



Creeks, Drainage & Wastewater Advisory Committee (CDWAC)

April 17, 2019 Meeting Notes

Seattle Municipal Tower, 700 Fifth Avenue

Room 4901

5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

CDWAC Members	Present?	SPU Staff & Guests	Role
Colum Lang	N	Natasha Walker	CAC Program Coordinator
Gary Olson	P	Shery Shapiro	CAC Program Manager
Mariela White	Y	Rachel Garrett	SPU Wastewater Education and Outreach Program Manager
Michael Williams	Y	Kevin Burrell	DWW Planning and Program Management Division
Maria McDaniel	Y	Guests	
Thy Pham	Y	Jason Devaney	Guest
Andrew Schiffer	Y	Weng-Ching Cheung	Guest
Isabel Carrera Zamanillo	P	Noel Miller	Alum
		Mary Pearsall	Guest

1. Regular Business

- CDWAC Co-Chair, Thy Pham, opened the meeting at 5:35 PM.
- Notes from March meeting will be sent out electronically for approval.
- Sheryl Shapiro indicated emergency exits and exit procedures.

2. CAC Program Updates

- Our next All-CAC Meeting on April 24 will include Part II of the Risk & Resiliency Framework, as well as exploring how claims are processed through the City. There will be a focus on the application of a Race and Social Justice to these two lines of work.
- Drainage & Wastewater (DWW) Line of Business (LOB) Updates. DWW Deputy Director, Andrew Lee, was unable to join but offered some LOB updates in his absence:
 - DWW has a significant planning effort to develop a new Integrated Plan. The Integrated Plan has a significant outreach component to it, which is called the Vision Plan. The consultant contract for the Vision Plan is in the process of being routed for approval, and we expect to begin the Vision Plan work in the next month.
 - SPU has had several meetings with Ecology and EPA to discuss a potential modification to our consent decree. We are seeking some immediate relief from upcoming milestones for projects where it makes more sense to push those projects out, in terms of schedule. An example is where the project should be partnered with a King County project, but the County project is further out in the schedule. We are at the beginning stages of the CD modification discussions, and those will be continuing over the next 12-18 months.

- SPU is making substantial progress on our South Park Pump Station and Conveyance projects. Those projects recently received a significant boost in funding from the King County Flood Control District. We were able to add a couple more blocks to the list of streets that will get new drainage pipelines and paving in the South Park neighborhood. Those projects are moving ahead with design, as planned.
- In 2018, we had our lowest rate of Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs) since we signed the consent decree in 2013. Our number was 1.9 SSOs per 100 miles, which is almost 4 times lower than the number of SSOs that we had prior to the consent decree. This is a tribute to the excellent work of our crews and our staff who inspect, clean, and maintain our sewer system in a daily basis.
- Our Ship Canal Water Quality Project continues to make significant progress. The tunnel portion of the project just went out to bid, and we expect to receive bids in May 2019. Construction for that portion of the project should begin at the end of 2019. This is our largest capital project in the Department and will address our most frequent and voluminous CSOs.
- CAC Membership Updates
 - May will be Michael Williams and Mariela White's last meeting.
 - Sheryl to write up something re: certain skill sets to fill gaps and send to the Committee to assist with referrals for prospective members.

3. Impromptu Networking

CDWAC members and guests were asked to “share something that you are listening to; podcasts, or radio, or another media or science you listen to.” Attendees shared

4. Research findings from Side Sewer Customer Focus Groups. Overview of Research Direction and Strategy for Side Sewer Maintenance

Rachel Garrett, SPU Wastewater Education and Outreach Program Manager, shared the research she has been undertaking on side sewer repairs. The goal was to glean insights from customers to learn more about residents' experiences with recent side sewer repairs in order to determine how to offer better resources and support to customers.

Garrett walked members through the process for convening side sewer customer focus groups, which began with customers who had received permits for side sewer repairs, focusing on homeowners and not developers. Recruitment was via letters, and stipends in the forms of gift cards, food and parking was offered. Staff focused on diversity of gender and neighborhood/zip code in the selection of participants. Videos of the focus groups are available, and interviews were conducted with those homeowners interested in participating but unable to attend. Garrett noted that one of their future recommendations is to work with community-based organizations to identify homeowners in Seattle who might suffer disproportionately if their side sewer failed.

