

WWTF Workshop
March 22, 2023
6:30pm
Margaret Rollins Center

1. Welcome, Call meeting to order.

President Panetta called the meeting to order.

2. Roll Call

Board Members

Thomas Panetta
Earl Webb
D. Preston Lee, P.E.
Richard Nichols
A. Thomas Owen

Ex-Officio Members

Austin Calaman, BPW General Manager
Robin Davis, BPW Asst. General Manager
Andrew Williams, Mayor
Pete Yingst, legal counsel

Others

Charlie O'Donnell, GMB
Sumner Crosby
Barbara Curtis
Jeffrey Kerrin
Michael Mazzetti
Hans Medlarz, Sussex County
Todd Lawson, Sussex County
Aaron Mushrush, Cape Gazette
Mark Prouty
Bob Heffernan
Barbara Warnell
Sharon Sexton, BPW
Joshua Gritton, BPW

3. **Continued discussion of the long-range planning on the Lewes BPW wastewater treatment facility. INFORMATION/DISCUSSION**

This is the third public workshop for the Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) long-range planning. The plan is to have three more; one in April, May, and June. At the last meeting, 42 people attended in person and 55 online and over 30 people provided comments. BPW encourages similar response moving forward. All comments are posted on the BPW website. There is a specific page for all WWTF information, videos, presentations, comments, FAQs etc.

President Panetta stated that this is a complex decision with environmental issues, political issues, capital costs, and future costs.

FAQ REVIEW:

1. **Is option 3a or 3b similar to the discussions the County had with Rehoboth regarding purchasing outfall capacity?** The Rehoboth discussion was strictly for the use of their outfall. The BPW discussion pertains to treatment and discharge. The BPW decision will be strictly based on our ratepayers and our issues with the county.

- 2. What will happen with the existing Howard H. Seymour Water Reclamation Facility (WWTF) should an option 2 or 3 solution be chosen.** There has been no decision or discussion on what will happen to the property. The property is jointly titled with the City and the BPW. The facility will be demolished if option 2 or 3 is selected.
- 3. Is there a correlation between the historic beach closures due to bacteria levels and our outfall into the canal?** The discharge is controlled by a DNREC permit. DNREC has done studies on the closures, and all were related to animal and farmland runoff.
- 4. What else would need to be addressed should option 1 be the chosen option?** Access to the site is the biggest concern. The logistics of how to keep the facility operational while under construction is another concern. Sea level rise needs to be considered since more frequent and intense storms occur.
- 5. Is the 2050-time horizon enough or do we need to look beyond?** This time horizon allows the forecasts to be monitored and adjusted based on the latest and best data that is currently available.
- 6. Will the City be involved in the decision-making process?** The BPW has set up meetings with the city to discuss progress. BPW will take into consideration city input, but the BPW is the decision maker.
- 7. Would the NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) discharge permit stay with the BPW?** The NPDES permit must be held by the organization that is operating the plant. The BPW would hold the permit for options 1 or 2. Sussex County would hold the permit for option three. Option 3 with the county would need a firm agreement.
- 8. Has the BPW entertained new WWTF designs, methods, etc.?** So far only a high-level engineering review has been completed. Looking at specific designs and options for treatment will be part of the next phase.
- 9. Has the BPW located a specific site or sites for option 2?** No specific sites have been identified. The actual number of acres needed will depend on which option is chosen: 2a, 2b, or 2c.
- 10. Will the smell of the current plant be diminished?** There were historical issues with smell in high temperatures but were resolved with new operating procedures. The majority of what is smelled is the marsh. If the plant was demolished, there would be no appreciable difference in smell.
- 11. Are there concerns over loss of control by the BPW if Option 3 is chosen.** BPW would remain the sewer systems operator. This includes the collection system, pump stations, customer service, and billing. This is similar to BPW buying electricity from DEMEC. There will be a detailed agreement between BPW and Sussex County.
- 12. Should the BPW wait and consider which option to pursue in the future?** There are concerns with waiting: availability and the cost of land, option 3 may no longer be available, and risk of major storms.
- 13. What is the impact of climate change on the inflow/infiltration into the sewer system?** There is concern of infiltration on the beach side of Lewes due to low elevations. The Mitigation Committee is looking to create migration standards. Concern with low lying fixtures inside houses as well. (This is part of the city building code.)
- 14. How can I stay updated on future discussions and reports?** There is a page dedicated to the WWTF long range planning on the BPW website.

