

Memorandum

To: Mayor Mark Bell and
Board of Commissioners

From: Chair Jenn Sykes and
Water and Sewer Advisory Board Members

Date: Aug. 19, 2024

Subject: Joint WSAC/BOC Meeting Agenda Thoughts



The joint meeting of the Board of Commissioners and the Water and Sewer Advisory Committee is scheduled for Aug. 26, 2024, at your regularly scheduled workshop. The only agenda meeting topic we wish to discuss is the benefit and potential discontinuation of the Water and Sewer Advisory Committee.

The Water and Sewer Advisory Committee (WSAC) was born in 2003 from a task group formed in 2001 to help figure out what to do when Flint Fabrics suddenly closed, taking at least a third of the water revenue from the utility enterprise fund. For 24 years, with a mix of committee members having various perspectives from the entire service area, WSAC has tackled an amazing number of issues related to the utility's enterprise fund. These include policies about leak adjustments, disconnections, billing deposits, billing systems, irrigation, energy use/savings opportunities, water quality, drought and conservation policies, code changes and other initiatives. We have assisted routinely with outreach ideas and efforts, the utility assistance program, input on the budget, and -- most critical to the customer base -- rates (minimum volume, differential, structure, etc.).

However, all the above and more have essentially been established and settled and even revisited several times over the 24 years of the committee's existence. We are proud of all that WSAC has accomplished. As only an advisory committee, there is no decision-making authority; recommendations only may be made by the committee. We appreciate the consideration the Board of Commissioners has given to such when offered or requested.

As of late, WSAC has struggled with its purpose and wonders about its benefit to the town. We understand the board has been thinking about this as well. It may be the time to consider whether to continue as an advisory committee who meets routinely, a committee that only meets to tackle significant matters, or a disbanded committee with new task forces formed when relevant. Below are some thoughts and perspectives for discussion at our joint meeting on Aug. 26.

- All major matters have been resolved through code or policy.
- Some WSAC recommendations have not been adopted. Some topics have been taken up by WSAC multiple times under different membership with essentially the same outcome.

- It has been difficult to get participation in WSAC. We have had two out of town vacancies for several months and no applicants. This is not the first time we have gone months with a vacancy.
- No citizenry routinely attends the meetings, and WSAC cannot resolve their concerns at the meeting, regardless.
- Attendance by some (past members) was sporadic. Member attendance has ebbed and flowed many times and sometimes a quorum is lacking. The interest level has seemed to decline, likely due to a lack of new topics to address.
- We want to be respectful of staff time to prepare agendas, information, and topics for the meetings. While the information shared by staff at WSAC meetings is always helpful, recently, little or no action is required by WSAC.
- WSAC advises on the utilities enterprise fund which spans multiple departments beyond utilities. It has been increasingly difficult to get outside departmental attendance to hear directly from them about the budget, rates, or financial policies as in the past. The burden has fallen on utilities staff to prepare information that we would want to hear from others.

While we believe the biggest asset of WSAC is that all members are wonderful ambassadors of the utility to the community (who is often woefully uninformed about certain aspects of operations) the committee desires to discuss how WSAC could be either more useful to the BOC and town or whether it's time to suspend WSAC and only call upon members for brainstorming and input when a large issue arises.

We look forward to this discussion and are prepared for whatever outcome arises from it. If it is determined to pause or cease WSAC, a vote of such is requested from the Board after the discussion.

Cc: Town Manager Eric Peterson
Civil Engineer Tyler Freeman (staff liaison to WSAC)