Services, the website is currently live, and we and customers have the ability to look online at the cemetery. Secretary says that we created a button (link) on RW&SD website that connects customers to the 2 different links, one is for the historical data concerning the Ramah Cemetery and the second link is to look at which plots are available for sale. The secretary and the operator looked over the website and the map and they both think that it is a good tool for us. We still need to go in and update some of the inventory with information that has changed between the time we started this project a year ago and now, and the secretary will need to take some time to get familiar with our AFS dashboard and how to maneuver through it. A board member asks how customers pay for cemetery plots. The

secretary explains that the customer can look at what is available on the website and make a request for a plot, that request gets sent to us and then we would call or contact the customer, and the customer would still need to pay us with cash, check or money order for the purchase of the plot. At some point it might be an option to have customers able to purchase plots and pay for them online, but we felt that is not necessary at this point. Board members, secretary and operator discuss how the website looks and what we will be paying monthly for maintaining the AFS website.

Update on trying to get the Tiejien well “certified” to connect it to our current water system. The secretary contacted 5 or 6 different engineers and didn’t hear back from any of them, so she asked a neighbor who works for a tribe if he knew anyone to contact that could help with the well. He suggested two different people and the secretary contacted Dr. John Shomaker, PHD and spoke with him and he knew what forms needed to be completed concerning connecting the well to our system, he also knew some information concerning the Zuni River Basin Adjudication. He said if we send him all of the information, he could send us a quote on what he would charge to help RW&SD get the Tietjen well where RW&SD could use it to service our customers and guide us through the process.

Update on the cemetery land survey and warrantied deed for a portion of the land at the north part of the cemetery, there had been some confusion surrounding this issue and why RW&SD had this “portion” of the land warrantied deed signed and the cemetery land surveyed for a boundary survey. After the secretary spoke with someone at McKinley County, McKinley County stated the RW&SD deed recorded, showing that we already owned that specific portion of the land that was in question. So, the secretary contacted the surveyor at DePauli and spoke with him again, and he clarified that at the time of the survey they knew that the portion of land in question was technically owned by RW&SD, but the problem was that the Merrill’s deed still showed they owned that portion of the land. That is why the RW&SD board at that time got the boundary survey and got the warranty deed signed

by the Merrills to ensure there are no questions or concerns with RW&SD owning that portion of the cemetery in the future. Once the situation was clear, the secretary called her contact at McKinley County again to explain. The contact at McKinley County said they would include the boundary survey and the warranted deed in the notes for the cemetery property and RW&SD will keep a copy of those forms for our records, should an issue ever arise in the future concerning that portion of the cemetery property.

Update on 2 accounts that have been shut off for more than 3 or 4 months and still owe RW&SD money for services already received. Someone asked the secretary about sending those accounts into a collections process, but the secretary has never done that and doesn't know how that process works. Board members and secretary discuss how much is owed on those 2 accounts, both accounts owe over \$200. The board also states that in the past there have been liens placed on the property owners' land for unpaid services, but in this case the two account holders do not own the land, and we couldn't technically place a lien on the property owner because the property owners are not the people who owe RW&SD the money. It is discussed that in the future that we cannot put an account in a renter's name or family member's name, the account will have to be put in the property owner's name and the property owner would have to acknowledge being the responsible party if the bill weren't paid. It is also discussed that usually it is a company that is hired to send a bill into collections and usually the money would go to that company. It seems that with the current situation there isn't anything that RW&SD can do to get the money owed to them. Another idea shared, if there is a customer that is a renter, if they get behind on their bill, we should shut the water off immediately, so that the money owed doesn't keep increasing.

The secretary reports on how the intern is working out. With the intern's help we have organized a lot of documents in the office like the deeds and the easements and the intern is currently scanning those in for us to have digital records as well. We were able to catch up on a lot of tasks that were on the low priority list with her help. The idea is after the deeds and easements are

scanned in to go through all of the maps in the office, organize those and most likely take a picture with a cell phone to have a digital record of those maps as well. The secretary tells the board which filing cabinet all of the deeds and easements are in. The board asks if the intern has entered payments into the billing system yet. The secretary explains yes, she has trained the intern on entering payments in the billing system and making out the deposit slip. She also trained the intern on preparing the monthly summary and the bank reconciliations, and the intern has learned how to complete some complicated tasks rather quickly and has a good sense for numbers.

