



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
WATER AND SEWER AUTHORITY  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Customer and Community Services  
Committee Meeting  
Thursday, March 10, 2005  
10:00 a.m.

Meeting Minutes

**Board Members in Attendance**

Alex McPhail  
David J. Bardin  
Stephanie Nash  
Brenda Richardson

**WASA Staff in Attendance**

Jerry N. Johnson, General Manager  
Paul Bender, CFO  
Johnnie Hemphill, Asst. to the GM  
for Government Operations  
Avis Russell, General Counsel  
Charles Kiely, Customer Service Director  
Karen Dewitt, Public Affairs Director  
Linda R. Manley, Board Secretary

Mr. McPhail called the meeting to order at approximately 10:10 am.

**Customer Service Report**

***Automated Meter Reading Project (AMR) Status*** - Mr. Kiely reported on the AMR project. We have completed 95% of the installations. We have an agreement with our valve crews to increase the number of shuts to allow for more large-meter installations as the weather improves. We want to complete the AMR project before the end of this fiscal year.

***Lead Services Hotline*** - Mr. Kiely reported that many of the customers contacting the Lead hotline are inquiring about private side replacements or filter replacements.

***Splash Contributions*** - Mr. Kiely reported that 1,557 customers have signed up for the round up option and that the number increases every month. The Authority has collected over \$22,000 so far this FY and should definitely hit our goal of \$25,000.

Mr. McPhail asked what percentage of customers the over 1,500 represents. Mr. Kiely replied about one and half percent. He also mentioned that we continually encourage customers to contribute to Splash through bill notices and telephone messaging.

***Information Systems***

Mr. Kiely reported that the AMR upgrade should be completed by the end of the week. This upgrade will take the Authority to the newest version of the Hexagram Software that runs our AMR system. Since the Authority was Hexagram's first major customer, the Authority was able to share information based on first-hand experiences in the field to help improve the product. The new software incorporates some new features that will improve the Authority's overall AMR operation.

Mr. Kiely reported that WASA formally kicked-off our Interactive Voice Response (IVR) project this week. He reported that IVR is the gateway into WASA and controls all the messaging and call routing for our customers. Mr. Kiely mentioned that WASA would take advantage of the newer voice capabilities of IVR to make it easier for our customers to use. We are targeting September to complete this project.

**Call Center** - Mr. Kiely reported that the Call Center response rate has significantly improved over the last two months. The Call Center experienced one bad day after the holiday where staffing issues impacted peak performance; otherwise, February was a good month.

**Electronic Payment Transaction** – Mr. Kiely reported that Mr. Bardin ask if we could include the traditional payment methods in the electronic transaction charts. Mr. Kiely stated that he would try to get this done for the April meeting.

### **Customer Survey**

Continuing the Committee's discussion from its last meeting on implementing a customer survey in 2005. Mr. Kiely presented samples of Customer Surveys from Schumaker & Company and J.D.Powers and Associates. He stated that the Authority will soon begin working on an RFP to target a customer survey by November 2004.

### **General Manager's Report**

Karen Dewitt distributed a draft Board Survey Questionnaire on the General Manager's Report. She also reported that there is a draft electronic version available. The Committee commented on the questions. Mr. McPhail asked to expand the survey to 15 questions that will be distributed to all Board members. Mr. McPhail replied that once the report is finished that Karen should send it to Linda Manley to distribute to the Board by March 18<sup>th</sup>.

### **Review of Work Plan Goals #3 & #4**

**Goal #3** - Mr. McPhail asked for an update on the government relations plan. Mr. Hemphill discussed various activities that are underway. Among these are ongoing communications with House and Senate Appropriations Committees, as well as participation in the annual District Council Environment and Public Works Committee FY 04 and FY 05 Performance Budget hearing, and Council Government Operations Committee hearing on local small and disadvantaged businesses. The House Government Reform hearing on lead in the District's drinking water and WASA's EPA's and the Aqueduct's response is scheduled for March 11, 2005. A second annual Council budget hearing (proposed FY 2006) budget is scheduled for the second week in April. Earlier this year, WASA visited every Council office to provide updated information on the lead services replacement program, and the reception has been very friendly. The General Manager met with Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton to discuss labor management, lead and federal funding issues. The General manager and staff also hosted business and environmental advocates to coordinate federal funding efforts for the Long Term Control Plan. Mr. Johnson stated that the effectiveness of our Government Relations Program could be measured by a personal call he received on March 9, 2005, inviting him to a reception on March 10, 2005, for the Chairman of the new House Transportation and Treasury Subcommittee that also provides the District's federal payment.

