



**SPU Water System Advisory Committee (WSAC)**

**January 21, 2015 Meeting Notes**  
**Seattle Municipal Tower, 700 Fifth Avenue**

**Room 5965**

**5:30 pm – 7:30 pm**

*Chair: Kyle Stetler*

*Vice-Chair: Kelly McCaffrey*

Committee Members & CAC Staff	Present?	SPU Staff & Guests	Role
Tom Grant	N	Tony Blackwell	Water System Maintenance
Jessy Hardy	Y	Alex Chen	Water Planning and Program Management
Chelsea Jefferson	Y	Craig Omoto	SPU Finance
Kelly McCaffrey	Y	Alexander Zimerman	Visitor
Kyle Stetler	Y		
Heidi Fischer, CAC Program Support	Y		
Julie Burman, Policy Liaison	Y		
Sheryl Shapiro, Program Manager	Y		

**PLEASE NOTE ACTION ITEMS ARE V MARKED AND HIGHLIGHTED IN YELLOW**

**Regular Business**

- Committee Members and SPU staff introduced themselves.
- November meeting notes are approved.
- A visitor then joined the meeting and introduced himself as Alexander Zimerman. He carried a red sign that said Standup America.
  - The Program Manager explained that WSAC does not have a public comment period, but that she could give him a few minutes to make a short statement.
  - He explained that he is running for Position 8 of the City Council, has lived in Seattle for 30 years, and has four diplomas including an MPA and a PhD. He further explained he and his organization support having an open question and answer period every Sunday from 12-4pm in the meeting room on the first floor of City Hall so that the public could

more effectively engage with the 30 people running for Council positions, an activity which he felt would bring us more in alignment with free speech and the Constitution.

- He then thanked the Committee and sat down.
- He excused himself from the meeting in the middle of the first presentation and was thanked and escorted to the elevator by the Program Manager.

### **Water System Update: Precipitation, Snowpack, Reservoir Storage, and Consumption:**

#### **Alex Chen, Water Planning and Program Manager**

- Alex referred to a handout of four graphs entitled “Seattle Public Utilities Water System Synopsis as of January 12, 2015.”
  - The blue lines in each show the average trends for every month.
  - The red lines show this year.
  - With regard to precipitation, we’re right at the normal range.
  - However, snowpack is low, at about 30% of normal.
    - Last year, we gained snowpack in mid-February. Snowpack is an important tool in water supply planning, but we are still early in snow season. We are watching the water supply situation carefully, and the current condition is “good.”
    - We use a planning method that takes snow pack into account as one of several tools for meeting water supply targets. If there is low snowpack, we apply more focus on filling the reservoirs using rainfall instead of snowmelt.
      - However, we have to balance storing water in the reservoirs during flood season and also leaving enough room in the reservoirs to hold water from large rainstorms during flood season.
    - We are working with the media to ensure that our message, about the water supply being in good condition, is clear.
- Alex will have more information at next month’s WSAC meeting about the 2015 forecast.
  - ✓ **If WSAC Members have interest in a particular topic, please let Julie know and she will communicate that interest to Alex.**

### **Water Rates Update: Craig Omoto, SPU Finance**

Craig attended WSAC in the fall of 2013 and presented some of the same information. He’s here today to give an update on water rate plans, and to give some information about water rates in general.

- The Water Branch usually submits a rate study every 2-3 years, so that the Council does not have to review multiple rate studies (for all SPU services) in the same year.
- The last time the City approved new water rates was 2011.
- Here, we are talking about retail rates for Seattle. Wholesale customers have a different rate plan.
- Last year the City Council spent significant time reviewing and adopting SPU’s six year Strategic Business Plan, and asked SPU to delay a water rate study until this year. As a result, rates will not change in 2015.

