

## **INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATE April 2016**

The following report reflects several areas at PWSA where I have devoted substantial time and effort. I want to share this information with the public and will continue to do so on a regular basis.

### **Meter Reading and Billing**

PWSA has made progress integrating the automatic meter reading devices with the billing system, with the assistance of contracted billing and IT specialists. March billing cycles for our water and sewer customers were successful and April is on schedule. The team stabilized the software to minimize unexpected bill changes, accelerated the billing process, and developed an intercept system for large bill changes before they are mailed to customers, giving time for research and adjustment, if necessary.

Approximately 1,000 commercial accounts have meters that are incompatible with the new remote reading devices. Installation of a new meter requires a PWSA plumber to shut down the water service line, which can be a burden on businesses and takes time to coordinate. Until the new meter can be installed, estimated bills are sent and PWSA is exploring the use of temporary meter readers so these customers can receive actual reads.

A target date of June 30, 2016, is set for re-establishing regular bills for PWSA's sewage only customers. Penalty and interest will not be charged for delayed bills.

PWSA also has water delivery agreements with municipalities outside of the city, like Millvale borough. Issues with the billing system caused the Authority to stop billing these customers last year, but issues have been resolved for Millvale and bills will be sent out in May to include payment plans for unbilled months. Letters explaining this situation are being sent to customers. A small number of accounts in several other communities will also be addressed soon.

Performance indicators show that call volume and response time improved in March 2016; however, they are not where we want them to be yet.

In addition to these efforts, Customer Service is working on other procedures, including improved final billing services, more efficient collection and notification procedures, and call center management. I will continue to report on these in the coming months.

We have not reached a fully functioning integrated billing system yet, and there are still legacy issues to deal with and accounts to correct. There is no magic wand – just a series of tasks and projects to be planned and achieved. The goal is clear that every customer deserves an accurate statement of their account and we are all committed to that goal.

### **Capital Projects**

In a recent message to employees, I included a section called “The Things You Don’t See.” This is an effort to communicate with everyone - customers, public officials, and civic leaders - about the real cost of maintaining a utility as large, complex, and old as ours. Two projects occurring this month are good examples:

- In early March, PWSA experienced a separation of a 20-inch water main under Forbes Avenue near the CMU campus. Our crews responded promptly and informed us that this was one of the most serious ruptures they had ever seen. The project was complicated by the fact that a construction project adjacent to the road removed much of the natural shoring. Refilling the trenches from the waterline relay work – normally a simple project only lasting a few days – instead required complex geotechnical evaluation. Fortunately, with PennDot’s assistance, we were able to reopen two lanes of Forbes Avenue to traffic while those studies continued. A solution has been agreed upon and work can begin on reopening the entire road to traffic with a projected date of April 29<sup>th</sup>.

It is significant to note that this one incident will cost the Authority over \$700,000 for a project we did not even know about just two months ago. Using my personal water bill as an average customer

for an example, it would take 14,000 of my monthly bills just to pay for this one project and emergencies like this can happen at any time.

- On the planned and budgeted side, PWSA also replaced 18 filters at the Water Treatment Plant as part of a multi-phase project that will cost \$28.7 million before completion in August 2017. This is just one project out of several needed to keep the plant operational.

The capital needs of PWSA are similar to other utilities, and it is important to remember that when we flip a switch or turn a tap, the result is a function of substantial, often unseen, investment in facilities, as well as the commitment of skilled workers.

### **Other Items**

Authority staff continues to work on Green Infrastructure (GI) programs with the City of Pittsburgh and in cooperation with other municipal partners. GI is an environmentally friendly way of collecting stormwater to reduce the amount of capital investment in pipes and other “grey” infrastructure. In my short time at PWSA, I attended sessions arranged by our staff with municipal officials to discuss cooperative projects on GI, as well as working a meeting with ALCOSAN staff on our mutual goal of achieving stormwater separation in the most economical way, while meeting all requirements. We also received an encouraging letter from Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) endorsing a more regional approach to GI.

The Authority hosted a first ever Developers Roundtable with public and private partners in an effort to better respond to the needs of those in the development community as they waded through the various public approval processes, including PWSA. PWSA’s Manager of Development Services George Robinson II hosted and moderated the meeting. George was hired in the fall of 2015 with a goal of improving the Authority’s processes and communication with the development community.

Thank you for reading. I welcome questions/suggestions on our goals and practices.