

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 14, 2004  
TO: The Board of Supervisors  
FROM: Richard Costello, Water Conservation Committee  
SUBJECT: Report of the Water Conservation Committee

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Water Conservation Committee

Margaret Mondul, Vice Chair; Tom Belden, Sarah Kadec, Louise Menges, and Richard Jones

Introduction

The Board of Supervisors asked the Water Conservation Committee to evaluate concerns about high water bills expressed by residents in the Wellington Development. The Committee met three times with representatives of Wellington. The Committee appreciates the insight and objectivity offered by the Wellington representatives.

Wellington Development

The Wellington Development is a relatively new neighborhood located on Rochambeau Road near Norge. The neighborhood will eventually have approximately 300 homes. Approximately 100 homes have been constructed over the past 18-24 months. The neighborhood is being developed in previously cultivated areas with highly erodible soils under a thin layer of topsoil and vegetative cover. In an effort to stabilize the soils, the developer encouraged new homeowners to install sod to establish grass. Sod requires significant irrigation until it develops an adequate root system. Many of the new homeowners in the Wellington development were unaware of the James City Service Authority's Increasing Block Rate fee system and were therefore surprised upon receiving their first water and sewer bill. These homeowners attended the October 12 and 26, 2004, Board of Supervisors meetings to express concern about the fees. As a result, the Board referred the issue to the Water Conservation Committee.

Legal Constraints

The County Attorney's Office informed the Committee that there is no legal authority to adjust individual water bills and any adjustment in the water rate structure had to occur during the next budget cycle.

Water Conservation Committee Meetings

As referenced earlier, the Committee met on three occasions with staff support provided by the JCSA. Wellington representatives participated openly in the discussion. In light of the insight offered by the Wellington representatives, the Committee has:

- Evaluated the JCSA's rate structure: a) including the rates for each tier; b) water allocation in each tier; and c) flat commercial rate.
- Discussed the basis for Increasing Block Rate System's implementation.
- Listened to the perspectives of the Wellington residents as new JCSA customers who had limited, if any, knowledge of water supply issues in James City County.

Recommendations

- 1) Retain the current three-tier rate structure as an effective tool in encouraging water conservation.
- 2) Retain the current commercial flat rate.
- 3) Consider billing residential customers every two months versus every three months. This will afford customers timely information regarding water use and reduce the opportunity for misconception that there is a preferable (less costly) summer billing cycle. Implementation will require reducing tier structure by one-third.
- 4) Improve communications with new customers and development community about the JCSA Rate System.

#### Communication Accomplishments

While there is more to be done, the Committee has reviewed materials prepared by JCSA staff to provide water rate information to a new customer. This material includes:

- 1) Brochures (door hangers) to be provided to all new customers that include information on rates and the Outdoor Water Use Ordinance;
- 2) Additional information about water rates on Outdoor Water Use Waiver Form for new lawns, so the customer will know that establishing a new lawn has a financial impact;
- 3) Information about water rates on the invoice that is mailed soon after a new account is established; and
- 4) When a new billing system is selected include the capability to chart a customer's water use over the past year.
- 5) Continue efforts on educating developers on James City County water issues.

#### Conclusion

The Water Conservation Committee thanks the Board for the opportunity to make a recommendation on this issue. The assignment gave the Committee an opportunity to re-evaluate the JCSA Rate System after several years of its use as a tool to encourage water conservation. Our belief is that the Increasing Block Rate Structure is an effective tool to encourage water conservation. Education of new customers is an area where improvements can be made. The items described above and already in the process of being implemented will improve this area significantly.

Water supply for our growing community will continue to be a challenge. To meet this challenge, the County needs to continue its efforts toward developing new and additional water supply. In addition, the County needs to use every tool available to encourage the wise use of our existing water supply.

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