



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

**Tuesday, June 19, 2007  
11:00 a.m.**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Staff Members**

Jerry N. Johnson, General Manager  
Johnnie Hemphill, Chief of Staff  
Gordon Fry, Government Relations Director  
Michele Quander-Collins, Public Affairs Director  
Donna Lewis, Customer Service Manager  
Avis M. Russell, General Counsel  
Linda R. Manley, Board Secretary

**Board Members Present**

Alan Roth, Chair  
Joseph Cotruvo  
Howard Gibbs  
Brenda Richardson  
Steven McLendon

**1. Call to Order**

Mr. Roth called the meeting to order at approximately 10:05 a.m.

**2. Introductory Comments on Committee Work Plan**

Mr. Roth welcomed the Committee members and staff, noting that this was the first meeting and opportunity for the newly restructured Committee to meet to consider where it is headed over the course of the next few months since the Committee last met in October 2006. Mr. Roth stated that he wanted to outline some areas that Board Chairman Martin has asked the Committee to focus priority on, to offer some ideas of his own and to give the Committee members an opportunity to offer their input and then proceed with the agenda items.

Mr. Roth noted that the new members experienced an interesting introduction to WASA from the confirmation hearings at which Councilmember Graham expressed strong opinions on some issues, to Graham's efforts to change the organic statute, to the CFO statue, through the recent fire hydrant controversy and the discussions with the Board's suburban colleagues regarding the relationship between the District and surrounding jurisdictions and WASA's structure. This experience has given the Committee an opportunity to take a fresh look at the areas which fall under its authority without any preconceived notions.

Mr. Roth stated that the Committee would like to learn more about the press and public affairs function, specifically how WASA has historically handled media and other modes of public outreach. The Committee is also interested in how WASA responds to and manages communications during crises. He also noted that the Committee would like to identify what strategies work well, what areas WASA can build on, and what additional resources and/or guidance might be prudent for the Board to provide.

In the area of Government Relations, recent actions in the District Government and potential congressional involvement in several WASA related matters have been the subject of spirited discussion in the Board meetings. As a result of discussion with several Board members, Mr. Roth noted that the Committee needs to take a look at whether WASA has placed adequate emphasis on active outreach to decision-makers, on developing proactive strategies for addressing issues before governmental bodies that affect WASA, and on having the most current information possible made available to the WASA Board on important issues.

Mr. Roth noted that a customer survey was conducted approximately 18 months ago and that a copy of the results was provided with the meeting packet prior to this meeting. He stated that the Committee needed to return to the issues identified by WASA customers for improvement and that Chairman Martin has asked that the Committee devote special attention to improving relationships with District Government agencies, large commercial accounts, and retail businesses that may face special issues. Mr. Roth also noted that the Committee should continue the work that was initiated by this Committee last year to improve and streamline coordination among DC agencies, WASA, work zone and other permitting situations.

Mr. Roth thanked staff for providing the meeting material and meeting minutes from previous committee meetings. He noted that he was aware that a considerable amount of committee work has gone into developing objectives, an action plan and performance measurements on issues not previously mentioned such as:

- Responding to customer needs
- Using new technology
- Expanding voluntary community and public service efforts
- Developing programs sensitive to customers who are less fortunate
- Building the community's trust in WASA as a professional provider of an essential service

Working with staff, the Committee will spend sometime over the next several weeks assessing each goal in terms of status and priority. Mr. Roth stated that he anticipates the Committee beginning the process today by deciding which of these areas needs continued focus in addition to determining what the Committee needs to do to build on WASA's strengths to facilitate delivery of the finest services to WASA's customers and the community of any water and sewer agency in the country.

### **3. Comments from Committee Members**

#### **Brenda Richardson**

Ms. Richardson noted that she has been on the Customer & Community Services Committee for some time and has observed that the press and the public affairs function has always been a challenge for WASA, even with the former Directors. She pointed out that WASA hasn't had success in encouraging people to participate in community meetings and that the Committee needs to think outside the box to identify ways to become more supportive of the Public Affairs Director, including Committee members attending community meetings.

Ms. Richardson stated that that Mr. Hemphill has a good relationship with the elected officials on the Hill as well as the DC Council. She stated that Mr. Hemphill is well respected and that even though WASA gets grilled on channel 16, the decision-makers have the highest regard for WASA because we've come a long way.

With regard to Customer Services, Ms. Richardson stated that she has high regard for Mr. Kiely and his staff because they have done an extraordinary job. She noted that WASA developed a program which staff was considering licensing and that is now patented. Lastly, Ms. Richardson indicated that she is concerned with the permitting issue and the fire hydrant issue. She stated that it is worthwhile keeping these two items on the agenda and on the Committee's radar screen.

