

CARROLL COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
MINUTES OF UTILITIES ADVISORY COUNCIL
September 24, 2009
Westminster Senior Center
125 Stoner Avenue
Westminster, Maryland 21157
7 p.m.

Attendees: *Council:* Michael Wilmore (representing Freedom District), Kathy Everly (Bark Hill), Dena Bauer (Hampstead), Leah Ann McCormick (Freedom District), Matt Candland (Water Resource Coordination Council)

County Staff: Mike Evans, Director of Public Works; Frank Schaeffer, Deputy Director of Public Works; Sheree Lima, Public Works Financial Manager; Joe Barrington, Utilities Bureau Chief; Rob Burk, Comptroller; Tom Devilbiss, Deputy Director of Planning; Robin Hooper, Budget Analyst; Jenny Hobbs, Financial Analyst, Comptroller's Office; Penny Gist, Administrative Office Associate II, Public Works

This was the initial meeting of the council. The formation of the council was adopted by the Carroll County Board of Commissioners on December 11, 2008 (see enclosure). The council will review and make comment on all aspects of the operations of the utilities, including, but not limited to the development and review of: 1. water and sewer master plans; 2. annually adopted capital and operating budgets; 3. water and sewer rate model and annually calculated rates (usage rates, area connection charges, and maintenance fees); and 4. customer concerns.

· Mike Evans opened the meeting by distributing the agenda and having everyone introduce themselves. He explained that the council, as users of the utility systems, will provide guidance and make recommendations to County staff. The council has no directive authority. All meetings of the council are subject to the Maryland Open Meetings Act; will be advertised and open to the public. Members of the council may be asked to complete a financial disclosure statement, which is distributed by the Carroll County Ethics Commission.

· Mr. Evans went over the role of regulations.

The Clean Water Act is the federal law that governs water pollution. It applies to the county's wastewater treatment plant discharges.

Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) is the primary regulator of the county's utility systems. The county basically self-reports. MDE is delegated its authority by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The Carroll County Department of Planning develops the Water and Sewer Master Plan. Carroll County Department of Public Works operates the facilities. Development causes changes in the plan.

· Mr. Schaeffer explained the utility systems in the county, using the Water and Sewer Service Area maps. The municipalities operate the systems within their borders, with the exception of the Hampstead sewer system and the Sykesville water and sewer systems,

which are operated by the county. Maryland Environmental Service (MES) operates the Freedom District Wastewater Treatment Plant. The land that the Freedom District Water Treatment Plant is on is leased from Baltimore City. The county operates small sewer systems at Runnymede Elementary School, South Carroll High School and Pleasant Valley and small water systems at Bark Hill, Pleasant Valley and Bramble Hills. The Freedom District systems are larger than all other systems combined.

· Mr. Barrington explained the creation and distribution of potable water and gave an overview of the operation and maintenance challenges.

Freedom District Water Treatment Plant: The water system consists of a 7 million gallons per day (mgd) water plant, two wells, four water storage tanks and 120 miles of distribution lines. The plant was recently upgraded with membrane filter technology, which better purifies the water. Chlorine is added for disinfection purposes. Usage varies by seasons. Elevation issues can cause erratic water pressure. Elevated tanks are used to maintain the pressure. Materials used to construct plants, tanks, lines, etc., get old, and suffer from the elements and deteriorate. Currently, we are trying to replace 25 fire hydrants per year. We test residences for leaks. There are hourly testing requirements at the plant.

The small water systems consists of wells with meters that register how long the pumps run. Tank levels are monitored. Daily inspections are made.

· Mr. Wilmore asked if the tanks get stagnant. – Mr. Barrington responded that because there is a continuous process of water exchange, there is no risk of stagnation.

· Mr. Wilmore asked if there is 2 day water supply available in the tank. - Mr. Barrington said yes.

