

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WATER AND SEWER AUTHORITY**

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**WATER QUALITY AND WATER SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2015**

**Present Board Members Present D.C. Water Staff**

Howard Gibbs, Vice Chair George Hawkins, CEO/General Manager

Matthew Brown, Board Chairman Charles Kiely, Assistant General Manager

Brenda Richardson for Customer Care and Operations

Alan Roth Linda Manley, Secretary to the Board

Kendrick Curry

**I. Call to Order**

Mr. Gibbs called the meeting to order.

**II. Water Quality Monitoring**

 **A. Total Coliform Rule (TCR) Testing**

Charles Kiley, Assistant General Manager for Customer Care and Operations, reported that TCR sampling had zero positive tests in August and into September. He stated that this was very good during the summer for a water distribution system with unlined cast iron.

 **B. Lead and Copper Rule Monitoring**

Mr. Kiley reported that they had 19 samples in on the Lead and Copper Rule which D.C. Water does twice a year. They are at 4.3 parts per billion which is extraordinary. The highest levels they anticipate coming in the summertime, and now they will continue to go lower since the water is less corrosive in colder weather.

Mr. Kiley indicated that these are two good reports from the water distribution side, although they still have to deal with the unlined cast iron issues.

**III. Fire Hydrant Upgrading Program**

Mr. Kiely stated that currently out of service hydrants are at 42. He pointed out that Inaccessibility due to construction is down significantly to 18. When the combination of construction inaccessibility and replacement or repair of hydrants is looked at, it is significantly below the 1 percent out of service goal that was established by the Board. Mr. Kiely stated that the fire hydrant activities were all moved in-house and they have recently set out on an initiative to try to lower the costs for installation. They focus a lot on the out of service and the old categories. At this time some of the old ones are out of their control because they are on hold since other work is planned in the same location and they do not want to dig up the streets twice. Mr. Kiely stated that they always check to make sure there is adequate fire protection around the areas when they have an out of service hydrant.

A question was asked about the dramatic reduction in inaccessible hydrants due to construction and whether it was because of in-house efforts. Mr. Kiely said that in many cases construction companies will install construction fences or something around or near hydrants. If it is obstructing the hydrant in any way, the hydrant is marked out of service. This procedure has been agreed on by D.C. Water and the Fire Department to avoid the Fire Department arriving to use a hydrant that is inaccessible. When D.C. Water knows that hydrants are inaccessible, they mark the hydrant out of service and try to work with the Department of Consumer Regulatory Affairs, District Department of Transportation (DDOT), or the construction manager to free it up.

Mr. Gibbs asked a question concerning the hydrant map. He stated that it appeared that there were three hydrants close together in the 3rd Street Tunnel. Mr. Kiely replied that they are currently working with DDOT on those and that they are not the traditional hydrants. There are little tags on the hydrants that show they are out of service. D.C. Water is trying to work out an arrangement on who should be controlling those hydrants because they are not a part of the public water system from D.C. Water’s perspective but an extension of the road system under DDOT. There is adequate water supply in that area, so it is not an issue from a “fire-fighting issue.” It is more an issue of not tracking them and getting them off of the report. If D.C. Water is going to be responsible, they need to figure out how to fix them.

Mr. Roth said that he went back and looked at the April report and agrees that there is a tremendous reduction in the inaccessible due to construction category. He wanted to know how this occurred. Did they go around to the construction managers and order them to move the fence so that a hydrant is not obstructed or is it DCRA ordering them? Mr. Kiely replied that it has been a combination of everything because the list was growing and they were working with the City. Using the Howard University construction as an example, there was nothing they could do since they do not have the authority. In one instance it was a simple move of the DCRA inspector coming up and telling the construction manager to push the fence back since it was obstructing the hydrant.

**VI. CIS New Rate Implementation**

Lauren Preston, Director of Customer Care, provided an update on implementing the rate changes, the changes that have been done, and the implementation schedule. She stated that UAT is User Acceptance Testing where they do not take the word of the programmers but actually put the system through paces to make sure it works correctly. They have finished all of the requirements thus far on the schedule, including the data clean-up which was an exhaustive exercise. Before it did not matter if a customer was wrongly classified but now it will matter because the prices are different. Over 10,000 accounts were evaluated where they had questionable designations as a business or non-residential account with a small meter or vice versa which did not make sense. For condominium buildings they had to evaluate which were purely residential or mixed-use. The UAT is finished and now they are left with rolling out the system that is 80 percent completed. Tasks remaining include set up, staging, and normal information technology efforts.

