



Creeks, Drainage & Wastewater Advisory Committee (CDWAC)

May 15, 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	Y	Shery Shapiro	CAC Program Manager
Mariela White	Y	Melissa Levo	Water System Policy Liaison (Interim)
Michael Williams	Y	Cathy Thielen	Utility Account Services Manager
Maria McDaniel	Y	Guests	
Thy Pham	Y	Weng-Ching Cheung	Guest
Andrew Schiffer	Y		
Isabel Carrera Zamanillo	N		

1. Regular Business

- CDWAC Co-Chair, Thy Pham, opened the meeting at 5:36 PM.
- Impromptu Networking: CDWAC members shared a favorite public (no fee) place in Seattle.
- Notes from April meeting were approved
- Sheryl Shapiro indicated emergency exits and exit procedures.

2. CAC Program Updates

- Summer schedule: A survey was sent out today regarding two field trip opportunities: a visit to the Water Quality Lab and to the King County Wastewater Treatment Plant. Members were asked to please respond as soon as they are able, so that we can begin coordinating the trips.
- CDWAC Member, Colum Lang, is unable to attend Wednesday night meetings May-September. Would CDWAC be interested in meeting on a different night of the week for a couple months? **Sheryl will send a query about that once we know our field trip dates.** She noted that if the field trips are on a Saturday, we likely won't meet on our normal Wednesday nights so we may not need to reschedule.
- Sheryl shared input received electronically from CDWAC members (via emails and meeting feedback survey) following the April meeting. **Responses from presenter, Kevin Burrell, in red:**
 - ❖ 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 its too late, and I would hope that loan programs, or incentives, could help people keep their homes in the case of a \$60K sewer repair bill.

- This is great feedback, thank you. SPU will infer this to mean we're mostly on the right track with potential program ideas and strategies. Do let staff know if other ideas emerge via CDWAC discussions or elsewhere.
- ❖ I would like to know next steps for Kevin's work regarding which options that SPU would pursue or recommend.
 - Staff are meeting with SPU leadership in May to discuss input and next steps. SPU is also submitting a report to council in June on Affordability and Accountability, which will include the topic of private side sewers among other potential strategies to address ratepayer costs.
- ❖ 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.
 - SPU was not familiar with this, although 3rd party websites like Porch, Angie's List, Yelp, and others have been considered; Modifying or changing characteristics of SPU's registered side sewer contractor list has also been raised as a potential to increase access to reputable 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
 - Often SPU is at the forefront of piloting and bringing programs like these to scale. However, in this case SPU may be borrowing from others.
- ❖ 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
 - That's a common response and staff have heard this from customers and other CDWAC members as well.
- ❖ 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.
 - Thanks for your input. Other stakeholders have made similar remarks in terms of steering away from monitoring or regulatory requirements. Note however that SPU already does enforcement for broken and leaking side sewers on private property.
 - 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.
 - In the case of East Bay MUD, research indicated that the incentive they offered was not enough to compel customers to voluntarily opt-in to their program and fix their side sewers.
 - Note that East Bay MUD program requires customers to certify that their side sewers do not leak when making investments in their property that are greater than \$100K, or if they change water service / size
 - **A CAC Member** shared that they had strong feelings about the fact that SPU holds the customer responsible up the main; they will submit their comments via e-mail.
- Today is Michael Williams and Mariela White's last meeting. Michael has been with CDWAC 2.5 years and Mariela for 3 years. Sheryl shared some history about each of them, including their term lengths and expertise/backgrounds as well as their contributions to the Committee and thanked them for their service.

4. Leak Adjustment Director's Rule

Melissa Levo, a member of the Leak Adjustment Director's Rule Core Team, provided an overview of work underway to revisit the Leak Adjustment Director's Rule. Levo began with an overview of the Leak Adjustment Director's Rule. A copy of the rule was sent to CDWAC members in advance. Levo explained that the financial hardships incurred by some customers under the existing policy is one of the drivers for reviewing the rule. This topic was brought to WSAC at their May meeting and is being shared with CDWAC because the Core Team is considering including some leaks that go into the sewer system.

Levo walked members through the process for the Core Team's leak adjustment policy review, which will result in a presentation of final options to SPU's Policy Board. The goal of tonight's meeting was to understand CDWAC members' perception of the current rule and gather any initial thoughts on options to consider. We anticipate further engagement with members to gather feedback in Q3/Q4 regarding draft, proposed options. Levo gave a brief overview of a recent customer water leak incident, and the surrounding media coverage.

- **A CAC Member** was amazed to see the total cost of the water leak, but it helped to understand it was both water and sewer, which wasn't clear in the article. They felt that the two-month estimate is a burden for customers.
- **A CAC Member** was unclear whether the leak was on the City side or the homeowner side. Staff explained that the problem was that the meter was on a different city block than their house. This was not a typical situation.

