



**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
D.C. Water and Sewer Authority
Board of Directors
Customer and Community Services Committee**

**Tuesday, July 17, 2007
11:00 a.m.**

Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present

Alan Roth, Chair
Joseph Cotruvo
Brenda Richardson
Steven McLendon

Staff Members

Jerry N. Johnson, General Manager
Johnnie Hemphill, Chief of Staff
Gordon Fry, Government Relations Director
Charles Kiely, Ass't GM, Consumer Services
Donna Lewis, Customer Service Manager
Avis M. Russell, General Counsel
Linda R. Manley, Board Secretary

1. Call to Order

Mr. Roth called the meeting to order at approximately 11:10 a.m. He noted that as a result of the discussions at the Board Retreat held on July 13th, the Customer and Community Services Committee will begin focusing more on broader issues that relate to external communications, but that due to Michele Quander-Collins' unavailability today, those discussions will commence at the September 2007 meeting.

2. Follow-up Reports from Previous C&CSC Meeting

• Recreational Summer Use of Fire Hydrants

Ms. Russell explained that WASA made the decision to implement an organized fire hydrant program because there was a propensity for kids and adults to randomly open fire hydrants. The fire hydrant program, which has been in place since 2004, has been managed in such a way that it minimizes risk. She noted that while there is no way of preventing someone from filing a lawsuit against WASA, liability is contingent on the facts of the case.

Mr. Roth asked if WASA is self insured. Ms. Russell stated that WASA is self insured up to a million dollars. She also noted that WASA has never had a lawsuit filed as a result of the fire hydrant sprinkler cap program. Mr. Cotruvo asked if WASA was aware of any injuries as a result of the program. Ms. Russell stated that she was not aware of any.

Mr. Johnson added that WASA has a new management approach to the program this year - in prior years WASA depended on the ANCs and others to open and close the hydrants. This year the Police Department is assisting with various functions of the program including street closures in an effort to ensure that participants are as safe as possible. The Police Department is also assisting with shutting off fire hydrants that have been turned on improperly.

- **WASA Response in Off-Hour Emergencies**

Mr. Roth stated that at its last meeting the Committee discussed an incident that occurred in Lincoln Park back in February, which Dan Tangherlini brought to the Committee's attention in the form of an e-mail from a customer to Mayor Fenty. He acknowledged that initially he had not read the customer's email as closely as he should have nor had he seen the WUSA 9 news report or video prior to Mr. Tangherlini expressing his concern with the Committee's proposed resolution to deal more closely with 727-1000 in getting WASA related calls redirected to the WASA's emergency line after normal business hours. Mr. Tangherlini requested that the Committee revisit the issue.

Mr. Roth asked if this was a unique situation or whether there was something systemic about it that the Committee needs to address. Mr. Johnson explained that each situation that WASA deals with has its own unique characteristics. Mr. Kiely provided the following summary of the incident:

- The call was received on Sunday, February 11th
- Investigation crew responded within one hour and found water backing up in a rear drain
- The crew found no clean outs on the lateral sewer line and called for a jet vac truck
- The jet vac truck cleared the blockage and the water subsided (*at this point the problem was thought to be resolved*)
- Approximately two hours later the command center received calls from two other customers complaining of sewer back ups
- A second investigation crew responds and opens a manhole that has collapsed and the crew suspects there is a broken water main in the area
- A repair crew is moved from another location and is dispatched to this location
- Valves are operated in the area to reduce the flow of water
- Repair crew continued to try to locate the leak
- The leak is pinpointed on a six inch main at approximately 6:00 am the next morning

Mr. Cotruvo asked if the crews have any techniques for detecting leaks other than observation. Mr. Kiely explained that under normal circumstances, devices are used. However, in this case with so many other repair activities ongoing the crews were essentially drilling holes in the ground to detect leaks. Mr. Roth asked about the structure of the crews. Mr. Kiely noted that the investigation/valve crews are comprised of two people and that the repair crews are typically comprised of six to eight people. Mr. Roth asked how many repair crews are typically on duty on a Sunday afternoon in February. Mr. Kiely noted that WASA typically uses a combination of contract crews and WASA crews depending upon the weather. He also noted that investigation/valve crews are staffed 24 hours a day and that in this particular case there were two WASA crews and one contract crew working overtime in anticipation of emergencies, in addition to the investigation/valve crew.

Mr. Roth noted that the customer's allegation was that they continued to call WASA and was told that the supervisor was not responding and that it took 2 ½ hours for a crew to show up. Mr. Roth pointed out that WASA had 83 water main breaks reported within the first 13 days of February and asked if WASA has enough staffing and whether WASA is adequately prepared for winter months. Mr. Kiely answered yes, and stated that the customer is alleging that it took

the repair crew 2 ½ hours to respond. Mr. Kiely noted that it was about 2 ½ hours before the repair crew arrived on location; however he pointed out that the investigation crew that responded to the second complaint was still on location attempting to isolate the leak. The other complaints were regarding why WASA didn't know about this situation sooner. Ms. Richardson asked if it took the crews 2 ½ hours to turn the water off. Mr. Kiely answered yes. Mr. Johnson pointed out that it's not uncommon for a customer to not see a crew working in the immediate area of the problem since the crew could be blocks away from a particular residence operating valves to isolate a leak.

