



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

**Tuesday, September 18, 2007  
11:00 a.m.**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Board Members Present**

Alan Roth, Chair  
Brenda Richardson  
Howard Gibbs  
Howard Croft  
David J. Bardin

**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, Customer Service Manager  
Avis M. Russell, General Counsel  
Linda R. Manley, Board Secretary

**Call to Order**

Mr. Roth called the meeting to order at approximately 11:10 a.m. and he welcomed new Board member Howard Croft to the Customer and Community Services Committee.

**WASA Permit Process**

Mr. Johnson gave the Committee some history on the challenges WASA faced with the Customer Service Department when it was created. He noted that staff began to correct the obvious problems by proceeding with modernization and re-engineering. As a result, WASA obtained a new Customer Billing System, restructured the management of the organization, and provided extensive training for the existing employees. He noted that following the reorganization, WASA commissioned Gallup to conduct a customer survey in an effort to gather data that would give the Authority a sense of how it was doing and identify any deficiencies. The survey was specifically designed to address residential and large commercial customers.

The survey revealed that there were weaknesses in the permitting process. Therefore, staff began to review the permitting process to get a sense of what the issues were. Mr. Johnson noted that staff has developed a series of recommendations to address the issues which will be discussed in today's presentation.

Continuing with the presentation, Mr. Hemphill pointed out that there has also been a higher level of development activity in the District over the past several years. He noted that a Steering Committee was formed that was made up of various departments to perform an internal management review. The initial focus was high-impact development. The overall project approach was to streamline internal operations, use technology to improve efficiency, and manage the infrastructure from the front end. Mr. Hemphill noted that the goals of this initiative were to significantly improve customer

satisfaction, comply with regulatory requirements, and standardize processes internally. One of the challenges in this process was to actually define the permitting process. He then shared a flow chart of the existing permitting process with the Committee.

Mr. Hemphill indicated that the staff looked at the permitting process of six other comparable organizations outside of the District that deal with similar climates and that were not part of central governments. The conclusion is that permitting processes tend to be jurisdiction specific. WASA has some unique challenges because WASA isn't directly involved in the construction permitting operations of the District government. He noted that while staff did not find a model that could be copied, they did receive some valuable information from these discussions.

Mr. Hemphill explained that staff attempted to design an overall generic process that would capture most permit activities. The Steering Committee identified twenty-four (24) internal processes to obtain a single permit.

Mr. Hemphill also stated that WASA collaborated with DDOT and DCRA in an effort to streamline the processes and to ensure staff was coordinating in DCRA's one-stop center as well as to ensure that there were appropriate linkages on both web pages. Mr. Gibbs asked if there were 24 processes for every permit. Mr. Hemphill explained that not every type of permit requires 24 processes, but that there could be up to 24 processes for some types of permits. He also noted that there are 12 processes in which only WASA deals with customers and 12 processes in which other organizations are involved. Ms. Richardson asked staff if it would be interested in receiving a copy of the report on the permits issued by DCRA, which is sent to Councilmember Barry bi-weekly. She also indicated that she would provide staff with a copy of the map that shows future development in Ward 8. Mr. Roth added that if WASA staff finds that bi-weekly document useful and don't already get it regularly, they could probably do so by getting on DCRA's e-mail distribution to ANCs and other community organizations.

Mr. Hemphill pointed out that staff developed the following recommendations:

- Make the process more transparent and ensure it's on the webpage
- Realign the organization
- Consolidate software systems
- Eliminate hard-copy job requests/work orders
- Allow credit card payments
- Institute payment of fees at DPO
- Eliminate variable reimbursable fees

Ms. Richardson inquired about the fee structure and the turn-around time in obtaining a permit. Mr. Hemphill explained that it could take up to six months for larger permit applications and a few weeks for smaller permit applications. Mr. Johnson noted that applications are often delayed for a number of reasons, e.g., incomplete applications, erroneous information, information that is not transmitted from one agency to another agency, etc. Issues in complying with DC Code have also been the cause of many delays in permitting process. With regards to the fee structure, Mr. Hemphill explained that there is a set of flat fees and that some types of permits require the customer to pay a deposit. Mr. Johnson noted that staff would provide the Committee with the schedule

of the fees for the various types of permits. Mr. Bardin asked about the number of permits issued by WASA yearly. Mr. Hemphill indicated that he did not have that information.