Levo reviewed the leak qualifications for the rule and 2018 figures on adjustments made. Levo used an example residential customer case to illustrate the adjustments. Levo walked CDWAC members through an SPU water bill, explaining the billing methodologies for water versus sewer, and noting that the way we bill (two-month bill period, flat rate for residential and variable rate for commercial, and 67% of sewer revenue to paid to King County Metro for sewage treatment) is important in understanding decisions around the leak adjustment policy. CDWAC members looked an example bill adjustment. Levo handed out copies of the pamphlet that is provided to residences where leaks have been identified by the meter reader and walked members through a scenario where a leak is identified. Levo shared that the Office of Housing home repair loan provides income-qualified customers no or low-interest loans to help them pay for repairs. Levo reviewed the principles of change the Core Team looking at this Rule has identified, as well as the changes they are considering, and risks associated with those changes.

- **A CAC Member** expressed that the language regarding what SPU adjusts is confusing.
- **A CAC Member** asked about leak adjustments in underground sprinkler systems.
- **A CAC Member** asked if there any exceptions to those rules for low-income or ability to apply for assistance? Staff responded that no, for leak adjustments there are not. There is a waiver written into the rule for exceptional conditions/scenarios for the General Manager/CEO to waive. Customers who qualify for the Utility Discount Program (UDP) receive a 50% credit already on their utility bills if they are the owner of the home. Additionally, customers have the option to do interest-free long-term payment arrangements.

- **A CAC Member** asked if renters are eligible for UDP. Staff responded that yes, they are eligible, and the credits will go on City Light bill because SPU only bills the owner of the property. For anything that doesn't get applied to their City Light bill, City Light will send a refund check to customers once a year.
- **A CAC Member** asked if renters can pay their own City Light bill. Staff responded that yes, and renters may pay their own garbage/sewer/water bill, but their name is not on the bill. It remains in the landlord's name. Staff can send the bill to multiple names (resident and landowner), but the SPU agreement is with the owner.
- **A CAC Member** asked if sewer rates for commercial are higher than residential? Staff responded that no, they are not. However, May – October, residential sewer bills are based on the average consumption during the winter Nov – Apr, while commercial is based on water consumption through the entire year.
- **A CAC Member** asked what would be a significant enough leak to indicate to the meter reader that there is a leak? Staff responded that the meter reader can see the read from the homeowners last bill; if it is significantly higher than that they know there could be an issue.
- **A CAC Member** asked how often meter readers make errors. Staff responded that when a customer thinks this might be the case, they call SPU and we ask them to take a read themselves. If the number is significantly off, it's an easy fix; SPU cancels that bill and re-charges. This does not seem to happen often though.
- **A CAC Member** asked if small leaks that persist for a long time become significant and major leaks. Staff responded that the major leaks tend to be sudden.
- **A CAC Member** shared that some customers who have identified leaks will turn off their water at the meter between uses to reduce leaking. They suggested that SPU provide education on this option. Staff noted that this may be discussed with customers in some cases.
- **A CAC Member** asked if, once the leak is identified, is the customer expected to pay any of the amount above normal on the first bill they receive. Staff responded no; SPU just has them pay the normal amount while they work to get the issue repaired.
- **A CAC Member** shared that their insurance company that covers side sewers also covers water lines in their policy. They clarified that this insurance is separate from homeowner insurance.
- **A CAC Member** asked if there is a place online to look up where your meter is. Staff shared the following website: <https://www.seattle.gov/utilities/services/water/water-meters/locate-and-read>. If you are unable to find it, calling SPU is the next best option.
- **A CAC Member** asked what the average per person water consumption is. Staff responded that there is a lot of variability, but SPU is currently developing a calculator for savingwater.org that could help with this calculation.
- **A CAC Member** asked why meter readers provide estimates sometimes. Staff responded that much of the reason is because cars are parked over meters, and meter readers must physically read the meters. They added that estimated reads are not common.
- **A CAC Member** asked what is the main issue for water leaks – tree roots? Staff responded that it is more likely to be due to failure of infrastructure.

Exercise: Customer Scenarios

The goal of the exercise was to discuss impacts to customers of the leak adjustment policy by examining real-life water leak scenarios and the outcomes for customers. Due to limited time, CDWAC members only reviewed the second customer story (toilet leak).

- **A CAC Member** felt like the loss of hearing and fixed income should be an “exceptional case”. They said they felt that SPU needs to set conditions for scenarios that would be considered exceptional and include a form to fill out for applying for an adjustment.
- **A CAC Member** added that maybe it’s a one-time adjustment; if it happens again SPU will not provide the adjustment again. They emphasized that there needs to be support or help for customers who don’t have the money to pay.
- **A Guest** asked if there is a way to take into account good payment history, in order to be more lenient or offer discounts?
- **A CAC Member** felt like there should be an education component; maybe a customer doesn’t have good hearing, but it doesn’t mean they are not responsible for and should be monitoring for toilet leaks. SPU has audiences that are hard to reach, and this could be an opportunity to reach these communities. “Partnering with the community” to find a way to reach those communities through these experiences. The Core Team should build a framework to justify why SPU would alleviate the burden for at-risk groups. This allows SPU to plan for the future since this probably won’t be an isolated issue.
- **A CAC Member** felt that if it is residential, SPU should forgive the sewer charges. If it doesn’t go into the sewer, it recharges the ground water. Additionally, SPU’s sewer bill does not increase with a leak on a residential property.
- **When asked if we should have different expectations for commercial than residential, a CAC Member responded:** If you’re a business, you should be monitoring this because you’re looking at your bottom line.