Mr. Gibbs asked if they did any field verifications. Ms. Preston stated that they did send staff out for about 200 verifications. A Committee member asked if there were instances where there were mixed use buildings, residential and businesses, and there was a single water meter. Ms. Preston replied yes and stated that if it was commercial use at all, it was considered commercial, non-residential. If it was purely residential, they got the lower multi-family price.

Ms. Preston stated that the training effort is probably harder than any they have previously done. She reported that telephone calls answered by customer care representatives are now very long, 10 to 15 minutes compared with a previous average of 3.5 minutes. It is mostly education of the customers since some do not understand the fees even though a lot of communication was done in advance. When customers got the letter that went out, the call volumes doubled because it is a big billing number and they are not use to it. Ms. Preston indicated that they wanted to make sure staff was able to articulate the changes and defend why the changes are necessary and a prudent investment. Ms. Preston stated that they have pulled a lot of representatives off the phone during training which has caused the call center service levels to suffer a little bit but it is a necessary investment. She indicated that they must have everyone ready before the bills go out. Fewer people were answering the phones while training was going on, but they have hired four more temporary staff and a dozen other employees have received training and can fill in if volume increases.

Ms. Preston reported that the last things they have to do are to finish the billing for this year, load all the new data for the rate changes, and then there is a step by step, day by day roll-out plan that they will implement with Vertex, the CIS service provider. Prior to going live they will implement the changes for CAP since that program starts each year on October 1st. All billing for CAP and adjustments will be done by September 30th. Ms. Preston will look at everything before the bills are sent out. They will not see the full effect of new revenue probably until approximately October 20 because of the billing cycles. She said they will then vigorously review all of the revenue with the CFO’s office every month.

Mr. Gibbs asked about the rates that change in the middle of the billing period and whether there was the ability to determine how much water was used under the old rate and how much under the new rate. Ms. Preston indicated that the system prorates all bills based on the number of days between the meter readings and that the information would be available.

Pamela Mooring, Customer Care, reported on the communication program which was begun by looking at the case for the fixed fee (the water system replacement fee), the need for a fixed fee due to lower consumption, and the need to cover the lifeline rate and affordability. A letter notifying the customers of a proposed rate change was sent out with the targeted audience being residential customers, non-residential customers, and the low income customers and their advocates. At the town hall meetings Mr. Hawkins went over the proposed new rate structure and customers were encouraged to attend the town hall meetings and the public meeting and provide their comments. They rolled out communications after the Board decision with bill inserts and bill messages, and explained the new water replacement fee, and the need for the fixed fee, affordability, the lifeline rate, Customer Assistance Programs (CAP), and how to conserve water and lower the customer’s consumption. Ms. Mooring said that a new web page at dcwater.com/updates has been added. Media outreach was pursued when the announcement of the decision was done. Mr. Hawkins starred in a public service announcement, and media contacts were made, and informative programs and articles were done by The Washington Post, Channel 4, and many other media sources. Another residential customer letter has already gone out and they will soon be sent out to non-residential, commercial and other customers. Responding to an inquiry from Mr. Curry, Mr. Hawkins then summarized the town hall meetings, comments received, etc. He indicated that a public comment summary document was prepared and submitted to the Board.

Mr. Roth asked if there was a text that is used by the customer care phone representatives to explain the water replacement fee. Ms. Preston replied that there are scripts and questions and answers (Q&A) that are supplied to phone employees. Mr. Roth said that he read the billing insert on the fixed fee and has concerns about the language used to explain the process. Mr. Gibbs suggested that the language be on the 6th grade level so that all customers will understand. Mr. Hawkins stated that they would take another look at it.

Mr. Kiely reported that there was one consent item contract that they were seeking approval by the Board. It was to purchase new large valves for replacement and repair mostly on the transmission mains. Fort Meyer was the successful bidder. Mr. Gibbs asked for questions and the Committee members agreed to recommend it to the Board for approval.

There being no other questions or business, Mr. Gibbs declared the meeting adjourned.