The Committee had several questions relevant to the average turn-around time for obtaining a permit as a homeowner in the District and for the six outside organizations used by the Steering Committee as benchmarks. Mr. Hemphill explained that WASA is still working on what the average time should be and that WASA does not want to make a commitment at this point that cannot be met.

Mr. Hemphill explained that the project implementation plan is expected to be completed by October 1, 2007. However, implementation of the plan will be ongoing. Mr. Johnson also noted that there are some substantial changes occurring in DCRA and that staff will be working with them on the issues that impact WASA's process.

The Committee agreed that staff is moving in the right direction to improve the permitting process. Mr. Roth asked if the levels of fees are designed to cover WASA's cost in providing the services to deliver the permits. Mr. Hemphill explained that some of the fees are designed to cover WASA's costs. The Committee requested that staff provide a summary report on the information obtained from the six organizations used as benchmarks for the permitting process. Mr. Bardin commented that WASA should be looking at how it measures up to other organizations and that the data system being used should be user friendly so that anybody can use it.

## **Public Affairs**

### **Monthly Report/Update**

Ms. Quander-Collins gave a brief report on the Community Outreach efforts for the month of September, which included the Water Monitoring Day event held at Oronoco Bay Park in Alexandria, VA and the Sewer Science event, which was held at Banneker High School. She also talked about a major meeting which was hosted by WASA for residents and businesses that will be impacted by the sewer separation project, which will be underway in the spring. The meeting was held at the United Planning Organization (UPO) on Good Hope Road, SE. WASA took this opportunity to talk to the customers and to encourage them to participate in the project. She also provided a list of the upcoming community meetings and a summary of kinds of questions asked at these types of meetings.

Ms. Quander-Collins reported to the Committee that water pitcher filters are no longer certified as being effective in filtering out lead. She noted that staff has developed talking points for Customer Service, and that Public Affairs has drafted a news release should it come to a point where WASA wants to release one. In addition, when WASA makes presentations about the lead service line replacement program, staff is now telling the customers that when they have replaced their service lines, they should use other filtration systems in addition to flushing.

Mr. Bardin expressed his concerns regarding the timeliness of the news release to announce the action taken by the Board at the September 2007 Board meeting on retail

rates. Mr. Roth suggested that the Committee continue this discussion under the implementation plan of the draft Communication Policy.

Mr. Roth noted that the Committee should also plan to include on next month's agenda at Ms. Richardson's request a discussion on how best to begin communicating with the development community in particular on the impervious rate initiative, and more generally to begin developing an outreach plan to interested organizations and affected stakeholders on that issue. Mr. Roth stated that the Committee did not expect staff to present a plan at the next meeting but rather that the Committee would like to have input in the development of the plan and wants to begin that process.

### **Draft Communications Policy**

Mr. Roth distributed an edited copy of a draft Public Information Policy for discussion. Ms. Quander-Collins noted that the draft reflects an effort to develop an overarching communications policy that is intended to formalize WASA's commitment to being responsive, ensuring that the public is aware of all the services that are available, and what WASA is doing in various communities.

The Committee, together with the General Manager and General Counsel, reviewed and discussed the draft Public Information Policy extensively, agreed on a number of edits, and agreed conceptually on some further edits, the specifics of which would be proposed by Mr. Roth based on the Committee's discussions and circulated by e-mail to Committee members for final sign-off. Mr. Roth noted that once the Committee reaches a consensus on the draft, the proposed policy would be presented to the full Board together with a resolution adopting the Policy and providing a series of directions to the General Manager for implementation based on the points from Board Chairman Martin's email (timetable for implementation, measures of success and benchmarking, etc.). Mr. Roth asked the staff to draft such a resolution.

### **Customer Service**

#### **Hearing Officer Update**

Ms. Russell reported that Mr. Roth received an inquiry from a customer regarding a hearing officer. After a drop-off in the caseload following implementation of automated meter reading, a decision had been made to use only one of the hearing officers that had been previously used. After further discussion with Ms. Liggins, it has been decided that WASA will retain the services of another hearing officer, who will rotate on a monthly basis with the incumbent hearing officer in hearing cases, thus giving each hearing officer the other month in which to write up decisions from the cases heard the preceding month. . The General Counsel indicated that she has established a 30-day standard for turn-around time in issuing decisions, and that this standard has now been communicated to the incumbent hearing officer.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 pm