

MINUTES

Public Informational Meeting on Proposed Water Project Harpers Ferry Water Treatment Facility and Distribution Systems Upgrades

A public meeting was held on April 6, 2015, at the Harpers Ferry Town Hall, located at 1000 Washington Street, Harpers Ferry, WV at 7 p.m. The meeting was announced in the local county newspaper (The Spirit of Jefferson), in the town's Community Newsletter, posted at the Harpers Ferry Water Department, at the local post office and the Bolivar Community Center, and on the Town's website.

ATTENDANCE:

Approximately 15 members of the public attended the meeting.

A panel of presenters included: Harpers Ferry Mayor Gregory Vaughn; Barbara Humes, Chair of the Water Commission; Jennifer O'Brien, Assistant Director of the Eastern Panhandle Regional Planning and Development Council; Josh Carter, Water Systems Manager of the Harpers Ferry Water Works; Christopher Eckenrode, Senior Project Engineer with Gwin, Dobson & Foreman; and members of the Water Project Team including Charlotte Thompson, Harpers Ferry Town Council; Ray Balut, Water Commissioner; and Kathryn Payne, Town Treasurer.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS:

Mayor Vaughn presented opening remarks and described the purpose and goal of the meeting. He stated that it was an aggressive project to correct problems occurring over generations and that we have been working over time for a comprehensive and conceptual plan.

Barbara Humes provided introductions and gave a brief project history.

Jennifer O'Brien gave an overview of the USDA Loan Program. She pointed out that the combined household income of our service area does not allow us to get a State grant.

Christopher Eckenrode presented a summary of his evaluation and findings of the existing water treatment facility and infrastructure, the upgrades that would be needed to ensure that clean water can be delivered in a dependable manner, to enable the Water Works to be compliant with current and future regulations, and to modernize the system so that it is efficient and highly functional for decades to come. He reviewed the expected timeline for project start and completion. He commented on the impact on rates. His PowerPoint slides are attached.

Following the presentation, citizens were invited to participate in a question and answer segment. Speakers went to the lectern and stated their name. Clarification questions were answered and comments were logged.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS:

Comment that we should approach our 2 federal senators and Congress persons to find funding and possibly get earmarks. *Meetings have taken place with State officials; federal grants of this nature are scarce. We will continue to pursue options.*

Comment with hope that we can mitigate certain infrastructure problems before the April 2016 start date and that the town will take into consideration who improperly installed the pipes in the first place. *Mr. Eckenrode described the strict oversight that will occur with this project and that we have no idea at this point who installed the pipes over the past century.*

Comment urging us to take advantage of National Park Service and any funding they could provide to mitigate rate increases. *The NPS is a cooperating partner in this project.*

Comment that Jefferson Utilities Inc. made an offer to provide thousands of gallons of water at \$4.20. He distributed a page that compares local water rates. *Alternatives have been explored and have been determined to be technically and financially not feasible when taking into account hidden costs, future water quality issues, and that the infrastructure upgrade must be factored.*

Clarification of whether sewer rates are tied to the water department. *These are two separate agencies. Rates are independent of each other.*

Question on whether we will continue to have hard water with a new system? *Yes. Most of the eastern panhandle consists of karst limestone geology. It would be too costly to try to deal with hard water at the system level.*

Question on the functionality of hydrants on Bolivar Heights? *There are two hydrants that can be used to fill a tanker truck.*

Question on why a staff room would be needed? *Because there is currently no room for testing, files and other administrative actions. Invited to take a tour of the plant.*

Question on whether our location to 3 bodies of water is unique in Jefferson County? *Yes.*

Question on whether we could enhance our water source with deep wells? *Surface water has its advantages and disadvantages; however, pumps are needed to pull water from a well. Also, county wells are surface water influenced and are no better than the water we are treating now. Usually the hardness is higher with wells. Surface water is so much cheaper to use.*

Comment on concern of rising water rates over the years. The project might cause a hefty increase for businesses such as her restaurant. Encouraged taking water from JUI.

Comment from a JUI rate payer that as a bulk rate customer of JUI you will pay one bulk rate to JUI and costs (not benefits) will be passed on to the rate payer. You may be pushed to pay an extra surcharge to replace infrastructures. JUI and affiliates continue to earn a profit while the ratepayer pays for it.

Comment that JUI is attempting a sale of its holdings to Jefferson County Public Service district.

Comment by a business owner to retain our redundancy to water sources and not limit ourselves to one source provider. The WV source water protection law was repealed this year so we have no protection with a single source such as JUI. An example was given of a successful investment in municipal water treatment in a town in West Virginia whose rates are now lower, and the water safer, than the surrounding towns that have privatized. Investing in a better system is more cost effective solution. A private company does not have the same objectives.

ADJOURN:

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:15 p.m.