

Stafford County Utilities Commission

Adopted Meeting Minutes – December 10, 2019

A/B/C Conference Room
1300 Courthouse Road
Stafford, VA 22554

- I. Call to Order – Mr. Tignor called the meeting to order at 7:14 p.m.
- II. Roll Call – The following members were present: Joyce Arndt, Moses Boulden, William Tignor, Mike Makee arrived at 7:28 p.m. and Kent Carson arrived at 7:34 p.m., Ms. Mickey Kwiatkowski and Mr. Alan Glazeman were absent.
- III. Approval of Minutes – Due to a lack of a quorum (only two members were present), there were no minutes taken at the November 12, 2019 meeting.
- IV. Presentations by the Public – no members of the Public were at the meeting.
- V. Reports by Commission Members – no Commissioners gave a report.
- VI. Director's Report – Jason Towery
Mr. Towery provided a Customer Service update including November, 2019 delinquencies, \$631,850.08. Paul Santay reported that 75% of the delinquencies were from tenants/renters. He continues to work with the Treasurer's Office on using wage liens to recoup delinquent funds. The process was slowed down due to the recent election of the Treasurer but is in the works and Mr. Santay will provide a report at the next Utilities Commission meeting.

Mr. Towery reviewed items approved by the Board at its November 19, 2019 meeting including a contract amendment for engineering services during construction of the Smith Lake filter repair project, and execution of a contract for construction of the Lower Accokeek Pump Station (to W.C. Spratt, Inc. for \$3,768,344.00).

At its December 17, 2019 meeting, the Board is asked to consider the purchase of a replacement crane truck (the old one died in October); a referral to the Utilities Commission regarding an ordinance amendment to include language in County Code Sec. 25-111 regarding the authority for the County Administrator to appoint a designee to authorize credits for excessive water and sewer charges; contract authorization to purchase UV lights for the Aquia WWTP; and Mr. Towery noted that the public hearing on alternative discharge systems, originally scheduled for 12/17/19, was moved to January 21, 2020.

The Field Operations update noted that all facilities were in compliance with their permits; and the Aquia WWTP received a new, five-year discharge permit from DEQ. Field Operations staff is completing a uni-directional flushing of Grafton Village and Ferry Farm.

The Capital Construction update noted that the Wayside Interceptor would be completed later in December; the Claiborne Run Interceptor project is complete; the Claiborne Run Parallel Force Main, Phase 1a completion will be later in December; work began on Phase 1 of the 342-05 pressure zone transmission line north; work also started on the Lower Accokeek gravity force main and pump station project; and the replacement of centrifuge 1 at Aquia WWTP will be advertised later this month.

Mr. Towery concluded his remarks noting that it was the last meeting in 2019 and was Mr. Makee's last meeting. He thanked Mr. Makee for his service and told Commission members that the Stafford County Christmas ornament was a small token of staff's appreciation for the guidance given to them over the past year.

VII. New Business – Utilities 5-Year Plan – Jason Towery

Mr. Towery gave a Power Point presentation on the Utilities Fund 5-Year Plan, which he said was presented to the Board on November 19, 2019 and in the future would be presented each fall to the Board and the Utilities Commission.

By the numbers, the County has 711 miles of waterline; 541 miles of sewer line, 5,933 hydrants, 12,716 manholes, 3.45 billion gallons of drinking water was treated, 3.22 billion gallons of sewage was treated, there are 38,165 water customers and 34,918 sewer customers. The growth rate is 8.7% and the total system value is \$9.65 million. Mr. Tignor asked how the numbers compared with five years ago. Mr. Towery said that these statistics were fairly new and were not kept five years ago so he didn't have those statistics.

The presentation continued with the Department's five-year goals including implementation of the Master Plan changes into the CIP; creation and funding of a water and sewer pipe replacement program; implementation of a fats, oils, and grease (FOG) rehabilitation program; creation and funding of a capital pump station rehab program; funding an inflow and infiltration (I&I) reduction program; and beginning a five-year uni-directional flushing program. Mr. Towery noted that the Department was well on its way to meeting many of these goals.

Accomplishments included adopting a Master Plan in May 2018 (it was the first update in ten years); allocating \$20 million to 3R projects in the FY2019 and FY2020 CIP; and 11,000' of pipe that was lined rather than being replaced, which saved the County nearly \$3.4 million. 4,377 linear feet of waterline was replaced and upgraded at a saving of \$880,000 and the project savings more than supported the salaries of the 4-man pipe crews. It only took approximately

30% of the worker's time leaving 70% for staff to work on other projects and maintenance. 180 miles of pipe were flushed in two years (25% of the total system). 5,358 hydrants were exercised and inspected, filters were rebuilt at Smith Lake WTP, which necessitated bringing down the Plant to 50% capacity and was a very delicate operation. The old Courthouse water tank was decommissioned and the new Courthouse water tank was brought on-line, resulting in better water pressure and better water quality.