Mr. Kiely noted that the General Manager authorized additional crews to assist the residents with clean-ups. This was an unusual situation where a water main leak broke into a sewer manhole and elevated the flow going into the sewer system which caused a back-up in the rear drains of the customers' homes. Mr. Kiely stated that WASA had a lot of work in February like some of the surrounding utilities and that WASA did a reasonably good job managing the work.

It was noted that WASA paid for the clean-up but not for damaged property. Mr. Roth asked staff to take a look at the last five years experiences and determine if WASA has changed its staffing policy, if there has been an increase in the frequency and severity of breaks during the winter months or various seasons, and if WASA has maintained the same staffing policy in spite of increasing incidences or whether the incidences are occurring at the same level of frequency.

Mr. Cotruvo asked if there was a way to anticipate breaks earlier. Mr. Johnson stated that he has not seen a system that has been very reliable; however staff has had Pitometer survey the distribution system for leaks in the past and that staff is looking into bringing them back to survey half of the system annually.

- **WASA Contact Person for ROW Projects**

Mr. Roth expressed his satisfaction with the General Manager's inquiry into and response following the last committee meeting to the specific situation brought to the staff's attention and reiterated the importance of listing a contact person on WASA signage who is appropriate and competent to respond to customer questions and/or complaints.

3. Legislative Status Update

Mr. Hemphill provided the Committee with a written update on current local and federal legislation related to WASA and the two neighboring state jurisdictions. Mr. Roth asked for an update on the status of the CFO issue and the Budget Support Act. Mr. Fry reported that the legislation has been signed by the Mayor and was sent to the Hill on July 3rd to the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee and the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee.

The Committee and staff discussed the probability that the legislation would take effect following the 30-day congressional review period, and had an extensive discussion on the implications of the new legislation and a number of issues that will need to be addressed and resolved if the new legislation becomes effective. Mr. Roth noted that if that occurs, the full Board should be prepared to have an extensive discussion on the direction it wishes to pursue at its September or October Board meeting.

Aqueduct

With regards to the Aqueduct, Mr. Johnson reported that having received some previous direction from the Board, staff has started to address the issue of governance and WASA's role in the operation of the water production facilities. Staff has identified all of the stakeholders and what has been done since the water rights were conveyed. Mr. Johnson stated that WASA would now have to spend some time developing in-house strategies before moving forward with this issue.

Palisades

Mr. Johnson reported that on August 11, 2001, there was a major storm in the District that flooded the Bloomingdale, Trinidad and Downtown Mall areas. The storm yielded an incredible volume of rain as it came over the District area and stalled there. The rain also flooded the Palisades area bounded by Loughboro Rd, Potomac St, Little Falls Rd, Cathedral Ave. and Macomb St. In an effort to determine if there was a piping problem that caused the flooding, money was allocated in the budget to explore the issue. After the preliminary work, it was determined that this was more than an issue of the ability of the system to carry off the water; it was the result of numerous urban planning, permitting, and construction factors outside WASA's purview that had accumulated over many years time that led to flooding after a major storm.

The engineers proceeded in an effort to determine what would be the most appropriate corrective action to the problem. Finally, it was determined that the problem could be corrected to some extent (at the cost of \$9 million), but there would be no guarantee that the problem would not reoccur. It was also determined that this was primarily an issue of the number and the location of the houses constructed in this area, some of which were built directly in or over the drainage way in this area. Mr. Johnson noted that a number of options have been under consideration and that a series of meetings with various parties have been ongoing since 2001.

Mr. Johnson noted that all of the stakeholders have been actively involved and that they will continue to meet in an attempt to move toward a comprehensive resolution. Mr. Roth pointed out that it is equally important to maintain a good relationship with Councilmember Cheh and to have all of the stakeholders view WASA as constructive participant while the appropriate resolution is sought.

4. Receivables and Collections – Policies, Processes, and Priorities

Mr. Roth stated that some of the Committee members received a tour of the Call Center prior to the meeting. He noted that the chart in the Billing and Collections area showed the decline of arrears from \$25 million to \$7 million. In reviewing the chart, Mr. Roth asked if the Committee should view an uptick of approximately a half million dollars in arrearages over the last 6 months, mostly from commercial accounts, to be a significant matter of concern. Mr. Kiely explained that the numbers in question have not been adjusted to reflect all of the Billing and Collections activities. The \$26 million in 2002 was based on rates that were 20 percent lower than today. The \$500,000 in recent increased arrearages includes the 20 percent increase, so a small uptick isn't necessarily of concern. He noted that when an account reaches the 60-day arrearage the property automatically goes into a lien status to secure the debt. The uptick that

is reflected in the commercial accounts generally occurs when Customer Service identifies services that unmetered or unbilled. These accounts are then back billed.

Mr. Roth asked staff to address Mr. Gibbs' question via e-mail the previous day regarding residents in a multi-family building being cut off because the landlord has not paid the bill. Mr. Kiely explained that multi-family units would not be shut off. Customer Service would initiate the receivership process to recover the debt from the landlord. Mr. Roth asked that the Committee be provided with copies of the presentation staff had prepared for the meeting on the collections and receivables issue.

5. Issues Deferred to Next Committee Meeting

Mr. Roth noted that the agenda items concerning WASA permitting issues, large customer outreach, and comments on the 2006 drinking water quality report would be deferred until the September 2007 meeting, and that he would address the agenda item concerning questions about customer appeals and hearing officers offline with the General Manager and General Counsel.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:55 p.m.