



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

**Tuesday, January 13, 2009
11:00 a.m.**

Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present

Alan J. Roth
Joseph Cotruvo
Brenda Richardson
Howard Gibbs

Staff Present

Jerry N. Johnson, General Manager
Johnnie Hemphill, Chief of Staff
Avis M. Russell, General Counsel
Jay McCoskey, Customer Service Director
Mujib Lodhi, Information Technology Director
Michele Quander-Collins, Public Affairs Director
Linda R. Manley, Board Secretary

Call to Order

Mr. Roth called the meeting to order at approximately 11:10 a.m.

Public Information Plan Implementation Update

Ms. Quander-Collins provided the Committee with a written report on the six month update and review of the implementation plan for the Public Information Policy. She noted that the report is a compilation of activities, programs, and initiatives either undertaken and completed or underway from last summer through mid January 2009. Going through the report by exception she pointed out that the objective of editorial board meetings and media appointments is to engage the media more in accurate and balanced reporting. To accomplish this, she noted that one of Public Affairs' tactics was to proactively make appointments with the editorial boards of the Washington Post, The Washington Times, and the Examiner. This approach was effective last spring and is planned again for late winter. A few of the topics to be discussed in these meetings include WASA's budget, the costs associated with required activities to address maintenance of the infrastructure, the federal regulations that are promulgated for WASA's operation, and any other topic that the editors would like to discuss. The Committee pointed out an equally important issue that should be discussed is drinking water quality. Staff agreed.

With respect to editorial responses, Public Affairs always make it a point to respond to reporters when misinformation is published. However, there is no guarantee that they will publish a retraction or a protest. As an example, she noted an article that was

printed by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, which publishes a quarterly magazine and devotes one page to all signatories of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. In their fall issue they published an inappropriate cartoon with a caption that said District Delays Implementation of Permit. WASA responded by sending the publisher a letter protesting the article, which was also sent to the Council and Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton. Mr. Johnson pointed out that the Foundation wrote back indicating that they could not respond because the matter was in litigation.

Ms. Quander-Collins reported that staff continues to submit articles for weekly publication to the industry trade markets and that staff has been successful in getting some new topics published, i.e. the fire hydrant upgrade program and drinking water quality. There was a brief discussion on fire hydrants and the maintenance rings and how to better communicate to the public what the rings mean.

The General Manager participated in a national summit panel discussion on the Chamber of Commerce's policy position Let's Rebuild America. The program has been aired on C-SPAN four times. The Chamber of Commerce had not previously focused on water and wastewater infrastructure. Their focus had been on highway construction, energy, and airports. As a result of WASA's ongoing discussions, they have since included water and wastewater infrastructures to their standard agenda, a welcome addition.

The Committee recommended that staff advance the goal of changing WASA's public image by aggressively getting the word out that the water is safe for consumption. Mr. Hemphill pointed out that one of staff's goals is to help mold public views of the Authority and of water quality, which derived from the Board's Strategic Plan. Staff has discussed forming a steering committee to focus support on that objective. The Committee noted that one thing missing from WASA's image is having a face in the media that customers can trust that will garner public trust.

In response to the Committee's inquiry on how staff is doing with improving partnerships with other city agencies, Ms. Quander-Collins referred to the written report and noted that there have been several ongoing initiatives to improve partnerships with other agencies, including working with FEMS on joint communications to reduce the public anxiety over the fire hydrant program.

The Committee asked how WASA is doing with the Speaker's Bureau, Crisis Communication Plan, and Press Tours. Ms. Quander-Collins reported that WASA has made considerable progress in these areas. She noted that of all the press tours listed in the written report, only one was a result of WASA accommodating a request from a reporter; all others were initiated by WASA. She also pointed out that WASA has found contacting reporters and inviting them to WASA to be an effective practice. With respect to the Speakers' Bureau, Ms. Quander-Collins noted that WASA has trained 19 volunteers since last summer. Staff has developed a number of topics and written descriptors that will market the topics and the Speakers' Bureau. Public Affairs has committed to helping the volunteers develop presentations and accompany them to

engagements. Staff also plans to start marketing WASA's Speakers' Bureau on the website by the end of next week. Public Affairs has inquired with other municipal and regional water and sewer agencies about their practices in this regard in order to obtain benchmarks on which to base WASA's program. The Committee suggested that staff send information about WASA's Speakers' Bureau to the ANC Commissioners and the neighborhood civic associations.

