

TANEYTOWN WATER AND SEWER COMMITTEE

MINUTES – Tuesday, August 4, 2015

Committee In Attendance:

Barbara Cook

Diane Foster, Mayor Pro Tem, Committee Chair

Jackie Jones

Joe Vigliotti, Councilman

Gail Wilson

Guest Speaker in Attendance:

Jim McCarron, Mayor

In Absence:

Don Frazier, Councilman

Meeting convened at 10:08 AM in City Council Chambers Conference Room.

The Taneytown Water and Sewer Committee opened its inaugural meeting with an introduction and statement by Mayor McCarron. He provided a brief history of water and sewer fees. McCarron also expressed his hope that the committee would seek to address the concerns and issues facing the people of the City of Taneytown relating to water and sewer rates. He noted that research regarding sustainable micro-grid communities is underway, and could potentially save the city ten percent on its electric bills.

Mayor Pro Tem Diane Foster provided an introduction and agenda, expressing her hope in the committee's pending work and research. Foster provided a handout containing Ground Rules for the committee which were then reviewed by the committee at large. Foster also provided a handout containing notes written by Councilman Angelo Zambetti which laid out important points needing to be addressed with specific reference to lowering water and sewer rates. Foster moved on to certain appointed roles within the committee. Foster requested Councilman Joe Vigliotti assume the role of Recording Secretary. Vigliotti accepted. Foster named Councilman Don Frazier to head up the water and sewer rate strategic reduction plan. Foster volunteered to act as liaison between the committee and the city offices as information is required or requested. She noted that city staff could be brought into meetings as needed. Previously determined appointments included Gail Wilson to study agencies to provide assistance to citizens; and Barbara Cook to study monthly water bills.

The floor was opened up for discussion. Foster suggested the committee be an informal ideas committee to engender discussion without having to rely on a voting method. Jackie Jones requested definition of the mission of the Water and Sewer Committee. Vigliotti suggested that the overall goal, by whatever method possible, be relief and assistance to citizens. It was agreed by all that there were many such methods possible. Foster suggested that perhaps a subcommittee might be formed to tackle the strategic plan for reducing water and sewer rates.

Various issues, concerns, and ideas were discussed at length. Cook brought up the issue of dead batteries (numbering 217) in water meters, and false readings obtained therein. She suggested that the city begin a concerted effort to replace these batteries within a set amount of time, or a citizen group could do so if the city could not. Wilson suggested amnesty for late fees in order to help people stay on track with water bills, and to alleviate financial pressure. Jones suggested the potential of determining why citizens were late in paying water and sewer bills.

Foster reminded the group that the city will work with distressed citizens to formulate payment plans. It was agreed that greater informational outreach was needed. Vigliotti suggested a small flyer be stapled to the water bills which explained options citizens have for paying their bills, and to make sure to check their bill stubs for notifications to see if their batteries have died. Wilson suggested the possibility of grants to assist citizens in obtaining low-water-use plumbing appliances. Foster pointed out that the city has tablets available to test for leaks. Vigliotti suggested this information also be included on the flyer. Vigliotti volunteered to provide an example of what a flyer may look like. Wilson suggested applying for grants for a rain barrel program for the citizens of town.

A point noted was that any revenue lost by lowering water and sewer rates, or from a reduction in water and sewer use, would have to be regained elsewhere. Vigliotti stated that there are various options for generating additional revenue, such as selling wastewater. Vigliotti referenced the NSA initiative of using waste water to cool equipment, etc. Cook requested further information on new development growth in the city, and how this might affect future revenue. Foster and Vigliotti explained that the city currently budgets for zero growth, so any significant growth is a benefit. Foster agreed to gather additional information on new houses. Cook suggested the possibility of revisiting the Davenport report on city finances in the future since economic and financial situations have changed. Foster added that the minimal growth and surplus is insignificant to the overall budget.

It was agreed by all that a serious effort is needed to bring relief to the citizens of Taneytown. It was revealed that many citizens are seeking to save money by buying thirty-cent gallon containers of water; and it was also noted that some citizens are sharing water from a hose. Vigliotti said that these examples demonstrate the hardships that many citizens are facing. All agreed. Wilson suggested organizing methods for relief into short-term and long-term goals. It was agreed that short-term goals include flyers on water bills publicizing payment plans, tablets for leaks, and dead batteries; research into grants; and amnesty for late fees. Long-term goals included the strategic plan for water and sewer rate reduction.

The committee members reiterated their optimism and dedication to helping the citizens of town. 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