Next, Garrett introduced her work on Side Sewer Maintenance Customer Research. The goal of the project was to develop research-based strategies for SPU to better inform and educate Seattle property owners about their responsibility to maintain privately-owned pipes (side sewers). In summer 2019, Garrett will be returning to present the results and analysis on research she conducted on current behaviors and knowledge related to side sewer maintenance, as well as exploring barriers and

motivators to scoping/cleaning sewer lines. She will share the data so that CDWAC can help with next steps.

- **A CAC Member** shared that side sewer cards are hard to read and suggested that SPU provide pointers/tips on reading them. A link was sent to CDWAC to review their side sewer cards.
- **A CAC Member** clarified about homeowner responsibility for cost of side sewer repairs all the way to the main. Staff confirmed
- **A CAC Member** asked how much lead time was given to participants who were contacted. Staff responded that the letters were mailed 3-4 weeks before the focus group sessions. The focus groups were in March of 2018.
- **A guest** asked if the cause of a side sewer issue is tree growth, is there anything the homeowner can do to prevent the problem? Staff suggested cleaning the sewer line regularly, either mechanically or chemically.
- **A CAC Member** shared that they were not aware that you had to get a permit to make a repair to side sewer (unless it would require significant digging). They asked if the permit process is widely known by plumbers and contractors. Staff responded that if you are digging, you are supposed to get a permit, but we don't know how familiar contractors are with this policy.
- **A CAC Member** shared that they were concerned most about side sewer issues near creeks, which they felt had greater potential consequences for significant health and environmental impacts. They asked about policies that reflect where the side sewers are located. Staff responded that we design policies to protect human health and the environment, and while we might have an emphasis on groundwater or shorelines the expressed intent is that the infrastructure should not be doing harm to health or environment.
- **A CAC Member** felt that trees were the biggest problem for side sewer failures. They explained that part of their job is giving free trees to homeowners in low income neighborhoods. They suggested providing guidelines for trees that are most side sewer friendly. Staff responded that it was a great idea. A lot of street trees were planted before checking on located of side sewers. Now SDOT checks, but years ago they didn't do that. Trees for Seattle looks at what tree species will do the best, and we can talk to them about generating a list, and guidelines on planting.
- **A CAC Member** asked if there a recommendation for frequency of side sewer scoping. Staff responded that SPU does not currently have an official recommendation, but scoping sewer line approximately every five years is generally a good idea if there is no aggressive tree growth.
- **A guest** asked if there was thinking about an outreach plan, beyond a website or hotline, to disseminate this information, especially for new homeowners. Staff responded that yes, and that will come after research and recommendations. SPU research is showing that awareness is low, and staff will be developing an outreach plan to raise awareness.
- **A CAC Member** suggested a FAQ document for side sewers.
- **A guest** suggested including information in SPU bill inserts.
- **A CAC Member** suggested that it could be powerful to have visuals on the consequences of not maintaining side sewers.
- **A CAC Member** suggested providing ballpark numbers for repairs by neighborhood.
- **A staff member** asked about multifamily impacts. Staff responded that we don't have that information back yet from interviews.

- **A CAC Member** felt that customers requesting in-language translation may be a barrier to participating in the surveys, and that it was worth translating the introductory material to reach those communities. Staff responded that they intend to work with CBOs if they need more info from those customers.
- **A guest** shared that illustrations and visuals may be an effective way to communicate side sewer information, as they can transcend language.
- **A CAC Member participating remotely submitted the following comments:**
 - Language was mentioned, make sure to translate material
 - Incentives; the presenter mentioned that there were offered; gift cards work well
 - Organize focus groups at community centers (in addition to collaboration with community organizations)
 - Consider time for focus groups (after 6pm tend to be good for families who work)
 - Offer childcare
 - Make sure that the contractors are culturally sensitive and have a good understanding of preferences in the different communities. Overall it is about developing trust and, in many cases, there's a lot of distrust especially towards "authority" institutions.

