



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

**Tuesday, March 18, 2008
11:00 a.m.**

Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present

Alan Roth, Chair
Brenda Richardson
Steven McLendon
Howard Gibbs

Staff Members

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

Call to Order

Mr. Roth called the meeting to order at approximately 11:11 a.m.

Customer Service

Monthly Report/Update

Ms. Lewis presented the monthly report by exception and noted that she would answer any questions the Committee had regarding the report. She also pointed out that the AMR consumption was a little low for the month of February due to a shorter billing cycle.

Billing-Related Issues Update

Mr. Roth gave a brief overview of a series of billing glitches he experienced when he elected to participate in the SPLASH program in September 2007. Specifically, the billing system automatically terminated customer donations that are intended to be continuous in cases where the customers select both the round-up option and write in the extra dollar contribution. His election of the budget billing plan was also automatically terminated when he was double-billed in a subsequent month for the SPLASH contribution and paid only the correct amount, not the overage. As a result, staff looked into whether these aspects of the billing system needed to be fixed and made several corrections to the system.

Ms. Lewis gave a presentation which outlined the objectives, the implementation, and the enrollment criteria of the budget plan. She also explained how contributions are processed through the system, including the controls that are in place. In an effort to resolve the issue experienced by Mr. Roth, she noted that staff has increased the threshold amount of the balance due before a budget billing plan is terminated. The processors have also been instructed to use the customer's round-up election as the default choice for future bills even when the customer also fills in the one-time donation space on the same invoice. This will reduce the probability of the system terminating donations which are intended to be continuous. She noted that staff will continue to monitor this process to ensure that other customers do not encounter the same problem.

Ms. Lewis reported that there are 301 customers currently enrolled in the budget plan – 275 are residential and 26 are commercial and multi-family dwellings. The Committee expressed surprise at how few customers had elected the budget option and wondered whether it was being promoted aggressively enough, especially to people on fixed incomes. It was noted that water utilities don't typically offer budget plans, primarily because water bills tend to be consistent and you don't see the seasonal spikes in a water bill as you would in other utility bills. The Committee expressed interest in promoting the availability of the budget plan in a more effective and more extensive manner.

SPLASH Program

The Committee noted that they asked staff for a briefing on the programs to assist low-income customers as a result of concerns expressed by Councilmember Graham on the impact the rate increases have on customers who can't afford them and in light of the recent billing system issues discussed above, to ensure that WASA and the Greater Washington Urban League (GWUL) are doing enough to promote these programs to those who need them.

Mr. Johnson reported that staff met regarding SPLASH on March 17th and the discussions have led staff to believe that GWUL could be doing a better job promoting the program. Consequently, staff plans to schedule a management meeting with GWUL to discuss the plan and direction of the program.

It was also noted that there is an incentive in the agreement with GWUL that states that they will receive a higher percentage of compensation for increasing the level of contributions and recipients to the program. The Committee expressed concern with the decrease in applicants overall, and especially the increase in applicants declined, as indicated in the handout given to the Committee. Staff was urged to carefully evaluate GWUL's plan and performance in its discussions. Staff agreed to give the Committee an update on the management meeting with GWUL at its April meeting.

Customer Assistance Programs (CAP)

Mr. Johnson explained that the CAP program is administered by the DC Energy Office (DOE), which determines eligibility based on federal income guidelines. With one application, DC residents may be eligible to receive discounts from Verizon, Pepco, Washington Gas and WASA. Although DOE accepts applications throughout the year, the participating utilities along with DOE, the Office of the People's Counsel and the DC Public Service Commission sponsor Joint Utility Discount Day (JUDD). This annual event allows DC residents the opportunity to apply for all of the discount programs at one convenient location.

The actual cost to WASA is the total of the assistance provided to eligible customers and an equally shared portion with the other three utilities to host JUDD. The current CAP discount represents a monthly savings of \$8.56 not to exceed \$102.72 yearly which is applied to water service charges only. (Federal regulations prevent use of the assistance to defray sewer charges.)

WASA does not determine eligibility; WASA receives an approved applicant file transfer from DOE. There was a discussion on what accounts for the increase in declined applicants. Staff agreed to contact DOE for additional information on the statistical data provide on the CAPS assistance report and to provide an explanation to the Committee at the April meeting.

Public Affairs

Monthly Report/Update

Ms. Quander-Collins reported that public outreach efforts have increased dramatically due to the ongoing Georgetown and East of the Anacostia River Construction Projects. In addition, Public Affairs wrapped up the last series of meeting for the Lead Service Replacement Review including a special presentation requested by an ANC in NE.