· Ms. McCormick asked if the infrastructure is the same age. – No. The Freedom Water Treatment Plant construction began in the 1970's; by 1975 the plant was on-line. The expansion was complete, 2009. In 1995, growth in the region caused a major expansion of the pipe system; some meters were replaced at times and are currently being replaced.

· Ms. Bauer asked about the condition of the pipes. - The ductile iron water mains are lined with concrete and can withstand 250 pounds of pressure per square inch. Copper pipes are subject to more corrosion. Some of the pipes are cast iron, which is not as flexible and this causes problems.

· Mr. Barrington explained the receiving and processing of sewage and gave an overview of the operation and maintenance challenges.

Collection systems run downhill from homes to pumping stations. The pump systems lift the sewerage to the top of hills and allow it to travel by gravity to the treatment plants. There are 11 pumping stations. Each is equipped with generator backups.

Problems arise when tree roots cause breaks in sewer pipes and grease and other non-disposable items enter the system.

The Bark Hill water system serves the community and the Francis Scott Key High School. Daily routine inspections and maintenance is performed on all the small systems.

· Mr. Wilmore inquired about the Clean Water Act and the effect of changing their standards. Mr. Evans said the county pays for about 80% of upgrades and operation at the Freedom Wastewater Treatment Plant. Our share of enhanced nutrient removal will be \$10,000,000.

· Mr. Schaeffer stated that at Hampstead Wastewater Treatment Plant there is a temperature limit on effluent discharge. High temperatures cause downstream effects.

· Mr. Wilmore asked what the temperature limit is. – Mr. Schaeffer responded 20°C is the permit requirement. Mr. Evans noted the county signed a Consent Order agreement regarding the temperature limits. Mr. Schaeffer said the county is trying to obtain a permit to discharge at a higher temperature. The county has had a temperature limit since 2004. Ms. Bauer noted that Baltimore County is having an issue with limits.

· Mr. Evans stated that tours of the treatment plants and pumping stations can be arranged.

· Mr. Schaeffer explained the Utilities Acronyms and Definitions list to the council.

· Mr. Wilmore asked if MES competes with private firms. – Mr. Schaeffer stated MES does not bid on projects, but submits proposals upon request. MES is a service agency, not a regulatory agency; they are an operator. They are the same as the county providing utilities operations and services. Mr. Evans noted that the South Carroll and Runnymede systems were operated by MES before the county took over. Those systems are owned by the Board of Education. MES owns and operates the Freedom Wastewater Treatment Plant.

· Ms. Lima presented the Bureau of Utilities Overview, which she had emailed to the council.

Carroll County's Bureau of Utilities operates as an enterprise fund. Users of the systems support the fund, not taxes. The enterprise fund is separate from the general fund. The major source of operating revenue is from customer bills, which are mailed quarterly. The rate model is based on a 3 tier system, so higher users pay a higher rate. She further explained how the tier system works and then moved on to area connection charges (ACC), which are fees to new users, which pays for growth.

· Mr. Burk said the county is trying to build equity and water conservation into the rate structure.

· Ms. Lima continued by going over the maintenance fee, which is the front foot benefit assessment; bonds, which are sold to fund capital accounts; debt service charge, which is repaying a loan due to the Freedom Wastewater Treatment Plant 1993 upgrade. The Bureau of Utilities took on the debt from the Bark Hill system, so a front foot benefit assessment was established for those users. The Bay Restoration Fee is a state charge (county collects it, state receives it).

· Mr. Wilmore asked where that fee actually goes. – Mr. Schaeffer said it's redistributed to various operators/counties for upgrades of the treatment processes.

· Ms. Bauer asked if the debt stays with the house when it's sold. – Yes.

· Ms. Everly brought up the subject of corner lots being assessed on both sides. – Mr. Evans noted the average of the two sides determines the front foot benefit assessment. There is a formula.

· Mr. Burk distributed copies of Utilities Proposed Rates to Support Operating and Capital Budgets for FY10.