#### **Howard Gibbs**

Mr. Gibbs stated that he'd like to echo Ms. Richardson's remarks and that he'd like to add that Mr. Johnson and staff have always been responsive to requests from Board members. He also noted that he has had problems within his neighborhood and that he made a call and the problem was taken care of.

Mr. Gibbs indicated that he has a concern regarding the permitting process, which is not all WASA's fault and that staff is going to have to work to distinguish WASA from the DC Government to the extent that WASA can. He also indicated that he is aware that the Mayor is working with DCRA to streamline the permitting process, and believes that WASA should be involved in the discussions.

### **Joseph Cotruvo**

Mr. Cotruvo stated that Chairman Martin has charged the Committee with a very good list. He noted that WASA does a very good job at community outreach and community service.

With regards to Government Relations, he stated that the Committee needs to look at whether this area needs some strengthening. He noted that being blind-sided on the amendment issue was striking. He suggested that the Committee look at intensifying efforts in this area, cultivating more relationships and perhaps expanding the current program.

Mr. Cotruvo also indicated that WASA should focus on image building. He pointed out that it only takes a fire hydrant or lead issue and WASA's public image goes down. The Committee needs to look at how WASA can restore its public image to the point where the public really appreciates what they have. He suggested possible airing a brief 10 second positive message that would get WASA's message out to large audiences. He also suggested rebutting some of the cases where misinformation regarding WASA has been advertised. He noted that it could be accomplished in the form of a press release so that misinformation isn't just hanging out there in people's minds.

### **Steven McLendon**

Mr. McLendon stated that the reality is that WASA is a well functioning organization, but the public is not always in agreement. He stated that perception is the key and noted that the statements from the public witnesses at the Public Hearing held on June 13<sup>th</sup> were the same: "the type of water we get", "we don't drink the water". Mr. McLendon stated that WASA needs to be more proactive.

Mr. McLendon stated that the current administration is great at customer relations. If WASA's out there and the customers feel WASA's presence, the customer will be more receptive to what WASA has to say. Perception is reality and most people think the water is substandard. Mr. McLendon reiterated that WASA has to do a better job at getting its message out and being visible in the communities.

## **4. Confirm Regular Meeting Schedule**

Mr. Roth polled the committee and they unanimously agreed to meet on the third Tuesday of each month at 810 First Street, NE from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., with the exception of the month of August. Mr. Johnson asked if the Committee would be willing to have some flexibility in the meeting place and that the Bryant Street Facility may be a more suitable meeting place. Mr. Roth indicated that the meeting will be held at 810 First Street for July and that he and Mr. Johnson will have further discussion regarding the possibility of moving the meeting to an alternate location.

## **5. Public Affairs Office**

Ms. Quander-Collins began by stating that because utility operations are mostly underground, nobody pays you any attention until something goes wrong. The challenge then becomes to find other ways to create visibility to customers, the general public, the regulators and regional stakeholders other than non-compliance with a regulation, disrupting commuters, or disruption of water and/or sewer services.

In addition to aligning the objective and goals for the Public Affairs Office with those identified in the Committee's work plan and the strategic priorities areas identified by the Board overall, some of the goals Public Affairs strive to accomplish are:

- Raise awareness among customers and the public about the services and programs that are available to them
- Provide information on WASA's strengths, on our achievements and on our challenges

Ms. Quander-Collins pointed out that WASA has to garner support by raising awareness and increasing knowledge on some of the challenges WASA faces. She stated that Public Affairs has to work very hard at making the public understand that WASA provide critical services and that those services have an impact on the environment in which WASA operates. The four major areas of operation for the Public Affairs Office include:

1. **Publications** - Direct mailing, What's on Tap, Newsletters, Annual Report, EPA Mandated Consumer Confidence Report (Water Quality Report), Employee Focus, Various Brochures, Website
2. **Community Outreach** – Community Meetings, Sewer Science Program, Conservation/ Environmental Health Fair/Senior Events, Various Parades, Plant Tours, Hosting International Delegates
3. **Media Relations** – Working with Media, Presentations Development,
4. **Issues Management** – Provide counsel to Management with regards to appropriate responses to media related issues

Ms. Quander-Collins informed the Committee that the results from the Gallup survey suggested that almost 70 percent of the people who receive bills either read some or all of the newsletters. In terms of internal communications, she informed the Committee that most of this is coordinated with the Human Resources Department.