The **next item** on the agenda is the agreement with McKinley County and what they would charge RW&SD to help us manage the WTB planning grant monies and procurement process. Each board member has a copy of what the lawyer for McKinley County sent RW&SD with the quote and the scope of work described. The county is willing to do all of the work for \$9,450 dollars instead of \$60K plus that they quoted in a previous meeting. Board Chairman gives board members time to read over letter from McKinley County. The question is raised that if we have the county help us with the planning grant, do we have to use the specific engineering company that the county chooses. Everyone discusses that with the amount of grant money that will be awarded in this planning grant that the county will have to go through the procurement process of writing everything up and then taking bids for the project and it sounds like RW&SD would have some say in choosing the engineering company once all of the bids are in for the project.

**Shawna Grassie makes a motion to accept the McKinley County agreement to help Ramah Water & Sanitation District with the procurement and contracting assistance and project oversight, billing assistance and budget tracking for the WTB planning grant. Michael Croley seconded the motion. Board chairman called for a vote of all in favor. All board members present voted, "Aye." Motion carried unanimously.**

**Next item** on the agenda is discussing and voting on “vacation” mode policy for customers who don’t live here full time but want to keep their water services readily available. A board member brought this up because a customer was asking about it and the board member didn’t think we had ever voted or established policy on “vacation” mode. The board discusses that the process of what we have done in the past is change some of the billing categories on the account’s billing each month and the charge would come out to \$17.06 per month, to include water, maintenance, well fee and sales tax. It is discussed that the “vacation” mode should cost a flat \$20 per month and that customers would need to call the district office and let us know when they are leaving town and when they are coming back into town. It is also discussed that vacation mode would be only for the billing cycles when the customer was not there for a full billing cycle. Everyone discusses the need for customers to let the secretary know or if the customer lets the operator know, then that information is shared with the secretary. Vacation mode would mean that the operator would shut the water off at the meter and it would be up to the customers to drain their pipes if that is what they wanted to do. It is discussed as to whether it is worth the secretary’s time to provide this option for our customers, and the amount of time it takes to change the account to vacation mode from regular billing and to change it back to regular mode to vacation mode. The secretary says it does take some time because our sewage is a flat charge that we have to change the date to take it off or put it back on and the water category rate has to be changed as well. Also keeping a record of which customers have sewage service, and which customers sometimes use vacation mode, but that as long as customers call and inform the office as to when they are leaving and when they are returning, it seems reasonable for us to offer this service to customers that don’t live in their homes here in Ramah full time. The board discusses changing the amount to \$20 and stating that the customer would need to be gone for a full billing cycle to get vacation mode and that the customer would need to contact the office and then the office would let the operator know when to turn the water off or on. It seems reasonable that \$20 per month would pay for the operator turning the water

off and on and the secretary doing the work on the billing side that needs to be done.

**Whitney River-Croley makes a motion that we have a policy for vacation mode for customers that are not in town, they will have to be gone for the full 30 day billing cycle, if they are leaving the water on at any time during that 30 day billing cycle it would be a regular billing cycle, the total charge for vacation mode will be \$20 for the month, which includes water, well fee, maintenance fee and sales tax. Michael Croley seconded the motion. All in favor said, "Aye." The motion passed unanimously.**

The **next item** on the agenda is the office equipment and office electronic inventory list for the board to look over, not included in the list is the counts for pens and paper clips. So, the board is aware of what the office has as far as computer equipment, printers, chairs, desks, filing cabinets and tables. The secretary says she will find the list of outdoor assets the operator made last year, and he can update that at some point in the future so the board will have that information as well. The board doesn't need to vote on the matter of the office inventory equipment and electronics.

