

# City of Flint

## Water Advisory Committee Questions & Answers



**March 19, 2015**



# CITY OF FLINT

## Department of Public Works

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**TO:** City of Flint Residents  
**FROM:** Department of Public Works  
**RE:** **Water Advisory Committee Questions**  
**DATE:** March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015

### Prelude

As the City continues to work diligently to improve water quality and to address rates, we have looked to increase communication and transparency. At our first Water Advisory Committee Meeting there were 61 questions posed by the participants. We have taken the opportunity to answer all sixty-one questions individually. The responses are broken into the categories in which they were posed as follows;

- Affordability
- Quality
- Safety
- Sustainability
- Miscellaneous

These responses will be posted on the City website. If there is a question that has been missed, please present your question at one of the committee meeting.

## **AFFORDABILITY QUESTIONS**

- 1. Will the water rates go down once the infrastructure is repaired? What type of bill reduction can we look forward to?**

The infrastructure repairs will be ongoing annually. The City is currently in the process of evaluating what the rates will be for the upcoming year.

- 2. What is the City of Flint going to do about the high costs, fees etc. that we're charged and have to pay for water we are afraid to use for anything? Drinking, cooking, cleaning, bathing, etc. Can our bills be reduced? When?**

Local and State officials are working diligently to find ways to keep the system solvent while also addressing the high costs.

- 3. This meeting is window dressing, it is not getting to the heart of the matter.**

Industry experts agree that the solutions being presented and acted upon are the correct measures to take in order to improve the quality of water and to address the infrastructure needs.

These meetings are an opportunity for more direct dialogue between residents and City officials.

- 4. In 2007 my average bill was \$35. Now it averages \$170 in Flint. However, in Grand Blanc now averages \$45. Why?**

One of the more significant reasons is the fact that there are significant "fixed costs" that are a part of running the system and making repairs. The City has 15,000 fewer users than we had ten years ago to fund an antiquated system. The County has grown in population and users to support a much newer system that needs less maintenance.

- 5. Cost is significant barrier for many families – how can the costs (in a sustainable way) be lowered or adjusted for lower income families?**

Efforts are being made locally and at the state level to keep the system solvent while trying to address the high costs.

- 6. Is the State of Michigan willing to subsidize the costs of our water over and above the recent gift of 2 million dollars?**

City and State officials continue to work diligently to determine where there may be funding sources that can be ascertained for support.

**7. How has the KWA family, friends, board members, land owners profited from the pipeline construction, main. And operation. Who will provide the oversight and the transparency?**

The City currently holds three seats on the KWA board and there are regular public board meetings each month. These meetings are the venue for the public to ask questions pertaining to all KWA issues such as this.

**8. Notification of bad quality = transparency. Not notified until Jan. 3**

The City followed DEQ regulations for a tier two violation which calls for notification to be given within 30 days of the notice. The notice is dated December 16<sup>th</sup> and the mailing did occur January 3<sup>rd</sup>. Our intention is to become more transparent and consistent going forward which is one of the reasons we have developed the advisory committees.

**9. Notification requirements are set by the Michigan DEQ.**

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**10. Shut-off nonpaying customers quicker, prosecute water theft and fraud.**

There are current policies in place and the City continues to evaluate them for effectiveness.

There is also a task force in place that is actively pursuing water theft and fraud with the intent being to ensure that everyone is paying for water they receive.

**11. Where are we at on getting money to fix the bad valves?**

The City has budgeted \$60,000 annually to cycle and repair bad valves. We are looking at raising this line item in the budget to increase the number of valves that we can address. In addition, we have developed a hydraulic model that will allow us to better determine the likelihood of the area where bad valves exist.

**12. There are established affordability rate programs in the US today that serves multiple economic objectives. I have a contact that has developed Affordability Rate programs and as we meet today is meeting in Washington, DC at a Congressional briefing with Detroit US Rep Conyers for City of Detroit.**

We welcome any and all information that can assist with the current rates. I recommend that you forward that information to a City official and ask that it is delivered to the Treasurer or the DPW Director.

**13. Reduce deposit tenants need to pay to get water on.**

This policy is currently under review as we go forward into the budget development.

**14. Flint pays one of the highest rates for water/sewer in the country. Does Flint still plan on implementing the 6% increase for the 2015 budget year?**

This is currently under review and the new rates will be determined in the coming weeks.