The County participated in nationwide AWWA Utility Benchmarking, which surveyed 157 water and wastewater utilities including Fairfax Water, the Prince William County Service Authority, Loudoun Water, Henrico, Hanover, and Chesterfield counties. Comparisons were made as to cost of service and financial metrics, employee turnover and training, staffing levels, and operations. The survey revealed that Stafford is in good shape with operations and maintenance costs per customer account but not so much with the renewal and replacement percentage, which is less than half the median investment level. The planned maintenance ratio was too low showing that the Department remains reactive, not proactive. The score for the number of sewer overflows per 100 mile of pipe was high but water system leaks and breaks per 100 miles was low although that could change as the infrastructure ages.

Employee turn-over is low but the percentage of the workforce eligible for retirement is high. Training hours are low and emergency response readiness training is also low. 40% of the current Public Works staff will be eligible for retirement within the next five years and there has to be a focus on training and readiness. Mr. Tignor asked if training was in-house or outside the organization. Mr. Towery replied that it could be both and cited OSHA training as an example of outside training. Mr. Chris Edwards talked about line crews and on-the-job training whereas wastewater requires state-sponsored training. Mr. Tignor asked if retirees could be brought back to help with training needs; Mr. Towery agreed and said that has been done in the past. He spoke about doing a knowledge assessment that would capture, gather, and retain staff training in a two-part process.

Mr. Towery noted that of the \$5 million replacement budget, only \$2.5 million is used due to staffing levels. Sewer overflows were higher in 2019 due to the high rainfall levels. Mr. Carson asked about the \$2.5 million and Mr. Towery explained that was what the County was in a position to accomplish and/or bid out to other contractors, workers, and project managers.

A key action item resulting from the benchmarking study was the need to develop (or enhance) the County's asset management strategy to increase investments into condition assessments, increase investments in to the 3R program, and increase the percentage of planned maintenance. It also includes succession planning and core operations support and enhanced staffing for finance, human resources and information technology based on staffing levels at peer Utilities.

When presented to the Board, Mr. Towery said he discussed the Department's strategic focus including healthy system growth, 3R and asset management, knowledge management and succession planning, environmental compliance, and financial sustainability. He said the Board asked questions about the recommended new positions and Mr. Towery provided an explanation as to why each position was needed and the upcoming years in which those positions should be filled. Positions in FY2021 include a 3R project manager, a property acquisition specialist (split 50/50 between Utilities and Transportation), a recruitment/training specialist, a senior accounting technician, and a 3R/asset manager. In FY2022, there will be a need for a civil engineer (operations), another GIS technician, a pre-treatment inspector, and a water sampler. In FY2023, customer service will require additional representatives; there will be a need for additional maintenance mechanics, a plant mechanic, and a safety specialist. Mr. Carson asked about the graphs presented on the Power Point and Mr. Towery provided an expanded explanation about the ideal situation for the County to be in as displayed by the charts. Mr. Carson asked, too, if there were charts for comparison prepared by other localities and Mr. Towery replied that these charts were created in-house and he did not know if other localities had something similar.

Regarding financial sustainability, Mr. Towery said that the Utilities Fund is self-supporting and its financial policies and five-year plan are consistent with the General Fund. The FY2021 budget proposed a 1.5% rate increase in accordance with the Utilities Fund financial policies and is based on the consumer price index (CPI) and a three-year rolling average of 1.45% and also based on increased cost of materials, supplies, labor, and utilities.

The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) proposes approximately \$115 million in new capital investment and reinvestment including \$42 million for water/\$66 million for sewer; 46% economic and development growth of \$53 Million in accordance with the Master Plan. 41% of the CIP project spending is associated with 3R treatment plant upgrades (\$30 million), 3R linear pipe, pump stations, etc. (\$17 million), 8% dedicated to state/federal mandates (\$9 million); and 5% dedicated to contingency, equipment, and vehicles (\$6 million).

