

**College Park City Council
Special Meeting with WSSC
Monday, January 11, 2021
7:00 p.m. – 8:43 p.m.**

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, this was a Virtual Meeting.

PRESENT: Mayor Pro Tem Dennis; Councilmembers Kennedy, Esters, Rigg, Mackie, Day. Councilmember Mitchell joined at 7:53 p.m.

ALSO PRESENT: Bill Gardiner, Interim City Manager; Janeen S. Miller, City Clerk; Steve Halpern, City Engineer. County Council Member Dannielle Glaros, Prince George's County Council, was also in attendance.

FROM WSSC: Glen Diaz, Division Manager, Water/Wastewater Assessments
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Yvette Parker, Section Manager, Collections System Planning
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Aaron Hughes, Section Manager, Condition Assessments
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Jerry Irvine, Division Manager, Public Affairs
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David Wilkins, Customer Advocate
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Monica Marquina, Government Affairs Manager
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Mayor Pro Tem Dennis opened the Virtual Special Meeting at 7:00 p.m. and invited Councilmember Rigg to provide an overview of events that led to this meeting.

Councilmember Rigg discussed the September 10, 2020 rain event and its impacts on Calvert Hills. Stormwater flowed into houses and in some cases there were sewage backflows through toilets, drains and sinks. It was his 4th sewage backflow event in 15 years. Many other homes in the neighborhood have experienced the same problems. Sewage should only flow one way and steps must be taken to ensure these problems do not keep occurring.

Response from WSSC:

Mr. Diaz apologized and explained that the intensity of the rainfall that day overwhelmed the system. WSSC has a separate sanitary sewer system that is not combined with the stormwater system. Stormwater flooding is not WSSC's responsibility. He acknowledged that there were sewer problems. These systems are not watertight and water will find any path. When stormwater enters the sewer system, it taxes the capacity. Customers should call WSSC

immediately if they have a sanitary sewer issue. He is pleased that the City has engaged with the County on the stormwater issues. Storms are getting more severe.

Mr. Diaz continued: WSSC is under a Consent Decree with MDE, EPA and DOJ and because of this, there is a comprehensive study being done of a larger area at this time. They have initiated a surcharge study. They have cleaned roots, grease and debris from the pipes. They will check for areaway drains that are connected to the sewer system. They will also do smoke testing to identify storm water entry points into the sewer system and use CCTV in pipes and manholes. Their focus will be on homeowners that have had multiple incidents. Short term solutions include installing backflow preventers at the property line, but they have to do an evaluation of each home first to make sure they aren't creating another problem by doing so.

Q&A with the City Council:

Councilmember Rigg asked WSSC's position on installing backflow preventers on homes where this has been a persistent problem and about the claims process.

Mr. Wilkins said to call before you clean the basement so they can do an investigation. Their team will do a clean-up. Document with videos and pictures.

Mr. Diaz said backflow preventers are a short-term solution being considered but he is not a proponent. In certain cases, a BF preventer can cause other problems. Mr. Wilkins said they have to make sure the home does not have an areaway drain connected to the sewer system. Nevertheless, this is a short-term solution being considered. They will provide some diagrams that illustrate this concern.

Councilmember Mackie asked WSSC to give our City Engineer their repair schedule and what exactly they are doing so we can inform our residents. She asked about their coordination with the County to alleviate the problem of stormwater seeping into the system.

Mr. Diaz said coordination with the County is not always easy so he appreciates our help with that. We do better when we work together.

Councilmember Esters relayed an experience by a resident who made a claim. Even though WSSC was found responsible, the resident was only reimbursed for a portion of the claim. Mr. Wilkins said payment is based on the depreciation value of assets. No one from the claims department is on the call tonight. WSSC will have Claims attend a future discussion. Monica Marquina and David Wilkins are the point of contact to our residents.

[Councilmember Mitchell joined the meeting.]

Councilmember Day discussed the difficulty residents have in getting through when they call and asked if WSSC can set up a call-back system. He discussed the claims process. Some residents report feeling rebuffed. Clarification is needed so residents understand the County's and WSSC's responsibility. Residents should be told the process and what to expect when they get work done; sometimes it is more work than they are prepared for. The resident should understand that the depreciation value will be reimbursed and how long the process will take. No one is going to wait before cleaning up sewage. There should be a way to document incidents immediately through the website.

Q&A with Residents:

Dave Dorsch: discussed the claim process.

Matthew Sawyer: backflow preventers are worth doing; should be cheaper than paying out claims.

Dan Oates: Has WSSC been in touch with PGDOE about the county's Calvert Hills Stormwater Management plan?

Mr. Williamson: It is time for WSSC to step up and accept this as part of their mission and provide a streamlined plan to achieve high customer satisfaction.

Don and Jeanne: Clarification of outside stairwell drain.

County Council Member Glaros: Under what conditions do backflow valves get installed?

Wrap Up/Next Steps:

Monica Marquina and David Wilkins will serve as the liaison.

Ms. Marquina said they will review their action items, conduct an internal debrief, and will be in touch with Bill Gardiner for the next meeting. The follow-up meeting will address the claims process and include helpful visuals. We may need a separate meeting to understand what they are working on short term and long term.

The meeting concluded at 8:43 p.m.

Janeen S. Miller
City Clerk

Date
Approved