Mr. Hemphill stated that he had been contacted by Norton's office and was asked to address specific questions in advance of the House lead hearing on March 11, and that her

office had also provided WASA with important information about the Committee's interest in these issues. Mr. Bardin addressed a press release that was sent out about samples in 19 homes for lead and drinking water. The press release is full of statistics but he wanted to know how they compared to the last test samples. A discussion ensued between Mr. Bardin and Mr. Johnson regarding the reporting of the samples.

Mr. McPhail stated that he wanted to include an update on the Authority's Lead Replacement Program in every press release that dealt with the lead replacement line. Mr. Johnson stated most journalists are not broadly informed about specific issues like the lead services program, and that it is important to ensure that individuals who have very little background are not confused when WASA releases include too much technical detail or multiple issues. He also indicated that a face-to-face press briefing provides a better opportunity to address multiple issues in a manner that avoids having confused reporters convey misleading information to the public. Mr. Hemphill stated that another challenge faced by WASA is avoiding having WASA produced information, like compliance samples, released or leaked to the public before WASA announces the information. WASA's position or credibility may be damaged if another party is perceived as a better source. Under those circumstances, the information can be given an inaccurate context by some other party. Mr. Johnson stated that we were criticized last year for not providing information in a timely manner. The Authority is making every effort to take quality control measures and to put the information out there as soon as it is in WASA's hands.

Mr. Johnson discussed the \$1.9 billion Long Term Control Plan. When broken down, WASA will need \$95 million a year to address this issue.

Mr. Hemphill indicated that WASA had no authorization under the Water Resources and Development Act as of yet, and therefore was unlikely to be successful in obtaining funds through the Appropriations Subcommittee that funds the Army Corps of Engineers for FY 2006. What we are doing this year is to continue with what we have done in the past, which includes working with Congresswoman Eleanor Norton and others to obtain such an authorization, but also working with the champions who have worked with us in the past (District of Columbia Appropriations Subcommittee members).

*Goal #4* – Mr. Johnson reported that there are a number of activities that WASA has been involved in. Many of these projects focus around the Holidays and are done in conjunction with WHUR and Channel 4 who sponsors Project Harvest. The Authority is involved with Food for the Soul Project that aids families that are affected by the HIV. We provided food baskets and toys for 66 homes. The Authority won a \$1,500 award for coming in second place in the Mayor's Labor Management Partnership Program and donated the money to another program that assisted a needy family during the holidays. The Authority annually sponsor a clothing, toy and book drive. Another program WASA is looking to get involved in is Christmas in April. We have done it for three years but not getting the support we need. We adopted Stanton Elementary School and work with a group of kids from the Covenant House. We also work with the Earth Conservation Corp. We are preparing now to participate in Earth Day coming up in a few weeks.

Chairman McPhail asked that a summary of the activities be submitted with the Board's minutes.

### **Update on “What Is WASA”**

Ms. DeWitt stated that the Talk Track about WASA, that was distributed at the meeting, leaves room for improvisation. The talking points help every one “sing the same song.” Mr. Johnson stated that about 14 people are going through the first phase of training at a speaker’s bureau to obtain presentation skills training so that when they go out to speak on behalf of WASA, they will have direction. Mr. McPhail asked that each member of the committee send comments and ideas on how to improve the Talk Track via email to Mr. Johnson. The chair asked Linda to send the document to all Board Members formatted in Word.

### **Reorganization of the Public Affairs Department**

Mr. Johnson announced that Karen DeWitt is leaving her post as Director of Public Affairs. Johnny Hemphill will serve as Interim while recruiting for the position. Mr. Johnson reported that he had a discussion with the Human Resources/Labor Relations Committee about some restructuring plans for the organization. The reorganization is broader within the organization and a plan is being developed and will be completed at the end of the month.

### **Emerging Issues**

Mr. Bardin addressed an article that was written in the City Paper. He suggested that the General Manager and Chairman of the Board send a letter to the editor as a response to the article.

Mr. McPhail asked that the following items be attached to the Minutes of the Committee that will be distributed to the Board at the next Board meeting:

- A copy of the Government Relations Update
- A copy of the Agenda for this meeting; and
- A list of all community activities that WASA regularly participates in.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 12:09 pm