HEARING MINUTES
CHESTER WATER POLLUTION CONTROL AUTHORITY PROPOSED 2019-2020 BUDGET
PUBLIC HEARING JULY 16, 2019 - TOWN HALL COMMUNITY ROOM

Sam Chorches, acting on behalf of Ed Ward who could not attend because of business obligations, called the hearing to order at 4:00 pm. WPCA members in attendance were: Ian McLachlan, Mark Riggio and Ed Meehan.

Public in attendance were three (3) commercial users: Mr. DeJonge, Mr. Schroeder, Dr. Senay; along with Jenny Kisten representing the Chester Historical Society, Tax Collector Madeline Myers and Frist Selectman Lauren Gister.

Mr. Chorches reported this hearing was duly advertised by public notice published in the Valley Courier, July 4, 2019, at page 11. In addition, notices were sent all WPCA sanitary sewer users by first class mail describing the proposed 2019-2020 budget, the extra ordinary budget drivers impacting operating costs and the proposed initiation of a three (3) classification fee schedule as a fairer way the assess users. See Attached.

Mr. Meehan provided an overview of the reasons for the budget drivers and why the WPCA was considering the three (3) user classifications: residential, mixed residential/commercial, and restaurant users. Also explained was why the Authority must carry a fund balance reserve.

Mr. Chorches opened the floor to questions and comments. Mr. DeJonge expressed his frustration that the existing method of calculation is unfair and not accurate because it does not allow for fractional assessment only rounding up charges. See his written comments attached. Mr. Schroeder expressed concern for the higher restaurant user fee charges and questioned the accuracy of waste water discharges based on Connecticut Water Company data. He suggested the WPCA could consider installing meters to measure sanitary flow form each user. Dr. Senay urged the WPCA to collect all outstanding fines and be more diligent charging restaurants that do not abide by grease disposal requirements.

Mr. Chorches closed the hearing at 4:50 pm thanking the public for their comments and stated the Authority would consider all concerns during our deliberation of 2019-2020 budget.

Submitted Ed Meehan
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

CHESTER WATER POLLUTION CONTROL AUTHORITY (WPCA)

JULY 16, 2019, 4:PM, COMMUNITY ROOM - TOWN HALL, 203 MIDDLESEX AVENUE

PROPOSED 2019-2020 BUDGET

The Chester WPCA is dedicated to providing a municipal sewer system that protects the public health and supports the vitality of the village center service area.

The draft 2019-2020 budget proposes $116,400 for operations expenditures, a modest $1,950 (2%) increase over the 2018-2019 budget. However, higher user fees are necessary to fund these expenditures and pay for incurred extra ordinary costs that have reduced reserve funds used for emergency repairs and easing future year expenditures.

Summary of 2018-2019 Extra Ordinary Costs

+ increased discharge volume (gallons) to Deep River treatment facility................ $3,463
+ increased emergency contractor call outs.................................................. $2,470
+ increased engineering costs for inspections and user compliance notices........ $11,114
+ Chester’s share for Deep River treatment plant capital improvements.............. $25,382

Note: higher usage volumes are caused, in part, by illegal sump pump connections, pipe leakage and storm event flooding.

Note: multiple notice of violations with fines totaling $12,878 have been sent to non-compliant users, WPCA intends to recoup these funds.

Proposed Changes to Users Fee Classifications

The WPCA proposes to change from a single user fee classification, all users pay the same rate, to a three-classification billing system. The WPCA believes that classifications based on user impacts to the sewer system will be fairer to all users.

2019-2020 Proposed Classifications and Equivalent Dwelling Units Fee Charges

Residential users..............................................$775
Commercial - Residential Mixed users.....$825
Restaurant users*..............................................$925

*Restaurant use classification pertains to Food Preparation Establishments that use Fats, Oils and Grease (FOG) Management Equipment approved by the WPCA as defined in Town of Chester Sewer Use and Pollution Control Regulation.
Hi Lauren,

Please go ahead with the street lamp hookups. I will gladly absorb the small cost of electricity. There's no need to send a check unless the bill comes out a much higher.

