



**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Water and Sewer Authority**

Board of Directors

**Customer and Community Services Committee
Tuesday, September 16, 2008**

11:00 a.m.

Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present

Alan J. Roth
Howard Gibbs
Joseph Cotruvo

WASA Staff Present

Jerry N. Johnson, General Manager
Charles Kiely, Ass't GM, Customer Service
Avis M. Russell, General Counsel
Gordon Fry, Government Relations Directors
Jay McCoskey, Customer Service Director
Mujib Lodhi, Information Technology Director
Linda R. Manley, Board Secretary

Call to Order

Mr. Roth called the meeting to order at approximately 11:01 a.m.

Staff introduced two new employees Mr. Ranjit Thomas, Director, Process Improvement and Performance Measures and Ms. Lauren Foley, Customer Service Lead, who will be working on the customer side of the Impervious Area Billing project.

Broadcasting Board Meetings Update

- **Relocation of Board Meetings to Judiciary Square**

Mr. Hemphill reported that the Public Affairs staff along with the Board Secretary did a site visit of 441 First St, NW in response to a suggestion on the possibility of using this facility to webcast/telecast WASA Board meetings and provided the following summary:

- **Availability** – the Offices of the Mayor, City Administrator and the District Council have preference for use of this space which is otherwise scheduled on a first come, first serve basis. As of September 16, 2008 the Chamber is available on the first Thursday of each month beginning January 2009.

- ▶ **Pre-Meeting Accessibility** – The Chamber is available to DCWASA for meeting set-up and preparation no earlier than 7:30 am the day of the meeting. This would create a challenge for staff to set-up prior to the start of the Board meeting and would provide little flexibility for committee meetings scheduled prior to the Board meeting, which is not an uncommon occurrence.
- ▶ **Space Design & Use** – The dais is designed to seat 13 individuals, which would not accommodate the full board and senior staff. Camera angles are fixed on the dais and witness table, meaning that even if the senior staff were to sit at the witness table, another row of dais seating added below the main dais (at unknown cost) to accommodate all alternates would not be visible to the existing cameras. In addition, food and drinks are prohibited in the Chamber or the adjacent spaces.
- ▶ **Transportation/Parking** – This location is Metro accessible and does have an underground parking garage. However, parking in this garage is limited. Additional public parking is available within a one-mile radius for a cost ranging from \$12.00 to \$20.00.
- ▶ **Staffing** – Excluding the Office of the Secretary (Board), DCWASA personnel attending Board meetings range from 48 to 50, depending upon the agenda. Additional considerations relevant to staffing include ready access to equipment (copy machine, internet, computer, and printer), other staff, and electronic and non-electronic documents relevant to Board discussions and/or inquiries.

In response to a question regarding the 11th floor conference room at 441 First Street, staff informed the Committee that the cameras are not working and that this room is currently not being scheduled for use. Mr. Roth also noted that the current by-laws require Board meetings to be held at Blue Plains, so that a by-law amendment would be necessary to implement such a move.

In light of all of the challenges and complications associated with this option, the Committee unanimously agreed not to forward a recommendation to the Full Board to move the Board meetings to 441 First Street, NW at this time. The Committee also noted that it is prepared to explore other options and/or suggestions from Board members with regards to alternate meeting spaces in other DC Government or downtown locations.

- **Portable Video Equipment**

Mr. Hemphill reported that in addition to the estimated cost of \$28,300 for the purchase of stationary equipment for the WASA Board room, the cost of the portable video equipment is approximately \$27,300, which does not include the cost for staff training and an operator. Mr. Johnson noted that due to the rapid change and cost of portable

equipment and due to the limited number of Board related meetings held off site, staff is recommending that the portable video equipment not be purchased at this time. The General Manager recommended that WASA continue to use Channel 16 or other commercial vendors for off site recordings of Board related meetings.

The Committee raised questions as to whether the purchase of the portable equipment would be an adequate substitute for the stationary equipment, (i.e. is the portable system cost effective, of the same production quality and as flexible as the stationary system). Staff agreed to provide an answer to this inquiry by email before the October meeting.

Public Information Requests

- **Scott FOIA – Update**

Ms. Russell gave the Committee an update on the Scott FOIA. She reported that Mr. Scott was notified that his request was ready for pick-up by email and by certified mailed. She also indicated that Mr. Scott would need to pay a total of \$10.50 which covers the search and copy fees and is required by regulation before WASA can release the documents. Mr. Roth stated that he contacted Mr. Scott after the July 2008 Committee meeting to inform him that his information was ready for pick up and was advised by Mr. Scott that because WASA's process was so lengthy, he obtained the documents from other sources.

