

Kapowsin Water District public meeting recap

When: May 8, 2019 @ 7 – 8 p.m.,

Where: Kapowsin Elementary School Commons Room – 10412 264th St. E., Graham, WA

Pierce County Planning and Public Works – Sewer Division held a public meeting with Kapowsin Water District (KWD) customers on May 8. The meeting shared details about a \$700 special assessment to be charged to each KWD connection beginning June 1, 2019.

Maintenance and operation of KWD ran a \$27,322 deficit from November 2017 to November 2018. Pierce County plans to recover these outstanding costs via a \$700 special assessment with an optional 24-month payment plan. The special assessment recoups maintenance and operations costs. It does not pay for improvements to provide a reliable long-term water source for KWD customers.

Approximately 35 people attended the meeting. Pierce County representatives included:

- Jane Vandenberg, manager of the Sewer Division
- Katherine Brooks, planning and program section manager
- Scott Roth, maintenance program manager
- Amy Cruver, council assistant for Pierce County Council District 3
- Sean McDermott, public information specialist

Valley Water District is the contracted maintenance and operations provider and was represented at the meeting by Bob Fulton and Brian Thompson.

Katherine led the meeting. She began by sharing why the current ground source water supply requires daily water quality monitoring. The current \$150 monthly rate was set before Pierce County was court-appointed as the water system receiver. That rate has not been enough to fully cover the maintenance and operations (M&O) costs of the water system serving the 40 connected properties. The Pierce County Sewer Utility fund has covered the remainder of the M&O costs that now must be repaid.

Katherine also shared that Pierce County received the emergency grant contract on May 8, 2019 from the Washington State Department of Health (DOH). The \$500,000 DOH grant is required to be used first in order gain access to the United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development emergency grant obligation of \$500,000 and other potential DOH loan sources to fully fund the drilling of a new groundwater well source for KWD.

KWD customers are not happy about the \$150 rate and the \$700 special assessment (with option of 24 monthly payments of \$30). They appreciate the effort that Katherine and Pierce County have gone through to continue providing potable water, but have vilified Valley Water District. Statements were made that Valley is making exorbitant amounts of money on KWD customers' backs. Valley's employees are being verbally abused by the KWD customers while they are on-site conducting daily monitoring and maintenance and when putting out doorhangers for notice of this meeting.

A current KWD customer and past KWD commissioner attended the meeting. She stated how someone needed to take over control of the KWD water system and Valley Water District was the only entity

willing to take on the challenges of the system. This statement was made as the attendees expressed frustration against Valley Water District and helped provide some background context to some of the comments made about VWD. Sampling of questions and answers from the meeting:

- Can we get certified to conduct our own water quality monitoring?
 - A: Summarized answer was that they lost the ability to do that when DOH initiated the receivership process.
- Can the KWD system be given back to the KWD board?
 - A: DOH has telegraphed that they will not likely allow the system to go back to KWD and a long-term solution needs to be found.
- What M&O work has been done that costs \$27,322?
 - A: Financial overview document (attached) was shared and briefly discussed during the meeting.
- Why are Valley Water District employees parking in front of monitoring station for long periods of time and not getting out of vehicle?
 - A: The employees manage other systems in the area. Another water system may require additional staffing compared to KWD. Valley only charges KWD for the actual staff/hours worked on their system – they are not being charged for staff viewed as “sitting around.”
- Why is KWD charged for weekend monitoring and how much is that charge?
 - A: Surface water sources are required by Department of Health to have daily monitoring due to the high potential of contamination. Valley’s employees are paid overtime for weekend and holiday work. Valley charges KWD \$72.00 per regular hour and \$98.00 per overtime hours (on weekends and holidays) with a typical of 1 to 1.5 hours charged Monday – Friday and 2 - 3 hours charged per day on weekends and holidays. Weekday travel time is shorter due to employees incorporating system checks with Kapowsin and other area systems. On the weekends the only system that is required to be checked is Kapowsin. Travel time takes longer when staff is going from the office or from their home directly to Kapowsin. Employees are on the clock as soon as they leave the VWD shop or their house when on-call. Travel time on weekends and holidays usually includes one hour, with an hour of time to sample and test the water source.
- Who can help pay the high cost of the water bill? Some customers are on fixed incomes, disability, etc.
 - A: Customers should seek programs for utility payment reductions for seniors, disabled and veterans. Pierce County will post links to potential programs on the KWD receivership web page (www.piercecountywa.gov/kwd) and include this information in the letter that accompanies the first special assessment bill.
- Why do the billing statements not reflect early payments? For example, pay \$200 one month (includes \$50 extra payment) and then next bill still shows \$150 due.
 - A: Our current billing system does not automatically apply overpayments to future bills. Staff must review each account and make appropriate adjustments. We will improve our processes to better catch and apply pre-payments. Please note that overpayments

are applied first to penalties, interest and oldest unpaid water service charges.
Remaining amounts will then be applied to future bills.

- Can KWD customers make electronic payments? Is there an additional cost for e-payment?
There is a 3% convenience fee for online sewer payments.
 - A: Electronic payments can be made through your bank's bill pay system. Please make sure to reference your customer number and/or invoice number from the billing statement (shown below). Please call us at 253-798-4020 for assistance.

	Finance Department 950 Fawcett Ave Suite 100 Tacoma WA 98402-5603	INVOICE Public Works	1 / 1												
CHANGE OF ADDRESS INFORMATION Street Address: _____ City, State, Zip: _____ Phone Number: _____		<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"><thead><tr><th style="text-align: left;">INVOICE DATE</th><th style="text-align: left;">INVOICE #</th><th style="text-align: left;">DUE DATE</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>4/30/2019</td><td>CI-100000</td><td>5/25/2019</td></tr><tr><th style="text-align: left;">CUSTOMER #</th><th style="text-align: left;">TOTAL DUE</th><th style="text-align: left;">TOTAL PAID</th></tr><tr><td>C-100000</td><td>\$150.00</td><td></td></tr></tbody></table>		INVOICE DATE	INVOICE #	DUE DATE	4/30/2019	CI-100000	5/25/2019	CUSTOMER #	TOTAL DUE	TOTAL PAID	C-100000	\$150.00	
INVOICE DATE	INVOICE #	DUE DATE													
4/30/2019	CI-100000	5/25/2019													
CUSTOMER #	TOTAL DUE	TOTAL PAID													
C-100000	\$150.00														
		<i>PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO PIERCE COUNTY</i>													
		REMIT TO: Finance Department 950 Fawcett Ave Suite 100 Tacoma WA 98402-5603													