**15. What will you do to help people with high bills who have health problems and have been forced to buy bottled water?**

Every possible effort is being made to address the high rates.

**16. Will there be bill reductions for citizens that have not been able to use their water due to health reasons and other issues?**

There is no rebate planned but significant effort is going into improving the water quality and addressing the rates.

**17. How can the committee assist in passing information on to Flint residents through our networks and be consistent with messages?**

We are working to create increased lines of communication through multiple avenues including this advisory committee. One of our goals of the committee is to hear new suggestions and ideas and create a consistent message being delivered. In addition to a new webpage that the City is developing that is dedicated to water I would suggest contacting the City's Public Information Officer and providing information about your specific group.

### **QUALITY QUESTIONS**

**18. Beyond just the water quality – a level of consistency is desired. For businesses that use water – we use a filtration system but the levels of pH are erratic. This makes it difficult to keep the filter working. Is consistency being addressed? When can we expect improvements?**

The pH level of water leaving the plant is fairly stable and is normally in the range of 7.5 – 8.5 S.U. Other quarterly testing throughout the city at 25 sites has been in the same range as water leaving the treatment plant. If you are measuring pH outside of this range, you should contact the Water Plant and have it independently tested, or have it independently tested yourself.

**19. If my water is brown and smells of rotten eggs, how can you tell me to give that to my kids? Safe on paper is not what is coming from my pipes?**

If your water is brown or has unusual odors, you should contact the water plant to have a sample of your water collected. I would not advise consuming any water that has unusual color. Water can also be effected by household plumbing and service lines that run from the curb box to the house. The City routinely tests for lead and copper within households.

**20. Does River water vs Lake water really matter?**

Lake water will require less treatment steps to meet drinking water standards. Lake water will also be more consistent, as river water parameters can change from day-to-day.

**21. When will we see these actions take place?**

The City has been implementing measures to improve the water quality of water since November of 2014. We have already started the engineering process for the most recent recommendations that have been made.

**22. I would like to know if you all checked Camp LeJeune health studies to see what TTHM does in the short term and what will you be doing for the people when and if this happen they develop anything from drinking water.**

We have not checked the Camp Lejeune health studies, we continue to follow all EPA and DEQ regulatory procedures to provide safe quality water.

**23. What determined the 4 hour time frame to test water and be able to capture a problem before it reached the public?**

The 4 hour time frame is referring to bacteria testing performed at the treatment plant. , This was determined by water plant staff. Regulations only require one test per day. Other treatment processes are monitored continuously, hourly or daily.

**24. When there is a break that will possibly cause poor water quality how difficult is it to notify residents so they will know to be aware and how will we be notified?**

The City is in the process of developing an enhanced notification procedures to alert the potentially impacted area when there is a main break. The new procedures will be made available on the City website.

**25. Why not add charcoal at end? Put it in beginning so don't need all chemicals.**

When charcoal is used in water treatment, it is only useful for a limited time. If charcoal is used at the start of the treatment process, it will be "used" up very quickly resulting in more use of charcoal. It is more economical to place it at the end of the process so it will last longer.

**26. You keep saying Water is safe. Yet daily citizens complain rashes, hair falling out and discolor. Water not safe. Why can't we go back to Detroit while you work on river? Sue McCormick said we could go on for 30-60 days. Stop charging for water we cannot use.**

Currently, the water meets all Federal and State standards, and is safe to the best of our knowledge. The City will continue to look into and test water anywhere that there is a report of an issue.

**27. How long will it take to get state approval for process enhancement?**

Anywhere from 30 -120 days depending on the type of process change.

**28. It is my understanding that the Governor weighed in with \$2million to address in part the concerns. What will it take to bring the Flint system to state of the arts quality?**

The \$2 million dollar grant was targeted at two shovel ready projects;

- a) Decommissioning of the incinerator
- b) Leak detection on the distribution system

The cost to replace pipe is approximately \$1 million dollars per mile. There are ~600 miles of distribution main and another ~500 miles of sanitary and another ~500 miles of sewer. At this rate, it would amount to 1.6 billion dollars to replace the system.

