



CITY OF TANEYTOWN

WATER AND SEWER COMMITTEE

INITIAL ACTIONS PROJECT

SEPTEMBER 2015

MAYOR PRO TEM DIANE FOSTER, CHAIRWOMAN
CITY COUNCILMAN DON FRAZIER
CITY COUNCILMAN JOE VIGLIOTTI, RECORDING SECRETARY
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INTRODUCTION.

In July and August 2015, the government of the City of Taneytown, Maryland, owing to public request, formed a committee composed of three councilmembers and three citizens to study the water and sewer rates and associated concerns of the city's residents. The committee was charged with determining whether anything could be done to alleviate those concerns and issues on behalf of the city's residents. The Water and Sewer Committee determined that its principle purpose would be to offer relief to the citizens of Taneytown through any and all possible and available means.

In August 2015, the Water and Sewer Committee organized its goals, projects, and recommendations to the Mayor and City Council, proper, into a set of two tiers: initial short-term recommendations, and mid-range and long-term goals and recommendations. This Initial Actions Project comprises a set of four short-term recommendations the Water and Sewer Committee herein presents for Mayor and City Council consideration.

The recommended initial actions in this report are the concerted and comprehensive efforts of all members of the committee (Chairwoman and Mayor Pro Tem Diane Foster, Councilman Don Frazier, Councilman Joe Vigliotti, Barbara Cook, Jackie Jones, and Gail Wilson). This report was compiled and written by Recording Secretary Vigliotti with the assistance of each of the members of the committee.

ACTION ITEM 1: FEE AMNESTY

It is recommended that the Mayor and City Council of the City of Taneytown waive some or all outstanding late and associated fees and fines associated with water and sewer rate collection, and to reconnect all disconnected residences once in the present as they currently stand. This will be a one-time gesture on the part of the city to help struggling citizens have access to water, and to better afford their bills. While late fees will be waived, the homeowner will still owe the existing rate balance.

PURPOSE: To afford immediate relief to those citizens without water supplies; to reduce the financial burden on those unable to pay that have been assessed late fines and reconnection fees; to ensure greater city revenue.

RATIONALE: Those citizens having difficulty paying water and sewer rates as they are will have a far more difficult time paying water and sewer rates with the encumbrance of additional fees. Likewise, those homes that have had their water supplies shut off for nonpayment are a drain on city revenues rather than a benefit. Houses without water supplies pay no rates at all. The short-term loss of late fees will more than be made up for in the long-term by the restoration of water supplies and subsequent rate payments.

The city budgets \$40,000 in water and sewer fees per year. A single quarter's amnesty will amount to approximately \$10,000.

ACTION ITEM 2: METER BATTERY REPLACEMENT

It is recommended that the Mayor and City Council of the City of Taneytown resolve that the replacement of water meter batteries that have failed continue to be a priority. (See Exhibit A for a potential flyer.)

PURPOSE: To establish accurate readings of water and sewer use by citizens; to ensure they are being fairly charged for water and sewer use; to increase public utilities efficiency; to create a more effective methodology for the replacement of water meter batteries as they expire.

RATIONALE: It is neither appropriate, nor right for the City of Taneytown to levy water and sewer usage charges based on inaccurate information. The City of Taneytown is dedicated to providing excellent public utilities services, and the billing of residents must reflect that service and sense of professionalism through accurate readings.

Those homeowners who have failed batteries must continue to be notified by the City of such failures by means other than notices on water and sewer bills, such as the green sticker notifications currently being utilized. It is the conclusion of the committee that most citizens pay their bills but do not always recognize notices of issues such as meter battery failures on their bills. Alerting residents to the condition of their batteries should be accomplished by way of an additional separate notice mailed to the homeowners each month as the batteries fail (see Exhibit A; also see Action Item 3); by way of phone calls from the city; and by way of green sticker notices currently being affixed to the doors of affected homes. If the homeowner still cannot be contacted, water supplies will be shut off pending contact, and will be restored at no cost once contact is established.

Each battery that must be replaced costs \$156.00. Each battery takes approximately twenty minutes to replace and has a lifespan of approximately twenty years.

