



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

**Tuesday, March 17, 2009
11:00 a.m.**

Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present

Alan J. Roth
Brenda Richardson
Howard Gibbs

Other Board Members

David J. Bardin

Staff Present

Jerry N. Johnson, General Manager
Johnnie Hemphill, Chief of Staff
Avis M. Russell, General Counsel
Charles Kiely, Ass't Gen Mgr, Customer Service
Jay McCoskey, Customer Service Director
Mujib Lodhi, Information Technology Director
Michele Quander-Collins, Public Affairs Director
Everett Lallis, Safety & Security Director
Linda R. Manley, Board Secretary

Call to Order

Mr. Roth called the meeting to order at approximately 11:06 a.m.

Customer Contact Briefing

Mr. Roth noted that two months ago the Board Chairman requested that the Customer and Community Services Committee take a look at staffing in the Call Center. As a result Charles Kiely and staff have put together an extensive PowerPoint presentation that addresses the transformation of the Call Center since WASA's inception and that outlines the current work load volumes, duties and functions of the Call Center.

Prior to reorganizing the Customer Service Department Mr. Kiely pointed out that some of the issues WASA faced included unreliable billing system data, untrained supervisors and staff, delays in the billing process, no focus on customer responsiveness, and a cost of service much higher than other utilities.

Mr. Kiely noted that some of the process improvement initiatives used to establish a management structure that was customer service oriented included upgrading the job descriptions and requirements for customer service personnel, administering a mandatory customer service personality test prior to interviewing applicants, establishing a comprehensive training program for both supervisors and staff, implementing a customer information and billing system in 2001, implementing an automated meter reading system, and developing an arrears management program in 2002.

With the implementation of WASA's state-of-the-art IVR system, customers are now able to complete various transactions without talking to a live representative. This accounts for 105,652 (31%) of customer contacts with WASA.

With regard to the call center trends, customer service contacts declined during the period of 2003 through 2006 largely due to the implementation of the AMR system and the self-service applications through IVR. In addition, staff implemented a risk management program in which staff attempts to contact the customer to make payment arrangements prior to shut-offs for nonpayment. Staff also developed and implemented HUNA (High Usage Notification Application), which enables WASA to monitor daily usage at individual premises and notifies the customer when there are unusual spikes that could be an indication of a leak within the customer's home. When the outbound calls are adjusted out of the total call count, the call trends continue to decline. Mr. Roth asked what the actual numbers for the six call types provided on page 8 of the presentation would be for 2003 and 2004. Staff agreed to provide this data.

Mr. Kiely noted that although there has been no substantial change in staffing levels within the past few years, Customer Service has absorbed the Emergency Command Center (which most utilities channel through their dispatch center), the Lead Service Hotline (which had been outsourced in the past), and the direct line for the Authority which was previously located at Blue Plains. In addition, the sudden increase of customer email contacts has been channeled to Customer Service Department.

Mr. Kiely noted that employees are cross-trained and can be assigned to perform various tasks as needed. In addition, the implementation of automated call distribution software enables staff to quickly place additional personnel in the telephone queue to temporarily handle peak loads and emergencies as needed.

With respect to the commercial arrears management outbound collection calls, Mr. Roth asked staff to provide the Committee with the percentage of calls made to management companies and/or the responsible person for paying the bill of condominiums and co-ops vs. business addresses.

Mr. Bardin requested that prior to the Finance & Budget Committee meeting scheduled for March 18th, staff modify the chart on page 28 of the presentation (WASA Total Over 90-day A/R and Bad Debt vs. Target) to clearly indicate that the dollar figures are denominated in the million of dollars (\$ million), and that the data reflects the total for retail customers. In addition, the reporting period should reflect the most recent data available.