**29. Is the Flint River “dirtier” than other rivers used for drinking water?**

The Flint River is not necessarily “dirtier” than other rivers used for drinking water. There are rivers that are “cleaner” and others that could be considered “dirtier”. It all depends on what chemical or microbiological parameters we are discussing.

In any event, the Flint River water is a suitable water source for a public water supply, with proper treatment. Otherwise, the State DEQ would not have approved the switch in water sources. Finished water from Flint’s Water Treatment Plant has consistently met all standards. The only quality issues have been associated with water at the point of usage, not from the plant itself.

**30. Will switch to KWA change the problem with the distribution system?**

No.

**31. There is much discussion regarding TTHMS, but what about pseudomas and legionella and other water borne pathogens?**

Each step of our water treatment process contributes to removing water borne pathogens. We use ozone, primary settling, chemical softening, and finally chlorine to remove these pathogens. The combination of treatment can provide 99.99% removal.

**SAFETY QUESTIONS**

**32. What is being used as the disinfectant? Have chloramines been used? Will they potentially be used to disinfect in the future?**

Currently chlorine gas is used as our disinfectant. Chloramines have not been used, and would have to be approved by the DEQ for use. Chloramines are a much weaker disinfectant, and may not be strong enough for our distribution system issues.

**33. What are we going to do about Toxic Soil and toxins that the EPA doesn’t test for? That seeps into our water.**

Substances in the soil generally do not “seep into” water systems, even though a leak in a pipe, because the system is under pressure. At a pipe break or leak site, water passes out of the pipe, and into the soil, not the other way around. City policy makers can make determinations to increase testing for any chemical or toxin, should there be any questionable areas.

**34. How often will the City check thoroughly for contamination?**

The river water and finished drinking water is monitored quarterly for a large number of contaminants, including numerous organic chemicals (petroleum based), pesticides, herbicides, PCB's, and metals.

**35. What are we going to do for citizens that are not able to use the water for health reasons?**

Health questions have been presented to the Technical Advisory Committee members which includes the EPA, DEQ, and Hospitals for recommendations.

**36. How soon can we have the unnecessary, caustic, fluoride stopped? It increases costs and health risks.**

The use of fluoride was voted in by the residents years ago. Another vote would have to be initiated to remove the use of fluoride.

**37. Can we get the fluoride turned off?**

The use of fluoride was voted in by the residents years ago. Another vote would have to be initiated to remove the use of fluoride. The City adds fluoride at very low levels as a preventative measure for tooth decay. It is not considered caustic.

**38. What can be expected when the KWA water is received in 2016? Will we be reanalyzing what the new water will mean regarding safety?**

We will have to meet the same drinking water regulations, and thorough testing will be conducted. Testing requirements will be set by the MDEQ.

**SUSTAINABILITY QUESTIONS**

**39. You spoke of valves being shut off, doesn't water just sit there and gather bacteria? How can you decrease some of the miles of pipe?**

The Master Plan land use map gives us a chance to envision areas of town that are projected to not be populated in the future. This information is critical to determining where we may have an opportunity to reduce miles of existing pipe.

**40. Is there a long term plan for infrastructure updates?**

Through the Master Planning process along with engineered water reliability studies, the City has developed a Capital Improvement Plan that is designed to regularly invest in the infrastructure.

**41. How could this be financed with limited city funds?**

The City allocates a certain amount of funding annually to make routine repairs to the system. Larger repairs are considered capital improvements which is a different annual allocation, and more significant capital projects tend to look at the states Drinking Water Revolving Fund for resources.



**42. Why haven't we brought in the army corps of engineers to fix our pipes?**

The City, along with local engineering firms and local contractors is capable of designing and effectuating repairs. The capital expense is what is largely needed to maintain infrastructure. The Army Corps of Engineers has no direct jurisdiction over either the water distribution system or the wastewater collection system. Their jurisdiction is over navigable streams, such as the Flint River itself. In addition, the funding of their projects generally must be authorized by the U.S. Congress.

**43. How can you ensure the water is safe to drink once it leaves the plant and it takes 2-3 weeks circulating in the pipes?**

Samples are collected throughout the city regularly to assure that the water is safe. At least 100 samples a month are collected for bacteria testing, and 25 samples are collected quarterly and analyzed for certain water quality parameters.

**44. Will Flint City be treating the water from Lake Huron?**

Yes.