Mr. Johnson added that management attempts to engage as many WASA employees as possible in community related activities. Consequently, WASA has very strong participation in activities like the AIDS Walk, Christmas in April, Adopt a School Program, Harvest (with WHUR) during clothing drives and toy drives, and Bread for the Soul (joint union management program).

Mr. Hemphill reported that about three years ago during the lead crisis, WASA contracted with George Washington University with respect to risk communication and other issues. Management sensed that this effort was invaluable as it attempted to communicate more appropriately with WASA customers and the public. Going forward, this relationship has enabled WASA to better communicate with the public on water quality issues.

Mr. Roth inquired about the nature of the George Washington Contract. Mr. Johnson explained that WASA had difficulty obtaining appropriate health related assistance through DC Government's local health department during the lead crisis. Stephen Trachtenberg (GW University President) coordinated a meeting with the head of the School of Public Health, who is internationally renowned, and WASA has had George Washington under contract ever since as public health, risk management and crisis management advisors. George Washington has a crisis communications program as well as research capabilities. Mr. Hemphill noted that the relationship is ongoing and that it was the Board's strong desire to maintain the relationship so that it would be available when needed.

The Committee reminded staff that when dealing with media issues, staff should make sure that sufficient information be intentionally made available to the media with language that is easily understandable to everybody.

Mr. Roth noted that from this discussion the Committee can lay out a plan for the future to better understand how WASA works with the media, in what areas staff feels a need for support from the Board, and in what areas can the Board provide useful guidance.

Ms. Richardson suggested that the Public Affairs Office modify its work plan to include hosting monthly media events so that WASA can get the press out for the rest of the year and take a more proactive approach to educating people about WASA. She also recommended emailing the decision-makers on a monthly basis to keep them abreast of what's going on at WASA. Finally, she suggested WASA get a slot on Channel 16 – should WASA have a major event, there would be another method of getting its message out.

With regard to the communications plan, Mr. Roth requested a short discussion at the next meeting on exactly where staff stands on each goal. Also he indicated that under the objectives column, the Committee wants to see a more specific set of objectives on how WASA deals with news media and crisis communications.

## **6. Government Relations Office**

Mr. Hemphill stated that the Governmental Relations function wasn't formalized until 2001. Prior to 2001, the General Manager was principally engaged in relationship building with the local and federal governments with support from the executive staff. One of the major issues at that time was billing – some large federal agencies were not paying their bills. Mr. Hemphill noted that at the time of his hiring, the issues with the Control Plan were ongoing and the General Manager realized there was a need for federal funding. Since that time, Mr. Hemphill noted that WASA has had some enormous success stories that would not have been possible without the support of the Mayor's Office and other elected officials and staff on the Hill. Mr. Hemphill noted that the relationships that he has developed at the Council level and on the Hill have been based on the issues.

Mr. Hemphill stated that the changes over the last six months are a clear indication that WASA needs to continue its efforts to build strong relationships with the Council and on the Hill. Mr. Hemphill also commended Mr. Gordon Fry for his effort in initiating continual dialog with the Council and staffers on the Hill.

With regards to the work plan, Mr. Roth asked if the objective and measures for item 1-3.1 -- "formulate and adopt a government relations plan" -- were in the form of a written report. Mr. Hemphill responded yes, explaining that one of the first projects Mr. Fry worked on was formulating a list by polling the executive management and some of the senior management to identify what they believed were the significant issues facing WASA. Mr. Hemphill noted that the issues that continue to be of concern for the Governmental Relations Office are the CFO issue, and the Washington Aqueduct Capital Legislation, which WASA has been working on since 2002. Mr. Roth asked Mr. Hemphill to share a copy of the written government relations plan with the Committee.

Mr. Roth requested a detailed written report on what the current and pending lists of issues are to include current status and how they are being prioritized. He also emphasized that Government Relations staff should put more focus on communicating information about issues that they know are of high interest to Board members as quickly as possible.

## **7. Customer Service Department**

Ms. Donna Lewis, Customer Service Manager noted that the four major areas under Customer Service are the call center, billing control, meter operations and collections. With regards to collections, Ms. Lewis pointed out that this unit is responsible for managing receivables for the Authority with a strong focus on accounts that are between 60 to 90 days delinquent. Ms. Lewis pointed out that WASA has implemented several beneficial programs, most recently the process notification system which has been instrumental in monitoring accounts and calling customers to remind them to pay their bills before they

become seriously delinquent and service is disconnected. When necessary, collections initiates the process to place liens on properties and this year collections referred approximately 300 accounts totaling \$1.2 to the city's tax sell. As of September 2006, accounts receivables 90 days or greater was approximately 25 million dollars and as of the end of May 7.6 million. Customer Service's current collection rate is approximately 98.5 percent.