With regards to the Impervious Surface Area Billing Program (IAB), Public Affairs have developed some public information material (Rack Card and Fact Sheet) which will be sent out to the Committee. The second tier of meetings is underway. This will also include a presentation on the overall proposed rate adjustment. In addition, an article on IAB was published in What's on Tap, and Public Affairs use every opportunity to discuss the subject with the editorial boards throughout the city.

Ms. Quander-Collins reported that WASA won an award from the American Association of Professional Marketing and Communications Professionals for a catch basin public service announcement, which was played for the Committee together with another PSA on the same subject. She noted that this is the second time this 60 second announcement, which was scripted by WASA staff, has won an award. This announcement has been aired on WHUR 96.3 and KISSFM 102.3 as well as in Spanish on a couple of Hispanic stations.

Ms. Quander-Collins also played for the Committee a brief news radio piece on WASA's High Use Notification Application (HUNA). She reported that Kristi King, WTOP consumer reporter, has been airing the feature with commentary and remarks by Charles Kiely. She noted that Ms. King also did a news clip on HUNA. She noted that staff has done a round of editorial board meetings with Washington Post and the Examiner, and has gotten good coverage of the Georgetown project in the Current newspaper, which she distributed. Ms. Quander-Collins indicated that she would provide copies of the Editorial Board and the East of the River hand-outs.

Website Review – Update

Mr. Hemphill gave the Committee an update on the promised near-term website improvements. He noted that there is an ongoing effort to modify the publications section to make it easier to navigate. He also noted that there is ongoing work on the Board and Permitting Sections. In addition, he stated that one of the principal concerns was the stagnant home page. To address this issue, the home page is also being expanded so that users will be able to scroll down and have access to more information. Mr. Hemphill noted that there should be a presentation ready for the Committee's review by next month.

The overall review is also underway. This involves procuring technical support, marketing expertise, survey of 25 to 30 website of various organizations, benchmarking, analysis and a set of recommendations. This is projected to be an eight to nine month activity and staff should be near completion before the end of the year.

Mr. Roth passed on information he received from the Board Chairman on March 5th regarding a specific website's graphical display of statistical information and asked staff to take a look at the website and to give the Committee some feedback in the context of the redesign of WASA's website.

Broadcasting/Webcasting of Board Meetings

The Committee discussed the possibility of acquiring broadcasting and/or webcasting capabilities for the Board meetings. The Committee asked staff to do an analysis on the technical requirements and cost and provide the Committee with a preliminary report at the May meeting.

Temporary Secondary Disinfection Chemical Change

The chemical change is scheduled for April 7 – May 12, 2008. With respect to Public Relations, WASA has met with Arlington and Fall Church and put together a plan for a press briefing where the entire project would be discussed with all the media. Then on a weekly basis, WASA would send out press releases outlining where we are with the process and any issues that arise.

Government Relations

Monthly Report/Update

Mr. Fry updated the Committee on legislative activities. He noted that he has been working with several public officials very closely to ensure that they support the President's appropriations request for WASA. He reported that so far he has received a commitment from Delegate Norton and Rep. Van Hollen to support \$14 million for the CSO and an additional \$4 million for Blue Plains. He also reported that there is a Chemical Security Bill pending in the House and that he is working with our trade association to ensure it come out as clean as possible. There are some problems that are jurisdictional (i.e., EPA vs. DHS). It also bans chlorine, which is not a problem with Blue Plains.

The fire hydrant legislation passed the 2nd Reading on March 4th and WASA is currently undergoing oversight and budget review by Councilmember Graham's committee.

Regarding the budget, there was a hearing held on February 22nd before the Committee on Public Works and the Environment. On March 10th the General Manager provided additional information on the Lead Service Replacement Program. In addition, a hearing has been scheduled for April 3rd on the WASA's budget for FY 08-09.

In response to a question from Mr. Gibbs regarding the Chemical Security Bill, Mr. Fry explained that chlorine is considered to be very toxic by EPA so they are seeking to find an inherently safer technology. Mr. Johnson added that the two controversies surrounding the Chemical Security Bill is whether EPA or Homeland Security will have primacy for enforcement and whether water and wastewater utilities should be lumped into the same category as chemical plants. He noted that a conference call has been scheduled with several national organizations to talk about an approach that might be taken to address some of the concerns of the industry. The Committee asked staff to keep them informed of the progress of this bill.

Emerging Issues

Staff provided the Committee with a copy of a sample bill with the IAB charges for residential and commercial customers. Mr. Kiely gave a detail overview of all the proposed changes. He noted that staff recommends that the Right of Way Fee and PILOT fee not be separated because the more detail you add the more you complicate the bill which makes it more confusing to the customer. The Committee asked staff to make another attempt to find an uncomplicated way to display the two fees separately.

Adjournment

Hearing no other business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:14 p.m.