Ms. Russell also brought to the Committee's attention that the status of Mr. Scott's request remains open in spite of the fact that he may never pick up the documents and that will affect the overall FOIA report. She noted that EPA gives their requestors deadlines for submitting payment for their requests and consider the request closed if the requestor has not responded by that date. The Committee agreed that it would not have a problem with WASA setting a reasonable deadline for closing requests after the requests have been appropriately responded to. However, the Committee reminded staff that the focus should be on the front end of the process to prevent delays.

- **Written Management Policy – Update**

Mr. Johnson noted that he is still of the view that a Board policy for FOIA requests is not necessary and that monitoring the processes based on the procedures the Committee previous outlined would be helpful in demonstrating that staff is responsive and on top of FOIA requests. Ms. Russell added that the vast majority of FOIA requests received are simple requests and are responded to in a timely manner. She also noted that occasionally WASA receives FOIA requests that require extensive research and that once the information has been gathered an attorney has to review it to make sure that WASA is not releasing anything that is privileged. In addition, the General Counsel's Office has acquired new software which provides a quicker method to redact documents.

Mr. Gibbs pointed out that the one thing that seems to be missing out of the procedural plan is a method of tracking the status of FOIAs. Ms. Russell noted that General Counsel's Office is near completion of a database which will allow its personnel to view the status of various jobs including FOIAs and will also have the capability of producing various reports.

There was additional discussion and various opinions on the processes followed with the Renner Case and DOH Case and whether there is a need for a Board policy or a management policy in dealing with FOIA requests. The Committee unanimously consented to request staff to prepare a written policy that is consistent with the philosophy of the Public Information Policy and promotes openness and transparency. Ms. Russell noted that the executive staff has discussed developing administrative policies and procedures that cover a wide array of topics that are not department specific and that this issue could be incorporated as one of the topics. Due to the urgency of the request, Mr. Johnson noted that staff would make this issue a priority.

Document Management and Electronic Retention Policy

Mr. Lodhi gave a brief status on the records management program. He noted that after benchmarking several federal, local and other agencies, WASA has developed a records management program that includes a records management policy, a records retention schedule and a guidelines and procedures manual. He then reviewed the process as outlined in a handout that was distributed and which described in detail six elements (see attached). In addition he noted that staff met with other departments and reviewed the law to make sure that there were no inconsistencies with the policy. He stated that staff is now ready to brief the General Manager and upon his approval publish the documents within the next couple of weeks.

Departmental Reports/Updates

- **Government Relations**

Mr. Fry updated the Committee on the 2009 Appropriations Legislation. He stated that appropriations for the beginning of 2009 would be part of a continuing resolution, and that the CSO appropriations would have to wait for the individual appropriation bills to be considered after January 2009 under the new President.

Mr. Fry noted that, in anticipation of legislation in Congress next year, he and Mr. Chris Peot, Biosolids Manager, will be meeting with the Virginia and Maryland Congressional delegation educating them on WASA's Biosolids project.

Mr. Fry informed the Committee that he is organizing a stakeholders meeting to develop a strategy on how WASA can get appropriations under WRDA. He noted that \$85 million was authorized for CSO and infrastructure, but Congress did not appropriate any money even though six members of Congress may request money.

- **Customer Service**

Mr. McCoskey reported that Customer Service had 905 small meters left to replace and that staff launched a significant campaign by sending letters and placing message on customer bills in an effort to reduce this number. As a result of this effort, 150 meters have been scheduled and replaced. Additionally, one of the Customer Service Managers has been going door to door in an attempt to schedule the remaining meter replacements.

Mr. McCoskey noted that customers can now pay by check through IVR and that the average number of customers who have been using this option per month is about 1400-1500.

He also pointed out that call types and call volumes remain consistent and that WASA set a record this reporting period by answering all customer service calls in 40 seconds or less. He also noted that WASA has begun placing thank you notes on customer bills that elect to round-up or contribute to SPLASH as a way of showing appreciation for the efforts. The Committee asked staff to include contribution received and payout amounts for SPLASH in next month's report. Mr. Roth also reminded staff of a request made several months ago to display in the monthly report a 12-month overview of call types.

- **Public Affairs**

Mr. Lodhi reported that the website project is on track and that WASA is in the development stage and expects to go live by the 1st week of December.

Public Affairs staff also noted that World Monitoring Day, a worldwide event for children promoting awareness of water resources, will be on Thursday, September 18th.

Other Business

The Committee was then invited to watch two short videos. The first was a PBS Documentary video on Liquid Assets, which discusses water infrastructures. The second, made in collaboration with the DC Fire Department, discussed ESRI, a handheld device which captures data transmitted from the field in virtual real time and then can be uploaded and published within an hour.

Hearing no other business, Mr. Roth adjourned the meeting at approximately 1:12 p.m.