Following the presentation, Mr. Tignor noted that the study and presentation took a lot of work and said he was proud of the work being done by the Utilities Department. Mr. Makee asked for the Board's reaction to the red/green diagram for how the County was doing in various areas. Mr. Towery replied that the Board expressed concern at being behind in asset management but they had been kept aware of it so they were not surprised or taken aback. He said the Board's primary concern was in doing the next right thing. Mr. Makee said that Utilities was a victim of its own success and he hoped that the Board paid attention. Mr. Towery said the Department had to finish a risk and resiliency analysis in addition to increasing awareness of outside threats by being proactive and getting ahead of the curve.

VIII. Unfinished Business – FOG Program – Chris Edwards

Deputy Director of Operations, Mr. Chris Edwards, gave a Power Point presentation on the FOG program proposal. He displayed slides of FOG build-ups in pipes in local restaurants and noted that FOG was found in cooked meats, fryer oil, and In dairy projects (including egg nog).

Mr. Edwards said that 50% of sanitary sewer overflows and backups were caused by FOG. Mr. Carson asked about the other 50%. Mr. Edwards responded that it could be roots, stormwater in the system and I & I. He said that FOG control was the key to reducing sanitary sewer overflows and cost the County \$1,634,900 annually including crews, equipment, response time, etc. Mr. Makee asked if FOG built up in the bend in pipes. Mr. Edwards said that FOG collects at the top of the pipe and everything else passes through at the bottom eventually weakening the pipe at its lowest point. Mr. Boulden asked if there were fines imposed for restaurants when the County had to do a clean-out. Mr. Edwards said that part of the proposal was an imposition of fines.

A questionnaire was distributed to the 386 commercial kitchens identified along with a packet of information regarding FOG disposal and best practices. Establishments were required to return the completed questionnaire and there has been a 50% return rate to date. In response to Mr. Carson's question, Mr. Edwards said that the goal needs to be prevention and that chemicals, while very effective in pump stations, needed more testing and evidence for sewer lines.

There were four notices of violations issued in 2019 as a result of one sanitary sewer overflow, one flagged inspection, and two sewer surveys. There have been positive responses from local restaurants including hardware upgrades, the installation of grease containment devices, and staff training. Mr. Edwards noted that residential issues were harder to control and were not addressed in his presentation

The County created a webpage StaffordCountyVA.gov/FOG and in October 38,000 customers received FOG flyers with their bills; a social media campaign started at Thanksgiving working with Briana Hairfield, the Public Works Public Information Officer. Mr. Makee spoke about outreach and asked if they went to the schools and science classes. Mr. Edwards said that it was their intention to visit the schools in the County; that during Trunk or Treat they gave out grease lids in the Halloween bags. Mr. Santay said that when he was in the "stormwater world" they did outreach with the Schools that was very successful. Mr. Tignor asked if the Health Department was on board and if they did training in commercial kitchens. Mr. Edwards responded that one benefit of the webpage was that it provided training to workers on correct FOG disposal methods. He said the Health Department helped to distribute flyers. Mr. Towery said that a Health Department worker, Frances, was extremely helpful when she did her inspections and he spoke about cross pollinating with building inspectors and using teamwork.

Mr. Edwards introduced the idea of a permit process in regulating the use of grease control devices and grease introduced into the sanitary sewer system. It would be a general permit to include high potential grease contributors and those that were unresponsive to the questionnaire with approximately 250 establishments to be included, with a fee to cover costs. Best management practices would be enforced; there would be signage in all kitchens, training of all restaurant staff and sink strainers. A grease control device would be a requirement. The cost of a retrofit is between \$1500 and \$8000. All liquid oil must be recycled. There would be annual inspections and a record kept of compliance with the permit and County FOG regulations.

Mr. Edwards presented three fee structure options. Option A was an annual fee of \$200 with no additional fees. Option B, staff's preferred option, is an annual fee of \$100 with a reinspection fee of \$50 if violations were noted. Option C is no annual fee but a reinspection fee of \$100. He outlined a few localities with FOG programs and fees associated with permits, the closest being the town of Culpeper and its \$250 fee for five years. Mr. Edwards discussed a permit/violation enforcement response plan and possible suspension of service for repeat violators.

Mr. Tignor said he was in favor of FOG enforcement and asked about receiving permits and who the permit was aimed at, citing an example of a restaurant changing hands and would the past or current owner be responsible if FOG violations were noted when a new owner took over. Mr. Makee said he was not sure he agreed with the permit idea; that enforcement and inspections responsibilities were huge. He asked why it could not be added to the Health Department's annual inspections. Mr. Edwards said that the Health Department was a state agency and the County had no control over its inspectors or the protocol they followed. Mr. Towery noted that the Health Department was more so concerned with healthy kitchen practices, not monitoring disposal practices. He added that this would not come into practice until the FY2022 budget year when a FOG inspector was one of the requested positions. In the meantime, the County would have ample opportunity for training and working on best practices with local restaurants through its social media campaign and outreach.

