

**Board of Health
Tuesday, October 4, 2016
Penn Room**

Members Attending: B. Hospidor, J. Seidel, K. Schorn, J. Wong
Others Attending: S. Katzenmoyer, T. Arentz, T. Coleman, B. Murray

Dr. Wong called the meeting to order at 4:06 pm.

A quorum was present.

Public Comment

None.

Lead in Water

Mr. Murray introduced himself to the Board. He stated that the US EPA was in Reading last week for a meeting with community leaders to hear their concerns. He stated that much time was spent alleviating urban legends. He stated that EPA indicated that the Water Authority is providing excellent information but that the public is not receiving it. He requested that if anyone sees an issue with water that the Authority be notified immediately.

Mr. Murray distributed the Water Authority's 2015 Annual Drinking Water Quality Report. He stated that the Authority is working to increase its educational outreach and will be making presentations at schools and neighborhood groups. He stated that the water is routinely tested for lead and that this has become a focus area. He stated that EPA is pleased with the Water Authority's work and a follow up meeting will be held.

Mr. Murray warned against changing the water source from Lake Ontelaunee. He stated that source water protection is very important. He stated that many municipalities that use rivers as source water strive to make their waste water as clean as the original source. He hoped that the Board's mind was at ease about lead levels.

Mr. Murray stated that the Reading School District does test the water for lead levels and does so through an independent agency.

Mr. Murray stated that the Authority is implementing a Turn On program to reduce the number of properties that have their water turned off. He stated that vacant properties are soon scavenged and tend to spread blight throughout a neighborhood. He stated that there are also sanitation issues when water is turned off (some people stay in the property and have no means for hygiene); or families are displaced.

Mr. Murray stated that homes began having running water in 1833 at a cost of \$1,500 per year. He stated that this would translate to \$38,000 per year. He stated that running water is now a necessity and not a luxury.

Mr. Murray highlighted the Turn On program:

- Water will not be turned off at owner occupied properties. He explained that some home owners cannot afford their homes and should be encouraged to downsize. He noted the need to change the mindset that renting is bad.
- People can make partial payments as they are able.
- Liens will be assessed on the properties.

He stated that overdue accounts will no longer be turned over to a collection agency.

Mr. Murray explained how a neighborhood with many properties that have had their water turned off affects the functionality of the system as a whole. He stated that when the system is not functioning as designed it results in clogs in the main pipes.

Mr. Murray reminded all that the water bill also contains the sewer, trash and recycling fees. He stated that when water bills are not paid the City also does not recover the other fees. He stated that this new approach will allow properties currently without water to get turned back on. He explained that there will be a \$500 fee to reconnect. He stated that he suspects there are 2,000 properties with no water and that this fee will generate \$1 million.

Mr. Murray stated that the Authority will need assistance educating residents and requested that the Board begin talking with their neighbors.

Ms. Schorn stated that she has not heard about this program before this evening. Mr. Murray stated that he has been working hard on the Mayor's priority to keep people who cannot pay their water bill from having their water turned off. He noted the need for a deeper understanding of the water issue overall. He explained that turning a property's water off has consequences. He noted that the Authority is working hard to change its perception and to create a positive reputation.

Mr. Hospidor expressed the belief that things are well under control. Mr. Murray expressed his thanks and stated that he wants to keep moving forward in a positive manner. He stated that the Authority has also expanded its hardship program. He explained that rather than just paying the outstanding amount, a plumber will visit the property to inspect any problems that may be occurring. He stated that small repairs will be made immediately to prevent future billing issues.

Mr. Murray stated that the City should be proud of the Authority employees. He stated that they are dedicated and well educated on the issues.

Mr. Murray noted his willingness to continue to attend meetings to provide updates and answer questions. The Board agreed to regular updates.

Mr. Murray stated that the Authority will begin foreclosing high value properties with high value liens. He noted his hope that this would set a precedent and inspire others to pay their liens and get their water turned back on.

Mr. Hospidor questioned how many of these properties have out of town owners. Mr. Murray speculated that it was many of them.

Approval of Minutes

Motion was made by Mr. Hospidor, seconded by Ms. Schorn, to approve the August 2, 2016 minutes as written. Motion carried unanimously.

Health Officer Report

Mr. Arentz presented the monthly report. He stated that the Health Inspector is currently at training and he is looking forward to implementing new ideas.

Mr. Hospidor stated that the property at 1220 Hampden Blvd is now boarded up. Mr. Arentz stated that it is now blighted. He explained that at this time there is no end user in the blighted process.

Ms. Seidel stated that there is a property in the 1200 block of Oak Lane that has been vacant for approximately 5 years. Mr. Arentz stated that he will follow up on this property. He explained that staff surveyed the City this summer and have documented 1,008 vacant properties.

Mr. Hospidor questioned if a non-profit entity could assist in getting these properties repaired and occupied. Mr. Arentz stated that they can. He stated that the City is working to continue the blighted property process through to an end user. He stated that the draft 2017 budget includes funding for demolitions.

Berks Teens Matter

No report.

Soil Contamination on S 7th St

Ms. Katzenmoyer explained that US EPA has completed their testing and there are high lead levels at properties on S 7th St but not at the nearby playground. She stated that EPA is following up in the area and researching former factories in that area.

Mr. Hospidor questioned if the former Glidden site is contaminated. Mr. Murray expressed the belief that it is since there was manufacturing on the site. He explained that clean up at these areas will be much simpler than what needed to occur at Bernhart Park.

Homeless Population in City Park

Ms. Katzenmoyer stated that Dr. Dethoff was contacted by an employee of the Berks County Conservancy (located in the building in City Park on N 11th St next to the anchor monument). She explained that the employee indicated that there is a homeless population living in City Park that is urinating and defecating along sidewalks. The employee has called police but they have not been relocated.

Mr. Murray stated that he will make the Mayor aware of this situation. He stated that the Mayor had concerns about this building after it was vacant so he will want to know about what is happening.

Mr. Coleman suggested that the City use one of its vacant buildings to house social services for the homeless population. He stated that they can use this as a mailing address, have computer access to apply for jobs, and have access to programs that they may not be aware of. He suggested partnering with the Human Relations Commission and Opportunity House.

Mr. Murray expressed the belief that this was a positive approach. He stated that the facility could also provide clean hygiene facilities. He stated that he has also had complaints that the homeless population are using the Parking Authority garage elevators.

Dr. Wong suggested that the new facility coordinate with Code Blue times of the year. He stated that this will provide another option to the shelter and will also help get the population the assistance it needs.

Mr. Murray worried about "Not in My Backyard" backlash from residents and suggested that these facilities not be located in parks.

Ms. Katzenmoyer suggested that a representative from Opportunity House be invited to the next meeting. The Board agreed.

Next Meeting

Motion was made by Ms. Schorn, seconded by Mr. Hospidor, to schedule a special meeting on Tuesday, November 1 at 4 pm. Motion carried.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 1 at 4 pm in the Penn Room.

The meeting adjourned at 5:17 pm.

*Respectfully submitted,
Shelly Katzenmoyer
Deputy City Clerk*