With regards to the Crisis Communications Plan, Ms. Quander-Collins provided the Committee with a one page outline. She noted that the draft plan is an 18 page document with several pages of attachments and is under review by the General Manager and the Director of Safety and Security. The plan is an expansion of an existing plan that was developed in 2003 and revised in 2006. The plan is broken into eight major categories and its purpose is to provide guidelines for effectively communicating in an emergency or crisis situation. The objective is to reduce public anxiety; provide consistent, complete, and accurate information; and to do so in a timely manner. The Committee asked staff to provide an update and a timeline for finalizing the document at next month's meeting.

Water and Sewer Damage Claims Follow-up

Staff provided the Committee with a document that summarized the numbers associated with sewer back-up and flooding claims from private property owners, a subject of discussion in the last two Committee meetings. The Committee acknowledged that it was a good document and that based on the discussions, there is no reason to believe that claims are being processed inappropriately. They also noted that staff should remain sensitive to the customer's ordeal and should always be on guard to ensure that customers know that they are being dealt with expeditiously, fairly, and straightforwardly.

DCWASA Website – www.dcwasa.com

The Committee began by commending Mr. Lodhi for the work put into the new website design. Mr. Lodhi provided the Committee with a detailed statistical report seeking to address Board member Bardin's questions regarding how to understand the website statistics in the General Manager's monthly report to the Board. He also provided the Committee with explanations of the terminology used and explained how the statistical data is collected. He noted that the reporting of the statistics for a given month occurs 45 days after the end of that month, which means, for example, that October's numbers were reported in the General Manager's January report to the Board. For that reporting period, there were 724,313 visitors to the website, 3,421,681 pages reviewed, and a little over 570 GB of data downloaded from WASA's website. The average time spend on WASA's website is 6 to 7 minutes. Staff was asked to look at how they could present more current data on a monthly basis, i.e. within 30 days rather than 45 (which in effect becomes 60 by the time the Board see the GM's report). The Committee requested that the statistical report be attached to the minutes for this meeting for the entire Board's edification.

Turbidity Notification – Update

Mr. Johnson reported that the only update since the last full Board meeting was that the notices have been received by the mail house, the translation has been completed, and the notices will begin to be mailed out today. There was a discussion on EPA regulations that require WASA to send out notices to customer when minor violations occur and possible strategies to convince EPA to change its regulations in this regard. There was also a brief discussion on pursuing primacy. Mr. Johnson noted that primacy was pursued and rejected a number of years ago.

Departmental Reports/Updates

- **Customer Service**

In light of the Board Chairman's concerns as to whether WASA is doing everything to keep costs down, the Committee has asked that staff be prepared to explain how call volume data is analyzed at next month's meeting. Mr. Johnson noted that lots of data is collected with regard to the call volumes, and staff will bring back that information along with some history of the call center and look at how WASA tracks and uses the data. The Committee also asked staff to look at how WASA can drive customers to use the website, particularly online bill payment, without compromising quality customer care.

- **Public Affairs**

Ms. Quander-Collins informed the Committee that for the last six months WASA has been in demand to film documentaries for the History Channel. WASA has now been approached by the Discovery Channel and National Geographic. She noted that National Geographic has a program called "The World's Toughest Fixes" and that National Geographic and the Discovery Channel will be coming to Blue Plains to look at some pipe work that WASA will be doing for the sludge transfer pipe. In addition, National Geographic will be taking a look at how WASA uses the robotic video camera for sewer evaluations.

Other Business

Mr. Johnson informed the Committee that the Liquid Assets video that was made available to the Board sometime ago has also been distributed to some of the transition staff as a follow up to a meeting held to talk about infrastructure. The person hosting the meeting told WASA that the video was enlightening.

In response to an inquiry about the status of the broadcasting and webcasting of Board meetings, Ms. Quander-Collins informed the Committee that WASA has met with potential vendors at a pre-bid conference and the bids are due on January 16th.

The Committee reviewed the “Board Open Meetings Policy for Video and Audio Recording and Photography,” which had previously been presented to the Governance Committee for its review. Comments on the proposed policy were favorable. It is contemplated that this policy will be implemented as a staff action, rather than requiring Board action. Mr. Roth asked whether it might be necessary to include a provision for referral to the Chairman of any disagreement over some of the more subjective terms like “disruption”, “disturbance”, or “interference”, but the General Manager thought that would not be necessary and that staff could handle any such situation appropriately.

Mr. McCoskey informed the Committee that with the passing of the CAPS sewer credit resolution at the last Board meeting, WASA should be prepared within the next week to finalize the required testing.

Hearing no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:05 p.m.