- The current rate structure has identical rates and structure for residential and commercial customers in the off-peak season (fall, winter, and spring) and different rates and structure for residential and commercial customers in the summer peak season.
- Current water rates also include a base monthly charge for the meter which is not based on water usage, plus a water consumption rate. This current structure evolved over several years.
  - In the 1970s, there was no distinction between residential and commercial customers.
  - In the late 1980s, we added tiers based on amount of water used, as well as peak and off peak rates. Right around then, demand was catching up to supply, and we were implementing many efforts to conserve. Water use declined and has remained lower, so we do not expect to have to consider new water supply sources until 2060.
  - In 2001, a third tier was implemented for people using a lot of water in the summer months. In order to be charged at the third tier, use must reach 18ccf.
    - The typical household use is 5ccf.
    - 1ccf equals 748 gallons of water.
  - Over 2 years ago, we convened a water rate design committee, and Tom Grant and Carol O’Hara, WSAC Members, were on it.
  - For the new rate design, the goal is to simplify and shift the focus to predictability, affordability, and equity, while maintaining conservation.
  - The timing of the any future rate design changes is still to be determined.
  - We will also be discussing customer outreach, on which WSAC may be asked to provide input.
    - The Program Manager noted that there have been some changes in the utility discount program, and SPU is doing outreach to increase enrollment.
    - The Policy Liaison will follow up with communication staff about this outreach and possible involvement with WSAC.

***Some Questions and Comments from the Committee***

- Question: If adopted, when would the new rates go into effect?
- Answer: If the plan is submitted to the City Council, they would take some time to review it and discuss it in the SPU/Dept. of Neighborhoods (SPUN) Committee meetings. The Committee would then vote on the plan as proposed by SPU, or propose a modified plan. However, we are not submitting any proposed changes to Council this year.
- Question: Will the public be informed through neighborhood meetings?
- Answer: The plan has not been approved yet, and we are still discussing outreach strategies.
- Question: Will outreach be done before or after approval?
- Answer: The SPU Communications Office will make a decision about that soon.

- Comment: It seems relevant to WSAC to consider how this is communicated to customers.
- Question: Can you clarify the role of conservation in the proposed rate plan?
  - Answer: Initially SPU was very aggressive in conservation efforts to forestall building a new water supply. Our customers have been very receptive, and as a result we have been very successful in our conservation efforts. We can focus more now on predictability and affordability, while still maintaining the conservation programs.
- Question: What about the growth that Seattle is experiencing?
  - Answer: SPU continues to take that into consideration. In fact, we are using the same amount of water that we used in the 1950s, even with all of the growth we've experienced since then.

### **Water System Maintenance and Customer Contact, Tony Blackwell**

The Water Operations Division installs, operates, maintains and repairs the City of Seattle water transmission and distribution systems. We perform this work 24/7/365 to protect public health and provide continuous fire flow pressure to protect public safety. If customers are without water due to a problem with our infrastructure, we fix it immediately.

- Tony passed around a map of SPU's direct service (retail) area, from Puget Sound to Lake Washington, and from NE 205<sup>th</sup> Street near Lake Forest Park to Boulevard Park.
  - SPU owns two protected watersheds, with no nearby farming or industrial use. SPU also owns and operate the wells, and the transmission and distribution lines.
  - Customers in this retail area get a bill from SPU.
- SPU also supplies 127 wholesale meters. They are the point of delivery to other municipalities, and those customers receive bills from those municipalities.
- SPU serves more than 1.3 million customers daily, including both retail and wholesale.
- The water we provide is for three purposes: drinking (and household use), to fight fires, and for fish.
- The Water Operations Division has 135 staff , and is divided into four functional areas:
  - Transmission
    - Includes Lake Young's & Tolt River Watersheds and Reservoirs, Right of Ways (ROW) and
    - Anything attached to the water main itself (known as an appurtenance), and
    - Dam maintenance and safety.
      - Major regulatory agencies oversee the maintenance of dams, including the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of Fish and Wildlife.
  - All City distribution
    - Includes City hydrant crews, first response crews, all City valve crews, metering maintenance crews, all City utility locators, and all City vactor crew.

