



# **Detroit Water and Sewerage Department Meeting Minutes - Final Customer Service Committee**

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Wednesday, December 6, 2017

1:30 PM

5th Floor Board Room, Water Board Building

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## **Customer Service Committee Meeting**

### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Blackmon called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m.

### **2. ROLL CALL**

**Present:** 3 - John Henry Davis , Pamela Rodgers and Mary Blackmon

**Absent:** 1 - Jane Garcia

### **3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Chair Blackmon requested approval of the agenda.

**A motion was made by Commissioner John Henry Davis, seconded by Commissioner Pamela Rodgers that this Agenda be approved. The motion carried by an unanimous vote.**

### **4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Chair Blackmon requested approval of the minutes of November 1, 2017.

**A motion was made by Commissioner Pamela Rodgers, seconded by Commissioner John Henry Davis that the Minutes be approved. The motion carried by an unanimous vote.**

### **5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were none.

### **6. COMMUNICATIONS**

There were none.

### **7. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

#### **A. [17-0142](#) Water and Sewer Application for Service**

**Sponsors:** Customer Service/Meter Operations

**Attachments:**     [Water & Sewer Service Application](#)

Debra Pospiech, CAO/Chief General Counsel reported the water and sewer service application would be addressed after the DWSD Billing and Collections Policy and Procedures is finalized.

The item will be addressed by the committee in January/February 2018.

**This Communication or Report was returned without recommendation.**

**B.     [17-0143](#)**

**ACLU Analysis of Proposed DWSD Billing and Collection Policy and Procedures**

**Sponsors:**     Pospiech

**Attachments:**     [ACLU Analysis of Proposed DWSD Billing & Collection Policy & Procedures](#)  
                                 [Billing and Collection Policy and ProceduresDRAFT\(17-0126\)](#)

The Billing and Collection Policy and Procedures will be addressed by committee once it's finalized.

**This Communication or Report was returned without recommendation.**

Debra Pospiech, CAO/Chief General Counsel reported that discussion with Wayne County Treasurer, Housing and Revitalization Department, Landbank, Mayor's Department of Neighborhoods, and DWSD team narrowed down the data sharing process on homes from the county for foreclosed or transferred to new owners from the auction. The department will allow tenants to initiate service in their name if they pay the deposit for new meter installation. Even if owner is delinquent on the bill, a tenant can start new service as long as they agree to be responsible going forward. There would be a lien on the home for what the owner owes. The Wayne County Treasurer is not evicting people. The tenant will be allowed to stay in a home even if the owner has foreclosed. Even if the water service was in the owner's name, the tenant can established water service in their name. Homes purchased through the auction, if the tenant produces proof, it will allow the tenant to maintain residency at the property and receive water service. Property that does not sale at auction, and transfers to the landbank, the tenant can obtain a letter from the landbank that states the tenant is allowed to move in. Commissioner Blackmon asked how is this information delivered to customers. Ms. Pospiech stated, once the policy is finalized, the information will be widely publicized. If a tenant is responsible for a delinquent bill, prior to foreclosure, and the owner has a lease agreement with the tenant, the debt will not be wiped out upon foreclosure. It is not a lien, but a debt to the tenant. When a tenant vacates a property, it is the owner's responsibility to inform the department of the vacancy date. This will place the lien back unto the property owner. The tenant can also notify the department when they move out. In reference to the \$150 deposit, it is being recommended that the deposit will be refunded only to owners, upon request after one year, if the account is in good standing.

Deputy Director Mobley asked why does the owner have to pay a deposit for service if they are responsible for the lien? Ms. Pospiech replied the administrative cost to enforce a lien from process to collect far exceeds the \$150 deposit.

Commissioner Davis asked if a deposit was made prior to the effect of the new policy, would the customer be eligible for a refund? Ms. Pospiech replied yes, if the account is in good standing.

Commissioner Rodgers asked if the tenant is responsible for the water bill and does not pay, does the department have the right to shut off the service? Ms. Pospiech replied yes. Commissioner Rodgers also asked does the landlord have any repercussions? Ms. Pospiech replied, the landlord has the right to evict the tenant.

Commissioner Coleman asked if the deposit is visible on the billing statement? Ms. Pospiech replied no. Ms. Pospiech added, if a tenant vacate a property and the water service was in their (tenant) name, the department cannot retrieve the delinquent bill from the landlord. The \$150 deposit would cover the two-month gap before a shut-off is issued. Director Brown added the purpose of the \$150 deposit is to get the department to a national average collection rate. He also said another way to get to a ninety-five percent collection rate is to shut the water service before the bill becomes extremely enormous.

