

TANEYTOWN WATER AND SEWER COMMITTEE

MINUTES – Tuesday, August 25, 2015

Committee In Attendance:

Barbara Cook

Diane Foster, Mayor Pro Tem, Committee Chair

Don Frazier, Councilman

Jackie Jones

Joe Vigliotti, Councilman, Recording Secretary

Gail Wilson

The meeting convened at 10:02 AM in City Council Chambers Conference Room.

Mayor Pro Tem Diane Foster opened the Taneytown Water and Sewer Committee opened its second meeting with information that had previously been sought by the committee. She reported that Dee Wilson met with Rick Weaver to tour the town's wastewater treatment facility on Monday, and that observations and results of the tour would be available at the next meeting. Foster explained that all outstanding failed batteries were slated to be replaced by the end of the month, and that homeowners where such batteries were present were notified by green stickers affixed to the homes ~~–proof of the influence of the committee to date.~~

Foster went on to explain that the city has put out for bids for a new billing system for water and sewer use. The new system being sought will be able to elaborate on billing particulars, such as if the bill is being estimated due to a failed battery. Foster also revealed that questions specifically answerable by Bobbi-Jo Fout will have to be delayed until September as the city is undergoing a routine audit. Foster also revealed that questions cannot be posed to homeowners as to why they are not paying water and sewer bills, as this would constitute an invasion of privacy. If homeowners are unable to pay their bills, they must contact the city office to arrange payment installments.

Foster revealed that citizens can indeed make payments by credit or debit card –but there is a surcharge for this service. Foster also noted that amnesty for late fees could cause a budget shortfall of \$40,000 for an entire year, or approximately \$10,000 for one quarter of amnesty. Councilman

Joe Vigliotti explained that fee amnesty would be a one-time thing, and would only be for the last quarter. Unpaid bills would themselves still have to be paid. Gail Wilson questioned whether the city should be basing its budget on fees that may or may not be collected. It was generally agreed that the city should reconsider the method of budgeting using potential late fees. **Foster noted that this is a generally accepted accounting practice.**

The committee then moved into member reports. Wilson began by explaining that she has been continuing to research grant opportunities and to establish contacts for grants, such as being directed by Chris Garrison to pursue an Indoor Plumbing Program (IPP) grant. Wilson revealed that other grants were also possible, such as a community block grant provided that certain conditions were met. Among these conditions were the requirement that 51% of a city's residents be at or below the median income level.

The idea of pursuing the bulk purchase of low-flow toilets for citizens was discussed. Wilson revealed that Lowes would be willing to slash rates for toilets by 15%. The cost for 500 toilets at a rate of ~~\$09~~ **\$109** per toilet would require some \$60,000, and would definitely require a grant. The city would then act as a middle-agent between citizens wishing to receive a toilet, and the receipt of the grant. Barbara Cook expressed concern about the government being involved in a potential operation of this kind. Foster and Vigliotti asked about toilet storage, and what would be done with extra toilets. Wilson said that these toilets would have to be stored.

Wilson went on to explain that should a toilet program be enacted, the city must publicize it to let citizens know they have options. Cook questioned whether or not landlords should receive this deal. Wilson believed they should. Councilman Don Frazier suggested extending the same deal to business owners. Vigliotti requested more information for what benefits a municipality that has gone green could qualify, and if such a municipality would have some sort of special status.

Cook then moved into her report. Her meeting scheduled with Bobbi-Jo will be rescheduled pending conclusion of the city's audit. She reiterated the importance of twenty-year battery life, and that it is the city's responsibility to stay on top of replacements. The committee unanimously agreed on this point. Wilson brought up the idea of restitution for homeowners who have had their bills estimated in the past. It was agreed that restitution would be difficult. Vigliotti suggested the fee amnesty might serve as some kind of restitution, an effort on the part of the city to try to make things right. Cook and Frazier agreed that a 10% late fee is too high. A discussion then ensued

about making battery failure notices more obvious on water and sewer bills. Foster noted that the city's search for new billing software includes this condition.

Frazier next moved into his committee report. He related to the committee a series of information requests necessary for the study of a structural plan to reduce water and sewer rates. Frazier provided a copy of the e-mailed information request to the members of the committee. Frazier acknowledged and thanked City Manager Henry Heine for his assistance in seeking to coordinate with the respective members of the city government to provide the information at a future date.

Vigliotti then presented the draft version of the Water and Sewer Committee's "Initial Actions Project". Copies were distributed to each committee member for review. The report listed three short-term actions the Mayor and City Council may take in order to provide a form of immediate relief and assistance to citizens in need of help. The report was well-received, and Vigliotti indicated he would alter and update the battery meter replacement action item. It was also agreed by the committee at large to add a fourth option to the report for an M.E.S. efficiency study of the wastewater treatment facilities. Vigliotti agreed to do this, indicating he would e-mail an updated version of the report to all committee members.

Questions and comments were then taken from the audience. Support of the M.E.S. efficiency study was voiced. Questions about the water meters themselves –if they have to be calibrated or maintained –were raised. Foster indicated she would be in touch with Rick Weaver to determine this. It was also noted that the Davenport report suggested the city only budget for \$26,000 in late fees, rather than the aforementioned \$40,000. A question was raised about the selling of clean water and wastewater. Vigliotti noted that this was one of the mid-term and long-range goals of the committee, and was listed in the "Initial Actions Project". Wilson noted that residential growth and new homes would be important to relief at large for citizens. She noted that affordable housing would be key to this.

With no further business, the committee meeting was adjourned at 11:15 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

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