

**CITIZENS' RATE REVIEW COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Wastewater Treatment Plant

Members Present:

Dan Schutter	Ernie Amundson
Charles Zickefoose	Mike Gougler

Members Absent:

David Maben	Chair Matson Haug
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Staff Present:

Daniel Danicic, PE, Public Works Director
Elizabeth Comfort, Finance Director
Dawn Karen Bevill, Recording Secretary

1. Call to Order/Roll Call/Introduction

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Vice Chair Dan Schutter.

Attendance was noted by Dawn Karen Bevill.

2. Minutes

MOTION: Zickefoose/Schutter to adopt the October 10, 2007 minutes. Motion carried by voice vote.

3. Credits for Low Income Customers:

Dan Danicic explained the City of Newberg's current utility assistance program. In 1973, a program was implemented for senior citizens with limited incomes. The rate was based on a flat fee for the first 500 cubic feet. In 1990 the rate methodology was changed to 100 cubic feet units, so the senior credit option was eliminated. The City Council has asked the Citizens' Rate Review Committee to examine this plan and determine whether there is a need to expand or change the current program. Dan explained how the City of Newberg works with YCAP in McMinnville, which helps to provide assistance to low-income citizens for water and wastewater bills. Appointments must be made with YCAP and income criteria must be met to qualify for assistance. Another available option is FISH who provides assistance to individuals who are in need of help. Newberg doesn't contribute to FISH.

Dan reviewed the affordability program options employed by other utilities and sample programs offered throughout Oregon for low-income customers with various credit and payment options.

Ernie Amundson asked if deposits are still taken from new customers.

Elizabeth Comfort replied they no longer take deposits.

Ernie Amundson asked about the water average.

Dan Danicic replied the average is approximately \$29. The fixed portion is approximately \$10.

Dan Schutter asked how many customers have had their service shut off.

Elizabeth Comfort explained there are 80 customers who have been notified of shut off but several were on their way in today to take care of their bill. There are typically 25 customers per month who lose service; 5 of those are typically empty homes that are discovered at a later date. The City appreciates customers who work with them in resolving the issue and payment plans are offered to aid in that process.

Dan Schutter stated he would like more information on how many needs YCAP and FISH are able to meet.

Mike Gougler commented on the assistance program offered in Eugene for military personnel. Individuals in the reserves who originally took a commitment for a one year tour are now serving their second or third tour and will need help when they return home. Many have lost their jobs in the process. Commissioner Soppe had an understandable concern about the age requirement for assistance. The City has an obligation to have a safety net for those individuals in need. A donation could be given to help with assistance and a box could be marked for donations on the water bill. If sufficient funds are received it would allow for appliance upgrades and repairs.

Charles Zickefoose asked if the city currently has a program like that.

Dan Danicic stated they do not.

Dan Schutter asked if complaints are received from customers who state they aren't using the amount of water they're billed for.

Elizabeth Comfort replied they do and those customers are educated on how to look for leaks, etc.

Dan Danicic stated a credit is given for a major line break.

Mike Gougler stated that as a developer he could provide a lot of service to the City for nothing. If individuals had an opportunity to help, with resources, a lot could be done, even if it were only to contribute to different funds for assistance.

Ernie Amundson stated he would rather see landlords pay for their own repairs.

Mike Gougler replied there are bad landlords downtown and if there is a problem and the City needs to have it fixed, the bill could be sent to the landlord after the problem has been fixed. If the bill remains unpaid, a lien could be placed on the property. Faith in Action also provides help for the elderly without an income screening.

Charles Zickefoose commented a one time donation can be given and is offered with other services.

Ernie Amundson asked how FISH qualifies individuals for assistance.

Dan Danicic replied they are fairly low key and will help the same person every few months. The City of Newberg doesn't contribute to the FISH program.

Ernie Amundson suggested a three person committee to monitor the donated money coming in and going out.

Mike Gougler explained a persons name and address would be kept in the computer and it would be tracked to assure that the same individuals aren't abusing the system.

Dan Danicic replied that there needs to be criteria of some kind.

Elizabeth Comfort explained they look at the history of the customer and it normally is the same people every time. Elizabeth talks with those who can't pay their bill, look at their history, and ask them to pay as they can until the bill is paid in full.

Dan Schutter asked about what organizations the City could pass funds to.

Dan Danicic replied FISH is non-profit and spends much more money than YCAP.

Dan Schutter asked what YCAP can help with.

Dan Danicic replied they help with rent also and help people get back on their feet.

Mike Gougler stated he would like to see a place on the water bill where people can donate to help those in need.

Ernie Amundson agreed donating is a great idea.

Charles Zickefoose commented on Salem having a \$5 donation box on their water bill.

Mike Gougler stated in Salem they specify who will qualify and establish their own level of service.

Dan Schutter stated the funds should go toward water and wastewater only.

Ernie Amundson suggested taking baby steps with this process first; seeing how much money actually comes in and review it to see how much money should be given to YCAP and FISH.

Charles Zickefoose asked about the leakage rate.

Dan Danicic replied 6% water loss. The EPA goal is 10% - 12% and Newberg is remarkably low.

Elizabeth Comfort added if there is a substantial change in water usage the City will tag it.

Dan Danicic suggested putting these ideas in writing, general enough that City Council can wordsmith it if needed.

Although no motion was voiced, all committee members present agreed it would be good for Dan Danicic to capture the suggestions and thoughts brought forth in this meeting to review at the next scheduled meeting on January 9, 2008. Those suggestions include a box to donate funds directly on the water bill sent out to customers, perhaps naming military service personnel or a description of what the contribution goes toward, and researching what criteria should be set forth in the determination of assistance.

MOTION: Schutter/ Gougler to adjourn at 8:18 PM until the next meeting on January 9, 2008 at the Wastewater Treatment Plant. Motion carried by voice vote.
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