**45. What are you going to do to help people with high levels of lead and iron?**

The City conducts routine volunteer testing of homes for lead and iron. Most cases of high iron are related to service lines or household plumbing.

**46. Will the crumbling infrastructure poison our KWA water? If not, why?**

We would expect to still see occasional instances of "brown" or "yellow" water due to the status of our distribution system, and corroded home and building leads.

**47. How do you deal with GM Contamination from the river?**

There is always a concern of contamination in the river. Where our water treatment plant is located, there are no significant industrial sites upstream of our plant. Most of our water can be viewed as coming from Holloway Reservoir.

**48. How is the bacteria eliminated since it takes 2-3 weeks to reach the homes?**

We attempt to add enough chlorine at the treatment plant so that a small amount still remains in the water to continuously provide a level of disinfection.

**49. Flint River Huge asset – clean it up and use it. Won't it save us money?**

We are evaluating the purchase of equipment that will allow us to test water farther upstream to better prepare for treatment when it enters the plant. The Flint River will serve as the City's permanent backup supply of water.

**50. Once KWA water arrives will it require a different treatment process than what the consultant is recommending for Flint River water and will state approval be required?**

Yes, there will be differences in the treatment of water being delivered from KWA. The City is actively engaged in the evaluation process of how to properly treat water from Lake Huron.

**51. Exactly how bad is our infrastructure: i.e. our pipe network? How costly to repair?**

The cost to replace pipe is approximately \$1 million dollars per mile. There are ~600 miles of distribution main and another ~500 miles of sanitary and another ~500 miles of sewer. At this rate, it would amount to 1.6 billion dollars to replace the system.

**52. We've heard all the problems. Can we have some real solutions that will truly help the citizens?**

Several industry experts agree that the solutions being presented and acted upon are the correct measures to take in order to improve the quality of water and to address the infrastructure needs.

**53. Why did they tear down the United Way building? Pollution?**

We will have to research that answer, it is not utility related.

**54. What type of time frame are we looking at for the infrastructure repairs?**

Infrastructure repairs and maintenance occur constantly and continuously, whether it is pipes underground, plants and pump stations above ground, or the roads on the ground. In a larger system, the work is never finished. Certain recommendations for treatment related projects are anticipated to be installed by late June.

**MISCELLANEOUS**

**55. Is or has there been consideration for tiered services and rates for the poor, elderly, people on fixed incomes. How will the rates (under KWA) be determined, fixed, and reported? As well, how will fees be determined?**

The system has revenue requirements that are necessary in order to stay solvent, City officials are continuously looking for solutions to properly charge all of the users on the system.

**56. Need better online access for landlords to manage utility and tax payments.**

This request will be forwarded to the Treasurer for appropriate follow up.

**57. For about a year people have been complaining about water quality. Why has it taken this long to bring in a consultant and identify steps to make the water better?**

The City of Flint has been working diligently on the water issues all along. A consultant was brought in to assure both the public and the City that appropriate actions have been and are being taken, and to see if there might be additional measures to enhance the process.

Much of the work that the City has undertaken has been with professional engineers and includes consultation with the DEQ. This work is largely chronicled on the City website and will continue through the implementation of the KWA.

**58. Can you provide more info on Veolia and their expertise/experience with municipal water systems?**

There is significant information available about Veolia that can be found online. The City's Purchasing Department can answer questions regarding the qualifications that the City requested in our RFP and what was presented by Veolia to meet those requirements.

**59. Special phone number for professionals to use. Also add customer service workers to answer phone calls.**

The City is working diligently to provide the best possible customer service for all residents, vendors, and professionals. If you feel that you have not received good service, we would like to know so that we can address it.

**60. Why hold meeting in obscure location with limited seating? It should have been publicized better to allow for residents. It should have been held at City Hall to more residents could have attended and microphones were available.**

Many residents voiced an interest in holding these events outside of City Hall. When that occurs we have to contend with venues that are sometimes booked or others that may have restrictions or limitations.

**61. I am very concerned about the use of chlormines as an alternative disinfectant. Is this being used currently and if not, is it being considered for future use?**

Currently chlorine gas is used as our disinfectant. Chloramines have not been used, and would have to be approved by the DEQ for use. Chloramines are a much weaker disinfectant, and may not be strong enough for our distribution system issues. The use of chloramines has been discussed as a way to combat TTHM's.