Mr. Michael Galligan, Customer Service Manager reported that billing control is responsible for billing approximately 122,000 accounts monthly. He also noted that by the end of July every customer should receive via mail a customer handbook. Likewise all new customers moving into the area will receive the handbook. Mr. Johnson noted that all Board members and ANC Chairmen will also receive a copy of the handbook. The Committee recommended that it also be sent to all ANC Commissioners.

In an effort to target WASA's large customer accounts such as Georgetown University and the federal government, Customer Services currently offers group billing in which specific staff has been assigned to deal directly with these customers. Billing control also handles the lead hotline and the associated billing process involved.

In the interest of time, Mr. Roth requested that Mr. Haynesworth present his overview of the meter operations and that the Call Center overview be deferred until the next meeting combined with a tour of the call center.

Mr. Haynesworth, Customer Service Manager stated that Meter & Field Services is responsible for the installation and maintenance of all the water meters in the District. Meter & Field Services serves as the technical operations and support unit for all of the Customer Service operations. This unit also provides support for other departments i.e. lead service replacement and is responsible for providing enforcement for the collections unit by turning off and restoration of water when the bill is paid. This includes removal of meters for illegal turn-ons. One of the benefits of the AMR system is that it allows Customer Service to monitor usage. Mr. Haynesworth also noted that WASA has an in-house state of the art meter testing bench and that meter operations also oversees and manages the AMR program.

#### **8. Policy on Summer Recreational Use of Hydrants**

Ms. Richardson shared a digital photograph with the Committee and staff that she had taken of a fire hydrant that had been turned on for children to engage in play, when a car pulled up, parked and the occupant of the car proceeded to wash the car. She inquired about WASA's policy on safety and liability. Mr. Johnson agreed that this was a dangerous situation not only for the people playing in the water, but for passing motorists and fire protection in the area. He informed the Committee that as a result of similar situation in the past, WASA has been working with the ANC's who assign adults to open specific hydrants and to place sprinkler cap on the fire hydrants during the summer months. This minimizes the potential for accidents and reduces the possibly of reducing water pressure in any given area. This year, the Police Department has requested to assist WASA in this effort as part of its community relations program. The Police Department has agreed to go into some of the neighborhoods, operate the hydrants, and block the streets to work with WASA and the kids. This joint effort has been a tremendous help to WASA.

Ms. Richardson asked who would be liable if a child gets injured while playing at a hydrant that has a sprinkler cap. Mr. Johnson noted that the question would be referred to the General Counsel and that a response will be prepared. Mr. Louis Jarvis, Water Services Director added that the ANCs are trained to open the hydrants, install the caps, and to position the proper equipment to block off the streets. Ms. Richardson asked how WASA knows the ANCs are following proper procedures. Mr. Jarvis informed the Committee that he checks the locations sporadically. He also stated that the hydrants are tested to make sure they are operating properly to ensure safety.

## **9. Weekend/Holiday/Off-Hours Response to Emergencies**

Mr. Roth informed the Committee and staff that Mr. Tangherlini sent an email that the Mayor's Office received prior to the meeting regarding a customer complaint where there was a water main break on a Sunday in February and the customer attempted to reach WASA through 727-1000 and was unsuccessful. After approximately 2 ½ hours the customer's basement was flooded and no one had responded. Mr. Roth asked if WASA has some mechanism in place to include a message on the 727-1000 line after hours, which states that customers should call WASA directly. Mr. Johnson indicated that WASA has always encouraged its customers to call WASA directly. WASA has a 24-hour operation, the calls are recorded so that staff knows exactly when the calls are received, when the calls are dispatched and when the crews follow-up with the customer care associates. He noted that the 727-1000 line is not under WASA's purview. Mr. Johnson nevertheless agreed to work with the Mayor's Call Center or other responsible person to request that a message on the 727-1000 line redirects callers to the WASA emergency number in the event of a water or sewer emergency. Mr. Johnson also noted that WASA will look at methods to educate the ANCs and others on where to call in emergency situations.

## **10. Community Communication on POW Projects**

Mr. Roth shared an experience that he had with a WASA employee listed as the contact person on a sign in his neighborhood where a contractor was performing work for WASA. When he called, Mr. Roth said the person barely had any information regarding his questions. He also noted that this person was completely inappropriate to interact with any member of the public and requested that management be more careful in its selection of the contact people who interact with the public on WASA projects. Mr. Johnson stated that he would look into the incident.

## **11. Adjournment**

Mr. Roth adjourned the meeting at 1:02 pm.