

Water and Sewer Public Hearing -- May 3, 2021 at 6:30PM

Participants: Chad Whiting, Alex Marini Lessin

Total Attendees: 7

Transcribed testimony received during hearing:

Justin Conway - [REDACTED]

"My issue is paying the sewer charge for paying the water portion used for irrigating my yard. Dir. Whiting has stated we are charged for water and sewer units [at MWRA] as one unit, not as separate units. Is there any way so that there are two separate charges? And if possible, is there a possibility to install a second meter that is exempt for sewer charges and plumbed to water just the yard, and saves the cost of sewer?"

Testimony received following the hearing is enclosed.

Alex Lessin

From: Kat Joseph [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, May 3, 2021 8:51 PM
To: water
Subject: Testimony: Public Hearing 05/03 6PM
Attachments: SomervilleWaterSewer_PublicHearing_KJoseph_Testimony_05032021.pdf

Thank you Alex Lessin and Chad Whiting for today's presentation and for answering my questions.

I am writing to submit my written testimony as a follow-up to today's presentation.

Thanks,

Kat

--

Kethia Joseph

Somerville Water & Sewer Department
17 Franey Road
Somerville, Ma 02145

03 May 2021

Dear Chad Whiting and Alex Marini Lessin:

I am writing to express my deepest concerns regarding the excessive sewer and water rates for the City of Somerville.

My family and I have been residents of the City of Somerville for over 30 years. For the past several years there has been a continuous increase in water and sewage that has become harrowing. While there may be a need for significant infrastructure improvements, this cannot be at the cost of subjecting residents to making tradeoffs between paying their water and sewer over other critical needs (e.g. electricity, food, etc.).

Our two-family home has had quarterly water bills that are triple the amount of the projected annual bill for 2-family homes in Somerville. While the City does not shut off these services when they go unpaid, these bills are converted into liens which accrue additional fees and taxes. These exorbitant rates are disproportionately impacting minority and low-income homeowners in the City of Somerville. Typically, these homeowners are working multiple jobs to make ends meet. The City of Somerville needs to explore other ways to finance these infrastructure improvements to preserve the livelihood of residents and their ability to age in place.

I urge the City of Somerville to do the following:

- Place a moratorium on rate increases until more favorable financing options are explored;
- Renegotiate the contract with the MWRA to get improved rates that reflect comparable cities;
- Expand exemption and discount programs for various area median income levels;
- Develop a sustainability plan for a more cost effective long-term strategy for sourcing water;
 - Consider exploring creative solutions... the development of reservoir or watershed...
- Look into other financing options. Additional federal funding? Biden \$4 Trillion Infrastructure Plan...will some of this funding reach the City's coffers?
- Provide free home assessments to ensure housing infrastructure has no leakages or other factors that can attribute to high water and sewage rates that can be mitigated;
- Adopt a High-Water Leak Adjustment policy similar to the City of Cambridge

These are just a few recommendations to take into serious consideration. The economic impacts of COVID-19 have been challenging enough. This is the worst possible timing to layer on additional rate hikes during this period of recovery.

Sincerely,



Kat Joseph

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Somerville, Ma 02145
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