Deputy Director Mobley suggested creating workflow diagrams, which would allow customers to refer to a particular section of the policy.

Commissioner Davis asked to provide the Board with the significant changes.

Ms Pospiech stated the department researched the country in regards to the no shutoff (medical, seniors, and children) and the majority of the cities where there is a medical condition, the only time allotted to avoid the shutoff is for the medical condition period (90-days maximum). There is no policy for someone with an on-going medical problem. Homes with children the maximum days is six weeks.

Ms. Pospiech said she and Marc- Antonie Cooper, Chief Customer Service Officer met with the Department of Administrative Appeals and Hearings to work on a smoother water bill disputes process. The department is making good use of the City's new rental ordinance and incorporating some of the department's procedures with those that Buildings and Safety use for landlord disputes.

## **8. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. Customer Service and Outreach Update**

Dr. Marc-Antonie Cooper reported the Customer Assurance Specialist Team (CAST) attend community meetings to aid or address customers concerns. Director Brown added there have been four subsequent Mayor community meetings with customer service specialist on-hand to address matters of the public. There are four customer service specialist attending the Police Precinct Community meetings with the intent to have one representative per Council District to attend the various meetings.

#### **1. [17-0191](#)**

#### **Downtown Saturday Hours Change**

**Sponsors:** Customer Service/Meter Operations

**Attachments:** [Downtown Saturday Hours Change 2017](#)

Dr. Cooper stated based upon an analysis of foot traffic, income, and bill payment enhancement, the main office Saturday hours would no longer be needed, effective December 16, 2017.

Commissioner Blackmon asked how can a customer avoid a weekend shutoff. Dr Cooper replied, if a customer gets a shutoff scheduled for a Monday, they can access the DWSD web portal and pay the bill or set up a payment plan arrangement (PPA). Customers may also visit a kiosk located throughout the city.

## **B. Collection Rate Historical Comparison - Quarterly v Monthly**

Debra Pospiech, CAO/Chief General Counsel stated it was questioned at the last meeting as to why the department decided to move from quarterly billing to monthly. It was noted that back in 2006 the department issued a press release stating why and for what reason. (See Item No. 17-0194).

Commissioner Blackmon said there was concern as to whether the monthly billing provided a better collection rate and if bills were aligned to what they should have been had they remain quarterly. Deputy Director Mobley replied the department may not have data dating back prior to 2006. Commissioner Blackmon said there are constituents who believe their bill is higher now than when it was quarterly. Ms. Mobley replied, yes. Back in 2003 and 2004 bonding funds for the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) program had not occurred. There was a huge difference in 2003 quarterly up to about 2008. As the bond charges became due for the CSO the bills elevated. Chief General Counsel Pospiech added our billing system goes back to 2007. We cannot make a correlation between then and now. Ms. Pospiech suggested adding FAQ's of the different billing cycles to the website.

### **1. [17-0194](#)**

#### **Press Release-DWSD Prepares for Monthly Residential Billing**

**Sponsors:** Brown

**Attachments:** [Press Release - DWSD Monthly Billing](#)

### **2. [17-0195](#)**

#### **Community Outreach Handouts**

**Sponsors:** Peckinpaugh

**Attachments:** [Participating Organizations - Community Outreach and Service Credits - 12062017](#)  
[Policy - Hydrant Painting - DRAFT-V1](#)  
[2017.Nov21 Community Outreach Credits v7](#)

Public Affairs Manager Bryan Peckinpaugh gave a brief overview of the community outreach programs.

### **3. [17-0196](#)**

#### **Lead Service Line Update**

**Sponsors:** Brown

**Attachments:** [Lead Service Line Update for BOWC](#)

Director Brown gave a brief overview of the changes being promulgated by the State. He will provide the Board with communication from the Municipal League along with the

department's recommendations.

**9. OTHER MATTERS**

Chairman Einhueser suggests the department rethink its "Public Comment" practice and consider addressing matters on-hand or provide a response within 24-hours. He also asked that the department establish a system for handling the intent of mischievous constituents.

Director Brown stated the department has considered holding the community meetings at churches. He suggested public comment is limited to two-minutes. Director Brown said he and Sid Bogan, Chief of Security would seek the assistance of the Detroit Police Department (DPD) at the community meetings.

**10. NEXT MEETING**

**TBD**

**11. ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Blackmon requested a motion to adjourn.

**A motion was made by Commissioner John Henry Davis, seconded by Commissioner Pamela Rodgers that this meeting be adjourned. The motion carried by an unanimous vote.**

**There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:39 p.m.**