Aware that I may be sending you a Pandora's Box, here is what I've learned after inquiries to CT Water, the Tax Collector, and WPCA about the sewer bills, why I think they are unreasonable, and how they might be made more fair and friendly.

1) The sewer billing is based on EDUs - which stands for 'Estimated Dwelling Unit' or 'Equivalent Dwelling Unit', depending who you ask. The initial EDU is "determined by the Tax Collector based on scheduled inspections" or "on information from the WPCA" and later "adjusted by the WPCA (or appeal) based upon the annual report from Connecticut Water". Again, it depends on who is asked.

According to WPCA: "Each retail, residential, office or industrial unit begins at the 1 EDU rate. The rate starts at 1 EDU which is 157 gallons/day x 365 days or 57,000 gallons. 'Anything over 1 EDU is billed at 2 EDUs.' Thus, for an example from Six Main: 141,000 gallons comes out to 2.4 EDUs and is rounded up to 3 EDUs even though it is 30,000 gallons less than 3 EDUs.

Since there is only one meter in most multiple use buildings and each unit is billed a minimum of 1 EDU, if the total usage in the building is 57,200 gallons the bill jumps from $1,400 to $2,100. Seven hundred dollars seems a lot to pay for an additional 200 gallons of water!

2) Depending on who you ask, "The yearly CT Water report covers September 1 to August 31" or, "October 1 - September 30" or, "September 30 - September 30". (CT Water says: September to August, Tax Collector: October - September, WPCA: September to September.) Regardless, the report is "based on the previous four meter readings" which is good because it makes certain all usage is reported and nothing is duplicated.

However, because the dates meters are read and the dates bills are issued are not the same, nor does the reporting period correspond to the billing periods, it is impossible for a user to reconcile their water usage with the sewer bill. Hence, when the EDU jumps from 2 to 3 one must just accept that fact, unable to reconcile it, and thus unaware that their usage may be just over the 57k. And, since each unit is charged a base EDU as determined by (someone) their bill may be even more unfair - since, say the retail store has perhaps used only 10,000 gallons, it is still being charged $700.
It's too complicated to easily explain, but in 2015 a reading taken only 3 days before the end of the reporting period cost me an extra $1,700. Had it the meter been read 3 days later it would appear on the next year's report and, since the building was then vacant for six months, I would not have been charged the $1,700.

My thoughts are:
A) The system should transparent and communicated, perhaps by providing a simple explanation with the sewer bills.

B) Charging every unit in a building the minimum of 1 EDU is unreasonable. Charges should be based on either; total usage in the building and at reasonably lower multiples - say 10,000 gallons. And, to help in understanding them, the sewer bills should show the gallonage. Instead they show showing only the EDUs.

Here's an example of how these charges play out: At 12-14 Main the most recent sewer bill was $1,400. According to CT Water the average residential customer pays $1.67/day for water or $610/year. For the past 12 months I paid much less; $1.04/gallon based on a total usage of 15,405 gallons at a total cost for the building of $378.40 versus a sewer bill for $1,400.

*Should it really cost nearly four times the cost of the water to dispose of it?* I'm all for protecting the environment, but to to people contemplating the cost of a hook up a septic tank looks like a good investment. Especially since today's septic installations are environmentally sound. No wonder the WPCA could not sign up more than one customer when they offered a discounted the connection fee during the construction on Main Street.

Should the Town float a bond to help pay for more hookups and thus spread the sewer costs among a greater base of customers? (One of the WPCAs mea culpa seems to be that the base is so small.)

Despite trying to be straight forward, I may sound a little belligerent and if so I apologize. I'm really not. But I do get a bit worked up paying sewer bills and reliving the time and frustration it took to learn about them.

Anyway, thanks for listening.

Bill

PS. To be fair I will mention that sewer rates have come down from $850/EDU in 2015 to $700/EDU in 2017.