

Joint CDWAC/WSAC Meeting April 12, 2017

Notes from Joan Kersnar and Kelly O'Rourke

The Committee members were asked to provide their thoughts as retail water customers about the regional water conservation program, and their expectations and suggestions for the program going forward. Current program information and other materials were provided as background. Specific questions they were asked in advance and discussed at the meeting were:

1. What are your expectations of SPU regarding our utility-sponsored water conservation programs for customers?
2. What types of water conservation services would you like to see from SPU? Why?
3. Should SPU be increasing, decreasing, or keeping the same its efforts in utility-sponsored water conservation programs? Why?

Reasons given for having a utility-sponsored conservation program:

- Lower water use is good for the environment, including fish habitat.
- Given the uncertainties and unknowns of future population growth, water supply availability and climate change, continuation of conservation programs positions the utility to be able to respond to these changes and ramp up the program if needed in the future.
 - Provides resiliency.
 - Better to be over prepared.
 - Use the precautionary principle.
 - Take a "7th generation" perspective.
 - Building a new source will have negative environmental and cost impacts.
- Using less water is a personal goal and SPU can help so that they can conserve more.
- Conservation ethic applies to all utilities; it's confusing if electric utilities message around resource conservation, and not water.
- Support the vision and leadership role of Seattle as a green community that is very conscious of our environment.
- Reduce sewer flows to wastewater treatment system (determine cost savings and benefits).
- "Right thing to do. Good for the environment. I want Seattle to do it."
- Help customers control their bills.
- Affordability is an issue.

Services they would like to see more of:

- Require sub-metering so that customers in multifamily and multi-tenant buildings see and are billed for what they individually use.
- Provide more landscape/gardening classes in outer areas that do more gardening.
- For commercial sector, projects typically need a payback less than 36 months in order to get approved; utility rebates are often critical in keeping the payback under 36 months.
- Allow for second round rebates to account for technology changes (e.g., toilets that were considered highly efficient 15 years ago are no longer the best available).
- Provide information comparing a customer's water usage compared to similar households, similar to what SCL does, but be sure to get input from diverse groups.
- Scale rebates based on amount of water saved (level of efficiency).

- Expand the commercial program to include rainwater harvesting systems that offset potable water use and provide wastewater benefits. (Current incentive is break on drainage fee paid by the property.)
- Provide incentives to new construction that go beyond code (can scale based on savings).
- Provide shower timers and/or low flow showerheads.
- Direct more resources to low-income households.
- Recognize private individuals or business that make significant reductions in their water usage.
- Like the toilet rebates; would like the rebate to cover a higher portion of the cost.
- Would like help with installation.
- Education is very important.

Comments on the level of effort and investment:

- Continue to support at same level of expenditure given relatively low cost of programs in SPU's overall budget.
- Is the \$2M/year for water conservation the best use of the region's money, or could this money be better spent elsewhere to achieve greater environmental benefits (e.g., addressing CSO or other stormwater issues)?
- How much does the program cost annually? And what does that equate to per person? (When the rough answer of approximately \$2M for serving approx. 1.4 M people served by SPU [1.3M have access to the Saving Water Partnership programs], so a just over \$1 per person per year was given, the response was that the amount seemed reasonable.)

Other issues raised for consideration:

- In multi-family units, some tenants may end up paying for someone else's leaking toilet. Since these buildings often have some affordable units, these costs can be passed along to lower income households and impact overall affordability. Could be addressed through mandated sub-metering.
- Households that are not low-income may not be motivated to replace inefficient or leaky toilets with only a \$100 rebate.
- People that lease or rent homes aren't in position to replace inefficient fixtures yet directly or indirectly pay for the utility bill; requires action/investment by property owners.
- Some people, such as the elderly, don't know how or can't install new fixtures.
- Consider buying toilets in bulk and offering installation. (SPU has done this in the past but there are risk issues to be managed.)
- Address first cost barrier; rebates currently come after purchase.
- Focus on a small number of things you'd like the customer to do.
- Avoid starting and stopping a program; consistency is important.
- Consider alternative financial incentives such as savings sharing or bill credits.