Staff asked CDWAC members: Should SPU cap the responsibility at a multiple of the bill (% of a normal bill)? Is there a percentage of cost-sharing between the customer and SPU’s ratepayers that is reasonable?

- **A CAC Member** felt that in the customer story/leaking toilet example, paying an extra \$250 per month for 3 years was not reasonable.
- **A CAC Member** said it should be income-based. A doubly high bill might mean some people don’t notice while another person can’t eat that month.
- **A CAC Member** asked if SPU could implement an income eligibility form. Staff responded that there were around 750 adjustments in 2018. A more thorough review of each case would likely require additional staff and increase SPU’s costs of administering the leak adjustment program.
- **A CAC Member** suggested distinguishing between toilet leaks and faucet leaks. Faucet leaks you see; toilet leaks you do not see.
- **A CAC Member** felt the customer should pay something, but the burden should not be so great.

- **A CAC Member** (For toilet leak) Should consider limiting the number of times a customer can get the same kind of adjustment. SPU should forgive it once, but not again.
- **A CAC Member** felt it was important to note that renters don't always have control over the proactiveness of fixing appliances and leaks. Additionally, low-income individuals don't always have the ability to be proactive about fixes.

We will include follow-up questions in the meeting feedback survey. Members also requested copies of the leak adjustment flyer. These will be shared at the June WSAC meeting.

5. 4/24 All-CAC meeting on Risk and Resiliency and Exercise on Equity considerations

Members participated in the exercise that was part of in the April All-CAC meeting:

1. Look at the risk matrix and think of a time you were impacted by one of these risks.
 - a. What were the impacts to you and your family?
 - b. What helped you to recover?
2. How might these risks have a disparate impact on our most vulnerable communities? (e.g. lack of resources)
3. How can the CACs work with SPU to ensure that the needs of vulnerable communities are addressed in our Risk and Resiliency work?

Members shared responses to one of the above questions:

- **A CAC Member** shared that snow/climate change is not on the matrix. SouthPark was impacted much worse than Georgetown by the recent snow event. The video sent out for the April meeting highlighted the issue with snow plowing; but a lot of people in SouthPark do not have the resources to stock up on supplies and there is no walkable supermarket. No bus service route to SouthPark, so residents couldn't get out. Disparately impacted by Metro issues.
- **A CAC Member** shared about the importance of telling the right story, the whole environmental justice story. They shared about the story of how Lake Washington's cleanup was at the expense of the Duwamish. After a sewer system was created throughout the City of Seattle and the region, that sewage got dumped into places like the Duwamish River.
- **A CAC Member** learned that since our April meeting on side sewer education and policy, that they had a side sewer failure, and needed to have their side sewer lined. The repairs were \$16k.
- **A CAC Member** shared how temperature rise will result in hotter summers, more wildfires. Last summer, described the experience of having a young child and realizing they couldn't go outside because of the smoke. Many residents won't be able to afford air conditioning, or don't have a car to transport air conditioning units. Especially a concern for those with young children. Air conditioning might be a reality in our region in the not distant future; wonder how the City is going to look at this issue.
- This discussion will be continued at the June meeting.

5. Community Insights, Around the Table

- **A CAC Member** shared that on Saturday, June 8 there will be a free public screening of Engineering with Nature - An Ode to Water, Wood, and Stone. Following the screening, Director

Shelly Solomon, will engage in an extended Q&A with members of NOAA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Systems Design, and other of the project's key participants. 1:30 PM Doors open at the Seattle Central Library (1000 4th Ave. Seattle)

<https://www.siff.net/festival/engineering-with-nature-an-ode-to-water-wood-and-stone>

- **A CAC Member** shared that the Thornton Creek Alliance, in partnership SPU and Parks will be hosting the Influence of the Confluence 2.0 on June 9. SPU CEO/General Manager Mami Hara will be speaking.
- **A Guest** shared that UW's College of the Built Environment is hosting a Women of Color in Community Planning and Design. **They will send a link to Sheryl to share.**
- **A CAC Member shared about** HonkFest West 2019, an event with marching bands, family-friendly activities and food May 31 – June 2. First night is in South Park, Saturday in White Center, Sunday in Columbia City.
- **Staff** shared about upcoming RSJ events. See email from Sheryl from earlier this week.
- **Staff** shared about an event Sat, May 18 9-4:30: Islandwood's Multicultural Environmental Ed Conf in Hillman City (SE Seattle). SPU is a sponsor. <https://islandwood.org/event/mcee-2019/>

Adjourned 7:35 PM