ACTION ITEM 3: PUBLIC INFORMATION ON CITY SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE

It is recommended that the Mayor and City Council of the City of Taneytown approve a one-time small flyer to be sent out at the same time as the next quarter's water and sewer bills. A copy of the flyer should also be posted on the City's website, Facebook, and other social media accounts. Additional copies should be placed in the City office. (See Exhibit B for an example flyer.) This flyer will alert people to the following:

- 1.) That the City of Taneytown will work with citizens to allow them to pay their water and sewer bills in installments;*
- 2.) That citizens should specifically check their water and sewer bills to see if their meter battery has failed;*
- 3.) That the City of Taneytown lends tablets at no charge to citizens to check for water leaks that might be contributing to large bills;*
- 4.) That the City of Taneytown will work to resolve the concerns of citizens who believe there may be a problem or error on their water and sewer bills.*

PURPOSE: The City of Taneytown offers critical services of assistance to citizens at no cost, but these services are rarely known about or publicized. The flyer to be distributed with the next quarterly water and sewer bills will be an effort to make citizens aware of assistance the city provides. A copy of the flyer should also be posted on the City's website, Facebook, and other social media accounts. Additional copies should be placed in the City office.

RATIONALE: The City of Taneytown offers vital services through public utilities for the health and wellbeing of citizens. Payment options and other assistance for these services are designed specifically to assist residents in need of help. Because few people know about these services, it is only in the best interest of the City and of the citizens that the public be made aware of such services.

2,699 water and sewer bills were sent out in the last quarter, meaning that 2,699 flyers would have to be sent out as well. This could be done under bulk mailing rates to curb the cost of such a mailer.

ACTION ITEM 4: LETTER FOR M.E.S. UTILITY EFFICIENCY ESTIMATE

It is recommended that the Mayor and City Council of the City of Taneytown authorize a formal invitation letter to M.E.S. (Maryland Environmental Service) to request a proposal on water utilities efficiencies and what process for change this would entail. M.E.S. offers this evaluation service free of charge.

PURPOSE: The City of Taneytown is consistently seeking ways to save money and curb costs. A free study and proposal by M.E.S. can demonstrate the following things:

- 1.) Where efficiencies can be made.
- 2.) What the cost would be for M.E.S. to take charge of water utilities, and what that process would entail.

RATIONALE: A study of the city's utilities may offer ways to increase efficiency and save money. The study itself will financially cost the city nothing, and will be conducted by a quasi-government agency under a gubernatorial administration determined to provide assistance to municipalities wherever this can be accomplished. The proposal, drawn up for free by M.E.S., can be accepted or rejected by the Mayor and City Council.

MID-RANGE AND LONG-TERM ACTIONS

In addition to the three primary items listed in the *Initial Actions Project*, the Taneytown Water and Sewer Committee is actively exploring and pursuing various other mid-range and long-term options with respect to bringing financial relief to the citizens of the City of Taneytown. These include, but are not limited to:

- Strategic plan to reduce water and sewer rates.*
- Examination of public works facilities' operating costs and efficiency.*
- Microgrid systems/energy-saving systems.*
- The sale of surplus drinking water and wastewater.*
- The formulation of a list of grants the city can apply for, including community facilities grants, grants for the assistance of water and sewer-related facilities, rainwater barrel distribution, etc.*
- New/alternative methods of billing.*

ADDENDUM: EXHIBIT A: DRAFT SAMPLE FLYER

Attention

Taneytown citizen and home owner

It has come to our attention that
your water meter is NOT working.

We need to enter your home to
replace the battery in your water meter.

This will take approximately 20 minutes.

Please call City Hall 410-751-1100
to schedule the replacement battery.

you have one month to call and
make this appointment.

Otherwise your water will be cut off.

There will be no charge for the water
shut-off or to turn it back on as
this method is an attention getter
this is a one time offer

Attention

URGENT INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR WATER AND SEWER BILL

IF YOU ARE HAVING DIFFICULTY PAYING YOUR BILL, the City of Taneytown offers the option of payment in installments. Contact the city office to arrange this. *No late fees will be assessed for this method.*

Numerous water meter batteries are in need of replacement. Check your bill to see if yours is one of them. If it is, please contact the city office to schedule an appointment for replacement. *There is no cost to you.*

The City of Taneytown offers tablets to citizens to **test for leaks and running water.** Contact the city office to arrange receipt of a tablet. *There is no fee for this service.*

If you believe there is an error on your water bill, please contact the city office. We will be happy to work with you to resolve the issue.

CONTACT THE CITY OF TANEYTOWN: 410-756-1100