He oversees billing and collection and customer relations, and deals with the calculation and setting of rates and maintenance and staffing cost projections. He explained the multiple rate structures and the challenges. Maintenance fees are a sensitive area with customers. It costs to own, operate and maintain systems. We try to determine a mechanism of allocation between existing and future users that produces equity and fairness. We continue to work with past methods.

The rate structure went into effect in 2001. We use operating and capital funds and cost projections to ensure the availability of funds for projects. National trends are reviewed to see what's working. Operations offer fiscal challenges, then environmental issues, new projects and other items that affect rates sometimes come into play. Rates are annually evaluated to meet the needs and the long-term fiscal health of the systems. The rate structure is adjusted as costs are identified.

· Mr. Candland mentioned that consumers are willing to pay a lot for bottled water but rail at rate increases.

· Mr. Evans asked for comment from Ms. Hooper from a Budget Office standpoint. She noted that interest revenue is down. Customers are using less water, but you still need to treat it. Bottom line, cost is up and revenue is down.

· Mr. Evans noted that Mr. Devilbiss is not only the Deputy Director of Planning; he is also a hydrogeologist, a “water resource finder”. Mr. Devilbiss stated the Planning Department oversees the County Water and Sewer Master Plan, which shows the designation and formation of growth areas. Staff develops the master plan and presents it to the Planning and Zoning Commission who reviews/comments/approves. Then the plan is adopted by the Board of Commissioners.

The county is currently working through the “Pathways Plan” (Pathways to Carroll's Future Landscape draft comprehensive plan). Areas of the county are being reviewed and growth is being designated. All types of water resources elements are considered; i.e., stormwater run-off, utilities.

He noted that Mr. Candland serves on the Water Resources Coordination Council, which determines how resources are developed at the planning stage.

· Mr. Candland stated you can't just use the water. It has to be allocated.

· Ms. McCormick asked if a comprehensive plan involving service areas has been completed. Mr. Devilbiss noted that the 2 maps presented earlier show the plans.

· Mr. Wilmore asked if they are 5 year plans. Mr. Devilbiss explained that the length of the plans vary by area. The state wants 20 years out for a comprehensive plan. Land uses are designated during the process, i.e., residential, commercial, industrial. We are trying to compact it.

· Mr. Wilmore questioned if the 8,000± customers includes businesses. Mr. Evans responded it is physical connections, therefore businesses are included.

· Mr. Evans asked the council to choose a council chair, who will conduct future meetings, assist in agenda planning, and meet the goals of the council as set forth by the Board of Commissioners. The council will determine how frequently to meet, the types of meetings to hold and guests to invite.

The rest of the staff attendees were dismissed and the council met to discuss the above.

The council chose Mr. Wilmore to be Chair; Ms. McCormick to be Vice-Chair. They will meet monthly initially. They would like to do a plant tour. Meetings on the 4th Thursday work at 7 p.m.

Remaining schedule: (note that November/December meetings held on 3rd Thursdays)

10/22/09	North Carroll Sr. Center, 2328 Hanover Pike, Greenmount (large craft room).
11/19/09	South Carroll Sr. Center (currently at 5745 Bartholow Rd., Sykesville-will probably be at new location, 5928 Mineral Hill Rd.)
12/17/09	Westminster Sr. Center
1/28/10	NCSC
2/25/10	SCSC
3/25/10	WSC
4/22/10	NCSC
5/27/10	SCSC
6/24/10	WSC
7/22/10	NCSC
8/26/10	SCSC
9/23/10	WSC
10/28/10	NCSC
11/18/10	SCSC
12/16/10	WSC

Enclosures:

1. Board of County Commissioners' charge to the council
2. List of council members with phone and email information
3. Master Plan for Water & Sewerage, September 2007
4. Tentative Budget Schedule

H:\pgist\FORMS\UTILITIES\Utilities Advisory Council Minutes\9-24-09initial.doc