Mr. Makee asked if the inspections would be scheduled or surprise (drop-in) inspections. Mr. Tignor said this would not likely present a big burden on larger or chain restaurants but he was concerned about small owner-operated non-chain restaurants and the burden it may cause them. Mr. Edwards said that was why they started out with the questionnaire and outreach so as to provide ample notice that this program was under consideration by the Utilities Commission and the Board of Supervisors. He said that the County was anxious to work with anyone on putting best management practices in place and added that this program, if adopted, would be a phased-in approach. He spoke about piggy-backing on the Health Departments regulations and keeping open the option to partner with the Health Department. Mr. Towery said they hoped to never have to suspend service but it was an option for repeat offenders.

Mr. Edwards told the Commissioners that staff worked with legal counsel regarding a civil summons should that ever become necessary. Mr. Tignor asked about enforcement. Mr. Edwards said the first step was the inspection followed by a reinspection as many times as was necessary until the violation was abated. If after several reinspections there was no improvement, a fine would be issued. If the fine was not paid, a notice of violation would be issued along with another fine and reinspection. Following all of these steps, there would be a suspension of water service. He added that the course of these actions would be spread over three to six months to allow the restaurant time to remediate the issues found in the inspection.

Mr. Towery asked for a general consensus of the Utilities Commission. The next step is for this presentation to be given to the Board's Infrastructure Committee, a public hearing would be held followed by a vote on the FOG program proposal. Mr. Edwards said that the position of a FOG inspector was in the FY2022 proposed budget.

Mr. Carson said he felt that it was a much needed program and it was well thought out and not onerous to businesses. He spoke about having a sewer overflow outside his house, it was not a FOG issue but it created a lot problems. He said he would look at the permit fee as a cost of doing business.

Ms. Arndt spoke about the cost of cleaning up sanitary sewer overflows, which Mr. Edwards said was between \$1200 and \$2000 depending on the time of day (overtime pay for staff if it was outside business hours) and the equipment needed to correct the overflow. Ms. Arndt said that restaurants should be made aware of those costs, which would make them aware of the potential cost and impact of non-compliance with FOG regulations.

Mr. Makee said he realized that it was a big problem and staff made a good start working towards a solution. He asked if staff was starting a whole new permit process and asked about food trucks and if they would be required to have a permit. He said the devil was in the details and asked if staff had reached out to other localities, to the Chamber of Commerce, and to restaurant groups; that a lot of things need to be figured out or this could spiral out of control. He asked about new tenants being held responsible for conditions left by past tenants. Mr. Towery said there would have to be certain rules and policies and some issues may come to a judgement call; that things could change along the way and the rest of the community would be actively engaged in the process starting with a public hearing prior to permit issuance. Mr. Towery said there were a lot of steps between now and then. Mr. Edwards said that Mr. Brindle was at a conference in Richmond and several localities were very interested in Stafford's FOG program. Mr. Tignor said he hoped there was no adverse impact that would cause potential restaurants to move to Spotsylvania or Prince William County to avoid the FOG restrictions in Stafford.

Mr. Tignor asked about pumping grease into the wastewater treatment plants. Mr. Towery said there were septic haulers that handled that; that some of them were angry that Stafford did not have a set up like the very expensive one in Spotsylvania for dumping large grease loads.

Mr. Boulden asked if the permit fee would be an annual fee. Mr. Edwards confirmed that it would be a recurring annual permit fee, the proceeds of which would be used to maintain the program. Mr. Boulder confirmed that the program was not yet established and Mr. Edwards referred to the slide with the options up for consideration. Mr. Boulden said it seemed like a good program to him; he pays a \$250 fee at his home and it is an annual fee so the Option B cost was acceptable to him. Mr. Carson said he agreed that Option B was the way to go and he would support it.

Mr. Towery wrapped up the discussion saying that the Utilities Commission was generally in agreement with proceeding with the FOG program so he would move it along in the next steps getting it to the Board's Infrastructure Committee. Mr. Carson asked if this could be rolled into another already existing County permit. Mr. Edwards said the closest thing would be the false connection backflow permit.

- IX. Adjournment – Mr. Makee said that he enjoyed his time serving on the Utilities Commission and his time as Chairman but he would not be reappointed to serve the Rock Hill District as his job was crazy since he'd received a promotion

The meeting adjourned at 9:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jason D. Towery, Director
Department of Public Works