**Next item** on the agenda is a list of properties and wells owned by RW&SD. The secretary was able to put the list of properties together with the help of the intern, when organizing the deeds, easements, and titles paperwork. Each board member has a copy of the list of properties and a map from the county with the properties owned by RW&SD highlighted is available for the board to look at. The secretary brings up that there were a few deeds that the secretary couldn't figure out what property those deeds are referring to. The transfer station deed says as long as we use it as a transfer station it will remain our property, and if it is not used as a transfer station, it will revert back to the original owner. The secretary also mentions that the property where the old high school used to be and now the current elementary school is located, that when she read the deed she couldn't tell if we owned the property and allowed the Gallup McKinley County school board to use it as long as it was



used for a school, or if the school district owned the property and RW&SD could use it as long as it is used for the community. The board members clarify that the property is actually owned by RW&SD and the school district can use that property as long as it is used for a school and if they don't use it for a school that property reverts back to us. Secretary asks about the Lambson well and why we are not using that well, it is discussed that the water from that well had a lot of sulfur in it. It is also discussed that we own the Clawson well but that one was pumping sand, so we aren't using that well either. It is articulated that for the Clawson well, we don't own the land, we only own the well. For the HWY well we don't "own" the land, but it is understood that the HWY well is on the right of way of RW&SD roads. The secretary says we have a deed in our records for the welfare farm and she isn't sure why we have the deed for that land, because we don't actually own it, but it is thought that in the past the welfare farm was near or possibly that land was a part of the current cemetery. The secretary mentions a deed for a property that RW&SD sold to someone else in the past. A deed that mentions Halver Lewis was possibly in the past, part of the cemetery which states 3 acres ( which it seems is included in our 7 plus acres we now own that came from a deed from the Bishop of the LDS church at that time). There is a survey for a small portion of land near the sewer treatment plant, on the county map it does not show that we own it but, on the survey, it shows that we own it, the operator says that portion is fenced off but we were told by the "owners" that we don't own that very small portion of land near the sewage treatment plant.

**Next item** on the agenda is discussion and possible vote on hiring a lawyer to help RW&SD understand the legal and practical details of the Zuni River Basin Adjudication water usage rights and allowance. The secretary has looked through the paperwork and isn't sure if the two wells on the adjudication paperwork are the current wells we are using, and the secretary is not sure if the adjudication paperwork allows 17 acre feet per well or only allows 17acre feet of water usage total. That is why it was put on the agenda, so the board could possibly hire a lawyer that could advise the board on how things



currently stand and advise the board on what we would need to do if we added the Tietjen well to our system to provide services for our customers. A board member thought we had already hired a lawyer to speak to the board a couple of years ago, but that lawyer has retired. Some board members are concerned about how much that would cost to hire a lawyer. The board discusses who might be a good lawyer to hire for those services and then the board realizes for the board to discuss and vote on hiring a lawyer that would need to be done in an executive meeting, so the item will be placed on next month's agenda in an executive meeting.

**Next item** on the agenda is the secretary attending a day long capital outlay training course in Albuquerque. The board discusses that they have already voted a blanketed vote to allow the secretary to attend training courses that are necessary for her to be a good secretary for RW&SD (trainings that the secretary feels are necessary) and that they don't need to vote on allowing her to attend this specific day training in Albuquerque. The secretary put it on the agenda to ensure if she needed permission, she could get it.

The **next item** on the agenda is RW&SD discussing and possibly voting to hire an auditor. The board discusses that in a meeting the board chairman and the secretary attended, we were told that we are supposed to send out emails and try to get bids from several different auditors every year and not just use the same auditor that we used last year unless we got several bids and then chose the same auditor again. There is a process with the OSA that we could ask for bids for several years in a row, but that requires a specific form to be filled out with the OSA. The board and secretary discussed how things have gone with the previous auditor over the last two years and the secretary felt they did good work but there were some issues with waiting until the last minute to request information from us and that situation puts a lot of pressure on the secretary, because these audits have a specific due date. The secretary discusses that several emails were sent out and there is one audit company that she felt would be good to work with and gave us a good quote for a Tier 6 audit. It is discussed that it would be best to hire the new company for only

one year first to see if we would like to work with them before voting on a multiple year contract. The board discusses that they could also hire the previous auditor back again.

**Michael Croley makes a motion that we hire High Desert CPAs LLC for auditing at 6,500 (plus tax) for fiscal year 2025. Shawna Grassie seconded the motion. All in favor say, "Aye." The motion passed unanimously.**

**Shawna Grassie makes a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:07pm. Michael Croley seconded the motion. All in favor said, "Aye." The motion passed unanimously.**