Sumner Crosby, Pilottown Road, stated that the quality of the canal is important and is concerned with additional flow rate and increasing concentrations. Mr. Crosby's concern is that there will be degradation in the canal and at the beaches. When will modelling be done? Mr. Crosby stated that option three with a constructed wetland will be more difficult finding a site to meet the demand. Mr. Crosby stated that two watersheds join near where the outfall will be and there will be strict limits on Nitrogen. Mr. Medlarz stated that a limited study indicated that none of the water will go into the watershed. There will not be an increase in concentration. Comparing the 2050 numbers to 2023 numbers is unfair comparison. Currently running less than 50% and if loaded up to 100%, the concentration will increase.

Barbara Curtis, Shipcarpenter Square, stated that the issue of infiltration into the treatment process because of sea-level rise is not relevant to decision making process. Same issue whether the wastewater is delivered to the old plant, new plant, or county plant. President Panetta agreed.

Ms. Curtis questioned if the constructed wetlands can be discharged year-round. Mr. Medlarz stated that at Inland Bays, the county is constructing constructed effluent polishing wetlands to remove nitrogen and phosphorus. Further reducing the load. Mr. Medlarz stated that by discharging year long, the plant uptake is going to be highest in the summer months but the reduction in the effluent will be consistent. The percentage will change, and a certain percentage will always work in the wintertime. Once a decision is made on Sussex County options, between the canal study and on-site studies, the timeline is years before moving forward.

Mr. Medlarz stated that performance is measured at the point of compliance. Mr. Crosby questioned if a new permit is needed. Mr. Medlarz stated that it would be a new permit, but the same waste load allocation.

Mr. Crosby questioned if there was a concern with cutting the discharge time by only discharging on the outgoing tide and what the impact will be. How will storms impact the discharge? Mr. Medlarz stated that hydrodynamic models on the canal will analyze the erosion capacity of the various velocities. With storage, there is the option to hold discharge in the event of a storm if necessary.

President Panetta stated that the ability to discharge on only outgoing tides depends on storage. The BPW does not have the ability to change the process to discharge on outgoing tide.

Mark Prouty, Wolf Point, questioned the treatment system that Sussex County will utilize at the Wolfeneck site. Mr. Medlarz stated that a biological nutrient removal system could be a possibility, but there are other options.

Mr. Medlarz stated that Sussex County and the BPW currently have a biosolids handling agreement. Mr. Prouty is concerned with the operational costs that the BPW would incur. Mr. Medlarz stated that the maintenance cost under the one and two series options assume that the current biosolids agreement will continue.

Mr. Prouty questioned if other alternative types of treatment were discussed for option one, hardening the plant. Mr. Prouty does not believe that the current location is the best place for a

treatment plant, but costs are a factor. Mr. Prouty suggests a study to replace the plant in its current location. President Panetta stated that replacing the current plant was discussed but there is only a finite amount of space and demolishing the plant and building a new plant while continuing to treat will be very difficult. Mr. Prouty suggested looking at the Berlin, Maryland facility. Mr. Prouty stated that the Sussex County options are a good focus, as the other alternatives are cost prohibitive.