- The picture in this power point slide depicts a broken pipe with water shooting 60 feet in the area – a reminder that it’s important to call 8-1-1 before you did!
  - North distribution
    - Includes all north unscheduled crews (for leaks), north new taps crews, north special projects crews, north saw cutting crew, and north vector crew
  - South distribution
    - Includes all south unscheduled crews (for leaks), south new tap crews, south special projects crews, and south saw cutting crew
- We do a lot of freeze response work. Generally, you need three days of cold weather before seeing private property damage, and seven days before seeing damage to the SPU infrastructure.
- There are three tiers of projects:
  - Long term large
  - Smaller scale SPU crews doing work
  - Emergencies
    - Protecting life, safety, and property is the first task.
    - We will let customers know about water outages after this is accomplished.
- The Policy Liaison asked how customers are notified when they’re going to be without water, and how the approach differs between planned work and emergencies.
  - Tony responded that there are a number of ways of notifying customers. Some work requires water outages, and some doesn’t.
    - If a project is big and planned, SPU communication starts getting the word out a year in advance, so that there’s plenty of time to meet customers’ particular needs.
    - With smaller projects, we communicate with the block or two that we’re working on.
    - In mid-size projects, we try to communicate with the people affected and with the surrounding neighborhoods.
      - With scheduled outages customers are given 48 hour notice.
        - However, we’re very customer focused, and we don’t shut off restaurants, doctors, and dentists during the day if at all possible. We try to negotiate shutdown times with customers. Sometimes residential customers do have to be shut off during the day so that businesses can stay open during the day. Most customers understand this.
        - We keep really good records of dialysis customers so we can avoid disruptions from water shutdowns.
    - The challenge is that lots of work is not planned, and is the result of emergencies.
      - We leave door hangers for emergency situations. Work crews fill them out by checking the appropriate box explaining the situation, and put

work order number on it. Work crews will update the work order before they go home. There's also a 24 hour emergency response number for the customer to call to have their water line re-opened, and a customer service number if more information is needed.

- Our intention is that the customer doesn't have to expend a lot of energy and time to find out what happened, and we are always trying to improve our communication system.
  - We are looking at ways for instant contact with field crews, but have to balance that with customer privacy concerns. Not all SPU staff has access to billing records.
- The Program Manager asked for further explanation of the water pressure zones shown in the SPU Direct Service Map.
  - Tony explained that the pressure in the zones exists in relation to their water source.
  - Seattle's water system is mostly gravity fed, which saves a lot of energy. We do have pump stations for some areas.
  - The colors on the map are different elevations of the zone as they relate to the source/dam elevation. Water pressure varies according to a location's elevation in the zone, and the zone's relationship to the dam.
  - We have pressure reducers towards sea level.
  - The highest pressure is at sea level, for example, in the Sodo area.
  - If you can see a water tank, you are probably at a higher elevation, and water pressure could be lower.
  - A pressure measure of 40-75 psi is what most people want; the distribution standard is 20 psi.
- Referring to a power point slide, a Committee Member asked where the 400 million gallons of treated water are stored.
  - Tony answered that they are kept in SPU's three wells and six covered reservoirs. This is considered in-town storage.
- One Committee Member noted that he would be interested in a field trip to see some of the water operations work.
  - Tony responded that they often do field trips. It is hard to plan for a water main break, but we might be able to arrange to call WSAC Members when one occurs. Special, planned projects are more accessible, like the Cedar River Watershed, with the education center, the falls, and the old train station. We can talk more about setting up a field trip for WSAC, during the day, taking traffic into consideration.
- The Program Manager noted that there's a short video on the SPU website that shows everything the Water Operations and Maintenance Division does.

#### **Around the Table**

- Updates from the January 13 Joint CAC Meeting
  - Kyle and Chelsea attended the meeting and gave a brief summary.