5. Overview of national approaches to Side Sewer Assistance Programs

Kevin Burrell, DWW Planning and Program Management Division, described side sewer policy and efforts underway to explore solutions to addressing customer costs of owning and maintaining private side sewers. Burrell shared research conducted to examine other municipalities' side sewer policies and programs, and invited CDWAC members to consider what solutions they may advocate for going forward. Burrell noted that SPU staff and leadership are exploring this as a potential tool in the toolbox to support customer affordability.

- **A CAC Member** noted that Seattle/SPU are not dissimilar compared to other large cities in the country, but many younger/newer cities have found ways to incorporate various types of programs into their bills or property taxes. He added that some cities may also behave differently depending on where the split in side sewer ownership is, and any requirements the agency may have associated with a consent decree.
- **A CAC member** asked if side sewers require ongoing maintenance and repairs, and how to decide between repair and replacement. Staff responded that it is a lot like fixing a roof, where you have the freedom to explore options. There are different technologies, different lifecycles, and it is entirely up to the homeowner to explore that. Nothing in code that stipulates which option is preferred.
- **A guest** shared about a personal experience in Austin, Texas when the County was re-doing a road and they were able to combine it with private property driveway work. There must be an alert that the connection won't be working, and there is an opportunity to contact homeowners and let them know there is an opportunity to get lower cost side sewer repair.

CDWAC members were encouraged to submit additional feedback via the meeting feedback survey. Burrell also noted that he would be interested to hear about homeowner experiences who have used side sewer insurance. **The below feedback was received electronically following the meeting:**

- In terms of the Side Sewer Policy research, I'd say that financial incentives and insurance might be two of the more helpful solutions. Also, informing folks when other maintenance will be done on their street and they can repair their side sewer seems like a very good idea. Outreach and education is always good of course, but there are simply so many things a homeowner has to deal with, I can easily understand how some people put this off until it's too late, and I would hope that loan programs, or incentives, could help people keep their homes in the case of a high sewer repair bill.
- Interested in next steps for Kevin's work regarding which options SPU would pursue or recommend.
- We belong to something called the Home Owners Club. This might be a useful model to look at and borrow from for how home owners would access side sewer contractors.
- Some great examples of efforts to support/engage with customers in other cities were presented. I would like to know if programs like these are adopted eventually by SPU
- From my perspective, the most important outreach/educational slide is #17 that delineates which part is the owner's responsibility and what is the city's responsibility
- It is likely that a combination of incentives and regulatory requirements will be needed.
- From a community-focused utility perspective, SPU will garner more goodwill through focusing its efforts on financial incentives and creating an enabling environment than through enforcement and monitoring approaches.
- Opportunistic solutions make great sense in preserving customer relationships and trust, increasing efficiency, and joint solutioning to address a need/problem
- Summary slide 23 – last bullet states that incentives didn't work and caution against an interpretation that incentives are not an important strategy. It would be helpful to learn from that experience and understand if it was due to (1) poor incentive structure, (2) poor implementation, or (3) another issue.

5. Community Insights, Around the Table

- **A CAC Member** shared about the upcoming Duwamish Alive event. Dirt Corps will be at Terminal 107, across from Duwamish Long Site. There will be sites all over Duwamish Valley.
- **Staff** shared that on Earth Day, Monday night, 4/22, Library Lab at the Delridge Library, 3:30-7:30 PM SPU is collaborating with Parks and our 1% Arts Project to provide interactive activities with the library staff about Longfellow Creek.
- **Staff** shared that the 5th Avenue Theatre is collaborating with ACT Theatre on "UrineTown," about the privatization of water. A WSAC member connected SPU 5th Ave. staff to explore possible partnership in their pre- and post-show talks. SPU will have display materials, an on-going loop of messaging on their lobby monitors and participation by SPU's CEO/GM with water conservation and education staff in the talks. Both talks are free.
- Passover/Easter this week. Also, it is Earth Month.
- **A CAC Member** shared about an event with Thornton Creek Alliance: "Influence of the Confluence" at Meadowbrook Pond on June 9. Family-friendly event with band and food trucks. Other watershed groups in the City have been invited.

Adjourned 7:33 PM