Mr. Crosby would like to see more engagement from the public. Mr. Crosby asked for an elaboration on the costs. President Panetta stated that for options one and two, the BPW is responsible for the entire cost. The county will upgrade Wolfeneck regardless and has agreed to allow BPW to pay on a per gallon basis. Option three costs include replacing two major pump stations, demolishing the existing plant, and upgrading the piping to the "handshake" point. Rates are determined on a flow basis. Mr. Crosby questioned if there would be a cap on the number of gallons sent to Wolfeneck and how the change in demand played into the plan. President Panetta stated that both the BPW and Sussex County have determined that the from the build out, the demand would be 1.75mgd for each entity. The facility would be built to 3.5mgd and the fluctuations would be pro rata. Mr. Crosby is concerned that the capacity is exceeded in 2050 or further, and what the ability is to expand the plant. Mr. Calaman stated that the growth Lewes generally vicinity is Artesian. Mr. Medlarz only referred to sewer growth (not land use) and sewers are never expanded unless the land use decision has been made. Mr. Crosby questioned if 1.75 mgd was sufficient for the BPW. Mr. Medlarz stated that it is a pretty hard line on who serves what.

Ms. Curtis suggested hardening the plant enough to get through the next 10 years and look at other options for treatment. Ms. Curtis feels that BPW does not necessarily need that 20 acres for option two and the public may not see that in these initial cost estimates. Mr. Calaman stated that the current plant site is approximately 6 acres. GHD looked at a non- MBR process with lagoons. The current site does not have storage. Mr. Medlarz stated that clarifiers take up significant space and would need several acres. Ms. Curtis stated that there is newer technology and may not necessarily build this type of plant.

Aaron Mushrush, Cape Gazette, questioned how much it costs for current operations. President Panetta stated that it is two million dollars per year for current operation. Mr. Mushrush questioned if the current insurance policy is enough to cover should a catastrophe. BPW holds a policy and through the operation of the maintenance contract with Inframark, Inframark holds a policy. The rest is covered by cash reserves.

Mr. Mushrush questioned if there is a threat to the well field of saltwater intrusion. Mr. Calaman stated that this is a hot topic. BPW is in the process of renewing the water allocation permit and creating a saltwater intrusion plan. BPW has an interconnection agreement with Tidewater and has discussed adding redundancy on the other side of town. President Panetta stated that the wellfield is the best spot in Lewes for a well. Saltwater intrusion concern is from the canal not the ocean. A wellhead protection study is being conducted but is probably a year from being completed.

Mr. Mushrush questioned option 2a and the spray irrigation. Would the land need to be used to secure drinking water. President Panetta stated that a spray pond on top of wellfield would not work.

Mr. Mushrush stated that the flow agreement seems like a support system. If BPW chooses option 3 and there is an issue with Wolfeneck, what is the backup plan? Mr. Medlarz stated that the county has the ability to divert, BPW does not.

Barbara Warnell feels that the options are limited even though well engineered. Ms. Warnell's concern is the environment. Ms. Warnell stated that it is distressing knowing that the BPW is adding water, even though it is processed, to the ocean and bays. Ms. Warnell would like to look at other areas (globally), because Lewes is not the only town in this situation. Ms. Warnell suggested contacting the University of Delaware for studies. Mayor Williams stated that the city annexed Donovan Smith because the alternative is septic fields. Mr. Medlarz stated that the county created a central system to take site systems off the table. President Panetta stated that the City of Lewes has been good about annexation for what is in the best interest- environment in getting people off septic. The BPW is looking for the best option for the BPW ratepayers, the city, and the environment. Ms. Warnell stated that there is a bigger impact (globally) with every decision.

President Panetta stated there are three workshops scheduled:

April 12, 2023, at 6:30pm at Margaret H. Rollins Community Center

May 17, 2023, at 6:30pm at City Hall

June 14, 2023, at 6:30pm at Margaret H. Rollins Community Center

Public comments will be open until April 5th and FAQs will be updated if needed.

Mr. Crosby questioned whether the Board is still exploring all three options. President Panetta stated that all three options are still being explored and as more information is received, the Board can start to whittle down the options.

4. Executive Session

None

5. Adjournment

ACTION: Mr. Owen motioned to adjourn the workshop. Mr. Nichols seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

President Panetta adjourned the meeting at 8:03pm.

Respectfully Submitted

Sharon Sexton

Executive Assistant