- The meeting discussed the implementation of the Strategic Business Plan (SBP) and asked the three Committees (SWAC, CDWAC, and WSAC) to identify a list of 10+ items of interest from the list of 71 SBP Action Items. WSAC chose:

**WSAC's 10+ Items:**

**Focus Area Grouping: Protect Health & Environment**

- A-01, Climate Change Adaptation/Resiliency
- A-02, Decentralized Green Systems, i.e. Rain Capture
- A-04, Watershed Roadways
- E-33, Establish a Standard Environmental Management System

**Focus Area Grouping: Customer**

- A-25, Service Equity

**Focus Area Grouping: Transform the Workforce**

- E-41, Increase Field Crew Productivity
- E-43, Establish Entry-Level Apprentice Training Programs

**Focus Area Grouping: OpEx – Service Quality**

- A-06, Improve Quality of Drainage and Sewer Services; Mapping, Modeling
- A-10, 11, Emergency Planning, Seismic Vulnerability
- A-12, Valves
- E-10, Update the Wastewater Model

**Focus Area Grouping: OpEx – Financial Strength**

- A-13, Require New Developments to Pay for a Share of the Utility's Systems Resulting from Growth
- A-15, Revenue Recovery

**Focus Area Grouping: OpEx – Technology Planning**

- E-32, Update GIS Platform

✓ **WSAC Members can still add to this list. Please send any suggestions to Sheryl Shapiro or Heidi Fischer.**

- The meeting also discussed the role of the CACs in implementing the SBP. Each Committee gave the following input:

**Report Results re: CAC Roles**

- CDWAC reported the following possible CAC roles:
  - Being informed
  - Informing/sharing information with community
  - Participating in district-based election discussions
  - Helping to shape the Communications Plan
- Content
- Message
- Format
- Outreach locations
- Conducting outreach/facilitation

- “Beta” testing public outreach format/materials
- Communicating with City Council
- Video-taping members on field trips (previous video was staff-centered) – Seattle Channel
- WSAC reported that they agreed with the roles listed in today’s presentation, and were especially interested in field trips, community outreach, and discussing the SBP overall.
  - They noted that climate change seemed a good topic for outreach.
  - They also wanted more information about SPU’s reorganization around the LOBs as it becomes available, and are eager to see the implementation schedule of the 71 action items, which will drive their role in implementation.
- SWAC reported that they have a couple of members who are beginning to work on the Committee’s community engagement proposal.
  - The Committee wants to better understand the role of CACs in taking information to the community and in bringing information from the community back to SPU.

✓ **WSAC Members can provide additional input about CAC roles in implementing the SBP. Please send any suggestions to Sheryl Shapiro or Heidi Fischer.**

✓ **Heidi will re-send to WSAC Members the following:**

- CAC Input on Roles
- SBP List of 71 Action Items
- WSAC’s List of 10+ Items of Interest

#### **WSAC Business**

- Officer Elections
  - The Committee discussed how to proceed with officer elections.
    - Elections are planned for the February meeting.
    - Members should decide whether they would like to be considered for an officer position.
    - The Committee currently has a Chair and a Vice Chair, who are responsible for speaking with the Policy Liaison prior to meetings to help plan the agendas.
    - The SWAC also has a Secretary position, and that person is responsible for drafting letters, and helping to coordinate field trips. WSAC may want to consider having a secretary.
- February Meeting
  - The Policy Liaison noted that there is a good agenda for February. Alex Chen will be talking about the planning outlook for 2015, and we will also have a presentation on SPU’s Seismic Program and Regional Resiliency Project.

- Other Items
  - The Program Manager reported that she had received an email from Tyler Roberts of Polar Concepts regarding a water systems lease to Foss, who build arctic drilling equipment to be used by Shell Oil, and its possible environmental impacts.
    - ✓ She will forward the email to WSAC.
    - WSAC may decide to further explore the issue.

Meeting adjourned. 7:31pm.