

MEETING SUMMARY
DIRECTORS OF UTILITIES COMMITTEE
May 5, 2021
WebEx

Pursuant to the declared state of emergency in the Commonwealth of Virginia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to protect the public health and safety of the committee members, staff, and general public, the meeting was held on May 5, 2021 at 1:30 pm via WebEx. These electronic meetings are required to complete essential business on behalf of the region. A recording of the meeting is available on the website. The following attended electronically:

Directors of Utilities Committee:

David Jurgens, CH	Yann A. Le Gouellec, NN
Jason Mitchell, HA	Robert Carteris, NO
Edward G. Henifin, HRSD	Chad Krejcarek, PQ
Donald Jennings, IW	Jack Reed, SM
Doug Powell, JCSA	Paul Retel, SU
Frank James, NN	Brian K. Woodward, YK

Directors of Utilities Copy:

Erin Trimyer, CH	Don Piron, VB
Bud Curtis, NN	

HRPDC Staff:

Katie Cullipher	Whitney Katchmark
Rebekah Eastep	Jill Sunderland

1. Summary of the March 3, 2021 Meeting of the Directors of Utilities Committee

There were no comments on the summary of the March 3, 2021 meeting.

ACTION: The summary of the March 3, 2021 meeting of the Directors of Utilities Committee was approved by consensus.

2. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

3. Help 2 Others Program Update

Ms. Cullipher presented an overview of the meeting of the H2O Program partners, which was held on March 22, 2021. Several proposed changes to the program were discussed during the meeting, including the maximum amount of assistance provided, the locality fund allocation schedule, program eligibility, and donation options.

The Program Partner meeting was well-attended and included representatives from various offices of the Salvation Army, HRSD, the Cities of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach, the James City County Service Authority, and Newport News Waterworks. The Partners asked the Directors to consider the following changes to the program:

- Increase the \$250 assistance threshold
- Move local allocations from quarterly to every other month
- Make those who fall at or below the poverty guidelines eligible
- New strategy for giving instead of donation envelopes

The Directors noted that the maximum assistance threshold had not changed since the beginning of the H2O program and agreed to increase the amount from \$250 to \$500. They also supported changing the local allocations from quarterly to every other month, which will help prevent suspending referrals between distributions.

The H2O Program was designed to provide one-time assistance to customers who are experiencing a hardship, and after some discussion, the Directors noted that the funds available are not sufficient to address poverty challenges. They agreed to keep the program eligibility requirements as they are.

Program donations have significantly increased since HRSD implemented the online bill pay donation enhancement in November 2019. The “add a little extra” campaign has been very successful. HRSD is exploring alternatives for paper check contributions instead of using donation envelopes, which are expensive to produce. The online contributions have been so much more successful than collecting paper check contributions that the Directors support moving away from paper donations altogether. They agreed to distribute one bill insert, which will explain how donors can make online contributions. The Directors discussed promoting the campaign through their social media platforms, and Ms. Cullipher noted that the HRPDC will provide a media toolkit with materials that are ready to share.

ACTION: The following changes to the H2O program were approved by consensus: 1) increase the maximum assistance threshold from \$250 to \$500, 2) change the local allocations from quarterly to every other month, and 3) phase out the paper donation program using a one-time bill insert to inform customers.

4. Federal Infrastructure Funds

The federal government is making significant investments in infrastructure and the Congressional delegation has requested input on regional priority projects across many sectors. Ms. Katchmark suggested developing a short list of projects so that we could easily respond as a region if asked. It is important to add water projects to the conversation that is often dominated by transportation and broadband needs. The Directors discussed adding HRSD’s SWIFT project, septic-to-sewer conversion projects, and lead line replacements.

ACTION: HRPDC staff will followup with an email to ask for input in developing a list of regional priority water infrastructure projects.

5. Lead and Copper Rule Follow Up

Following discussions with the LCR DUC subcommittee, Ms. Kathmark asked the Directors if it would be helpful to develop a regional website to document lead inventories and/or an app for multiple utilities to use in field data collections. The Directors discussed the status of their lead line inventories. Several localities have identified most of their lead lines to be in the older developments. The City of Chesapeake worked with Hazen and Sawyer to develop a plan, while the City of Suffolk is using their past knowledge of construction projects to develop their GIS layer.

Ms. Kathmark also asked if the Directors would be interested in conducting a regional survey to determine the public perception of drinking water. Several Committee members noted the importance of developing a survey for a specific reason and readiness to take steps based on the data collected. The Committee did not direct HRPDC staff to work on any efforts at this time.

ACTION: None.

6. HRPDC / Mission H2O / New Aqualaw Group

Aqualaw formed a new group, the Virginia Municipal Drinking Water Association (VMDWA), which may appear to overlap with the work of Ms. Andrea Wortzel and Mission H2O. However, several Directors noted that their work is complimentary. The first meeting of the VMDWA is scheduled for Thursday, May 6, and many Directors had plans to attend even if they had not decided whether to join the association. Mr. Henifin indicated that he appreciated having several groups working to influence sound water policy during General Assembly sessions and is a proponent of the new VMDWA.

The Committee also discussed the best role for the HRPDC moving forward and considerations for a new hire. Ms. Katchmark suggested using consultants for groundwater modeling and have HRPDC staff analyze the data at the last meeting. She will send out a survey to help assess HRPDC's role and overlap with Mission H2O/VMDWA and what tasks and skills are most valuable to the committee.

ACTION: None

7. Utility Directors Roundtable Discussion

- Ending the Moratorium on Cut-offs - In order to incentivize using CARES funds for delinquent bills, several localities and HRSD are likely to reinstate shut-offs this summer. It is anticipated that the timing will be aligned across the region.
- Marijuana and Employee Drug Testing – The Directors are interested in sharing updates to their drug testing policies. One of the challenges in regards to marijuana testing, in contrast to alcohol testing, is that someone could have been under the influence during non working hours and still test positive days or even weeks later.
- Mr. Powell announced that Mr. Danny Poe is retiring from the JCSA.

8. Other Business

There was no other business

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