

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PUBLIC AWARENESS/PERSONNEL/POLICY COMMITTEE
OF THE VALLECITOS WATER DISTRICT
MONDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2017 AT 3:00 P.M.
AT THE DISTRICT OFFICE, 201 VALLECITOS DE ORO,
SAN MARCOS, CALIFORNIA

Director Evans called the meeting to order at the hour of 3:04 p.m.

Present: Director Evans
 Director Hernandez
 General Manager Pruim
 Assistant General Manager Scaglione
 Administrative Secretary Johnson

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

DISTRICT POLICY FOR BILLING ADJUSTMENTS

General Manager Pruim stated the Board was made aware at the September 6, 2017 Board meeting of a customer who was underbilled for sewer services. The Board directed the Committee to discuss whether a policy for handling billing adjustments is needed.

General Manager Pruim provided details of the underbilled customer. The commercial customer was underbilled for sewer in the amount of \$24,437.34 over a three-year period. That is as far back as the District can legally go to collect the funds owed. Staff called the customer before sending a letter explaining that a billing error had been made and offering to extend a payment plan. The customer's response was that the error was the District's error and didn't feel he was responsible for the underbilled amount.

Assistant General Manager Scaglione stated the reason for the error was identified. For commercial customers, the sewer charge is based on flow. A common "return to sewer" ratio for water through a meter returning to the sewer system is 80% with a discount of 20%. The error was made when the percentages were flipped to 20% return to sewer with a discount of 80%. A data query was performed to identify commercial customers with a discount greater than 50% which could be suspect. Staff will be performing a query such as this on a regular basis to identify and investigate any accounts that fit the criteria to avoid underbilling in the future, and new accounts will be reviewed when they start up as well. Staff currently performs routine surveillance of customer accounts to look for anomalies.

General discussion took place. During general discussion, it was clarified that the process of conducting routine surveillance, performing queries and checking for anomalies is a practice, not a policy. A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for staff's

use will be written to outline the practice. The consensus of the Committee was that customer account (water and sewer) reviews should be conducted quarterly. This will be included in the SOP.

The Committee will report to the Board that they are confident with the current practice in place and directed staff to update procedures in a written SOP which will include tightened procedures and quarterly review of water and sewer customer accounts. Staff will continue its efforts to collect the funds due to the District as a result of the underbilled commercial account.

Mike Hunsaker, member of the public, asked if the District is obligated during a drought to grant more water capacity to someone who is using more water. Staff responded that unless the District is in Drought Level 3, the District is obligated to do so, provided the need is justified by the completion of a demand form which is reviewed by the Engineering Department. Mr. Hunsaker also inquired where information regarding the return to sewer factor for commercial could be found. Assistant General Manager Scaglione stated that information can be found in District Ordinance No. 184.

DISTRICT PRACTICES FOR WATER METER LOCK NOTICES

Director Evans provided background information regarding a customer in her division who contacted her when she received a water meter lock notice after falling behind on her account. Director Evans commended staff for resolving the situation with an apology, explaining the situation, not locking the customer's meter and returning the \$25 delinquent fee to her. The customer requested the District review its policy concerning water meter lock notices.

General Manager Pruim provided a copy of District Ordinance No. 186 in which Section 2 outlines in detail the process for delinquent service notification. He noted that staff virtually always errors on the customer's side and that the earliest a customer receives a courtesy notice is 30 days after the account is past due. Grace periods are allowed. Staff calls the customer a day before and on the day the 48-hour meter lock notice is delivered to the customer. Customers get multiple opportunities to pay their bill before service is shut off.

General Manager Pruim stated the 48-hour meter lock notices will now be sent out by InfoSend, who in turn contracts with FedEx to deliver the notices. By law, a written notice must be provided to the customer.

General discussion took place regarding the amount past due that triggers the delinquent service notification. Assistant General Manager Scaglione provided statistics on how many delinquent notices are sent in a year which equates to approximately 4,092 out of over 22,000 customers (some received more than one notice). The District allows one occurrence per year to waive a delinquent fee.

The consensus of the Committee was that the District's current practice for delinquency and water meter lock notices as outlined in Ordinance No. 186 is flexible, lenient and appropriate as is.

Staff was directed to present a brief overview of the water meter lock notification process at the next Board meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

None.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mike Hunsaker, member of the public, commented that he has found the District to be very compassionate and understanding. He questioned whether the District is experiencing abuse of the policy by high water users who may try to skip payments every other month. Assistant General Manager Scaglione stated the controls in place work well to prevent this from happening.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at the hour of 3:54 p.m.