Mr. Johnson noted that the staffing level for the Call Center could not be measured solely by incoming and outgoing calls and that consideration has to also be given to the other functions being performed by the Call Center. Today Customer Services is responsible for substantially more services, i.e., collections of all revenues for the organization, AMR support, receivership which requires personnel to go back and forth to court and to support the Office of the General Counsel, etc. He explained that staff

reviews the staffing level every year during the budget process and that every position in the Authority has to be justified by work unit before it is approved and that based on staff's best professional judgment, the call center is not overstaffed as an organization. He also pointed out the independent review conducted last year by Amawalk Consultants suggested that based on the organization's size and WASA's customer base, WASA has fewer employees as compared to other comparable organizations.

Staff also presented a demonstration of a new tutorial feature for the website that is expected to be useful in providing information to WASA's customers, particularly with the introduction of IAC billing. This new feature is expected to be launched after final internal review.

At the conclusion of this discussion, the Committee agreed that based on the functions performed by Customer Services, the volume of work that has replaced the drop in incoming calls, staff's high level of commitment to provide outstanding customer service, and the Committee's desire that quality not be sacrificed for minimal savings, they were reasonably satisfied that the Call Center is appropriately staffed. The Committee also commended staff for their hard work and their efforts for staying on the cutting edge of technology and customer care.

Departmental Report/Update

- **Customer Service**

Mr. McCoskey distributed the revised Customer Assistance brochure which now includes the CAP sewer credit information. He noted that this brochure will be translated into six different languages. He also reported that "What's on Tap" was printed on recycled paper effective February 1st and that the WASA bills will be printed on recycled paper effective April 1st. Mr. Roth asked that a copy of the newly revised CAP brochure be distributed to the full Board in the next Board package.

With regard to the CAP (water and sewer credit), Mr. McCoskey reported that in the 5-month period from October 2008 through February 2009, \$263,000 was disbursed to 3,028 customers as compared to \$344,000 disbursed to 5,800 for the full year of 2008 (water credit only), reflecting the significant savings the new sewer credit has brought to customers in greatest need.

Crisis Communication Plan Update

Ms. Quander-Collins presented the revised version of the Crisis Communications Plan. She noted that the Plan serves as a guide for communicating effectively in the event of an emergency and/or crisis situation with the media, employees, and other agencies. The plan outlines procedures for a variety of operational emergencies and/or situations. The objectives of this plan are to communicate quickly and frequently; provide complete, consistent, and accurate information; reduce public anxiety; and establish productive relationships with the media.

Ms. Richardson asked how staff would communicate during an emergency if cell phones were not working. Mr. Lallis noted that WASA would use 800 MHz radios and WASA would have use of regular telephone lines through the District's command center. In addition, as a backup, WASA will use text messaging and a satellite phone to communicate during an emergency.

In response to a question regarding distribution of the Crisis Plan, Mr. Hemphill indicated that the plan will be distributed to approximately 40 staff members.

The Committee expressed concern that the contents of the plan need to be shared with all levels of employees so that everyone is clear on what their role is in the plan. They suggested that accountability, training, and practice drills should be the next step. Mr. Lallis explained that WASA continues to participate in various FEMA level courses and national drills.

Ms. Quander-Collins noted that the difference between this plan and the 2006 plan is the level of detail. In addition this plan also provides a number of boiler plate tools that staff can use for general emergencies.

Departmental Report/Update

- **Public Affairs**

Ms. Quander-Collins reported that the contract for webcasting and videotaping of Board meetings has been executed and that the vendor has given staff an estimate of 60 to 90 days before WASA is up and live on the website. There will be some minor construction in the audio/video room and installation of cameras in the Board room. In order to ensure that the recording appears as professional as possible, staff suggests that the Board and staff members who take part in the meetings receive training for on-camera appearances.

She also noted that the Speakers Bureau is being marketed on WASA's website and that customers can go online and request speakers for groups of 10 or more.

Other Business

The Committee reminded staff that the review of the Urban League's performance under the SPLASH program contract is coming up for the next meeting and asked if it would be possible if the Urban League could attend the next meeting to talk about what they are doing.

After a brief discussion, the Committee agreed to modify their meeting schedule to every other month versus every month with the understanding that if the need arises a special meeting would be scheduled to handle specific issues or action items.

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