

TANEYTOWN WATER AND SEWER COMMITTEE

MINUTES – Tuesday, August 11, 2015

Committee In Attendance:

Barbara Cook

Diane Foster, Mayor Pro Tem, Committee Chair

Don Frazier, Councilman

Jackie Jones

Joe Vigliotti, Councilman

Gail Wilson

Meeting convened at 10:00 AM in City Council Chambers Conference Room.

Mayor Pro Tem Diane Foster opened the Taneytown Water and Sewer Committee opened its second meeting with work assignment reports.

Barbara Cook began by speaking on the issue of water meter replacement. She explained that the original information given to the committee (217 bad batteries, and the cost of \$40 per battery) was incorrect. The most recent figures demonstrate that there are still 51 bad batteries, and the cost to replace each battery is \$156. Cook explained that it would be prudent to contact these homeowners, and presented a draft notice which could be sent to homeowners whose batteries have expired.

Gail Wilson reported on grants and a rain barrel initiative. Wilson explained she had spoken with Deborah Standorford about grant possibilities for rain barrels, and that she is also looking into low-flow/double-flush toilets. Such grants would be received and administered by the town to citizens. Foster agreed that it would be best that the city itself would pursue grants on behalf of the homeowners by the city government. Wilson suggested that perhaps a poll could be conducted of residents of the town to determine if there would be popular support for such a program. Wilson reported that community facilities grants may be possible. Cook noted that it may be possible to contact home improvement chains like Lowes or Home Depot to solicit a discounted rate for toilets and other water-use appliances purchased by Taneytown residents. This would enable the individual citizen to go out and purchase the toilets and appliances personally, rather than the city.

Jackie Jones posed the question of how late fees are assessed, and why people are not paying their bills. Foster explained that citizens are notified of their late fees based on notices. Councilman Don Frazier explained that bills fluctuate from quarter to quarter. A discussion began about the availability of information regarding payments, batteries, and late fees. Councilman Joe Vigliotti suggested returning to the idea of a small flier to accompany the next round of water and sewer bills, and presented a draft flier which indicated four primary things: that the city can offer payment installments; that citizens should check the bill to see if their batteries need to be replaced; that the city offers tablets to test for leaks; and that if a citizen believes there to be an error on his or her bill, the city will address the issue directly. It was agreed that such a flyer would be a good idea.

Frazier moved on to discuss the strategic outline for the reduction of water and sewer rates. Frazier explained that contacts are being made with other municipalities regarding their water and sewer rates, and that he is studying ideas such as the front footage concept for the determination of water and sewer rates. He expressed the importance of needing a meeting with Bobbi-Jo Fout for specific numbers. Vigliotti reiterated his interest in assisting with the strategic outline, and agreed to work with Frazier on the plan.

Jones then reported on other issues and ideas relating to the water and sewer committee. She wondered if people were actually paying greater fees in 2010 and 2011 than 2015. She also spoke about the potential for backstreet leakage following the completion of Streetscape, noting that all improvements cost money. Foster explained that the city has a leak detection system that is working very well. Jones suggested the possibility of creating a special fund from late fees in the budget to benefit the elderly who have trouble paying their water and sewer bills. Foster explained that such money already goes back into the budget. Jones also sought further information on Frazier's idea of microgrids and efficiency.

Wilson noted that her husband, who helped work on the town's water and sewer system, is to meet with Mayor Jim McCarron and Director of Public Works Rick Weaver regarding a tour of the system and the potential for greater efficiency. Foster noted she would check on the progress of planning such a tour. Frazier noted that energy unused by the town could be sold back into the grid. Wilson suggested that there might perhaps be a public information meeting where citizens could learn about things like solar panels, windmills, and how those would affect the town.

Cook and Frazier went on to discuss the possibility of a holiday, or amnesty, for late fees. Frazier noted that a house with its water shut off is not providing the city with any revenue, and that it would be better to have belated water and sewer payments than no payments at all. Discussion was had regarding habitual late-payers and first-timers for late payments, and whether these patterns could be determined. Vigliotti noted that he would change the sequence of information on the water bill flyer to first explain the fact that the city is ready and willing to assist citizens with structuring the payment of their water and sewer bills. Wilson noted that new growth for the town in terms of new houses is a good thing, but that one of the reasons the purchasing of new homes is slow is because the houses themselves are too expensive for many to afford.

Comments were then heard from members of the attending public. Frazier expressed concern that the rules of the committee seemed to forbid public discussion at the end of the committee meetings. Foster assured that the public was allowed to speak at the end of each meeting, but not during the course of the meeting. An individual would have to specifically request time on the agenda in order to speak during the meeting. Vigliotti noted that the rules of the committee should reflect the fact that the public has the right to comment at the end of the meeting by way of an addition to the rules, and a general agreement was had by all on this point.

It was decided by the committee as a whole that a list of short-term ideas should be presented to the Mayor and City Council at large to be voted upon, in addition to a long-range set of ideas. Vigliotti volunteered to compose the short-term list and present it at the next committee meeting for committee approval.

With no further business, the committee meeting was adjourned at 11:21 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Joe Vigliotti
Taneytown Water and Sewer Committee Recording Secretary
Taneytown City Councilman