Meeting Summary
Orange Water and Sewer Authority
Natural Resources and Technical Systems Committee
May 21, 2013 (5:00 p.m.)

Members Present

Terri Buckner (Chair), Will Raymond, Dana Raborn, Amy Witsil, Stephen Dear, Alan Rimer (*ex-officio*)

Other Board Members Present

John Young, Gordon Merklein

Staff Present

Ed Kerwin, John Greene, Pat Davis, Mason Crum, Ken Loflin

Visitors Present

- *Carrboro resident*: Mr. Alan Spalt
- *UNC School of Dentistry*: Jane Weintraub
- *Chapel Hill residents*: Daria Barazandeh, Alan Tom

Items Discussed:

1. **Fluoridation of OWASA Drinking Water:** The NRTS Committee met to discuss a petition previously received from Daria Barazandeh requesting that Board members read and discuss Dr. Paul Connett's book, "The Case Against Fluoride" prior to responding to other petitions requesting that OWASA discontinue its practice of fluoridating the water provided to OWASA customers. The meeting commenced with a summary of actions that the Committee and Board have taken to date (please see Attachment 1). The Committee then discussed Dr. Connett's book that had been provided to all members of the OWASA Board of Directors by Ms. Daria Barazandeh.

The Committee ultimately voted unanimously to confirm their previous (December 4, 2012) decision to recommend to the full Board that OWASA continue fluoridation of the drinking water provided to OWASA's customers, while also committing to stay abreast of scientific developments, changes in best management practices, etc. regarding this issue.

The Committee directed that staff take the actions necessary to organize fluoride information currently available on OWASA's website into a single web page and to make that page easily accessible to the public. The Committee Chair then directed staff to add the fluoridation topic to the agenda for the June 13, 2013 OWASA Board meeting. At the June 13th Board meeting, the Committee Chair will announce the Committee's recommendation, the Board will then receive comments from the public, prior to the full Board finalizing discussion on this topic and taking action on the petitions previously received.

2. **Future NRTS Committee Discussion Topics:** The NRTS Committee then continued its efforts to prioritize the list of items previously identified by the members of the Committee as potential discussion topics for the coming year. Topics for June (*Issues and milestones associated with OWASA's ability to gain access to its Jordan Lake allocation*), July (*Evaluate the feasibility of OWASA's use of "smart" water meter technologies*) and August (*Exploration of opportunities for OWASA to increase its use of renewable energy sources*) were identified previously. It was agreed by all on the Committee that the remaining items on the NRTS priority list are being addressed as part of the OWASA Board's strategic planning initiative, so the Committee will only readdress their priority list if it is deemed necessary to do so after the Board's strategic planning efforts are completed.

Next Meeting

Time and agenda items for the next Committee meeting will be determined at a later date in consultation with the NRTS Committee Chair.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 5:50 p.m.

Meeting Summary Prepared by: Mason Crum, PE
Director of Engineering and Planning

Attachment

ATTACHMENT

The OWASA Board appreciates community input to help guide its operational and policy decision-making. As part of that process, the Natural Resources and Technical Subcommittee - NRTS – was given the responsibility for focusing on technical, health and natural resource issues related to providing the quality water and waste water treatment services at caliber our community deserves and a price our community can afford.

With the prompting of our customers and the wider community, the Board began the process of reconsidering OWASA's fluoridation program and trying to gauge its appropriateness given today's best scientific understanding.

Knowing that there are differing opinions on the benefits and risks of fluoridation, this Board and the OWASA staff has invested significant time and resources evaluating community input – pro and con, reviewing materials provided by petitioners, listening to testimony from the dental, health and other concerned advocates. I know some of us have also reached out to our own personal contacts throughout our educated community to deepen our understanding of this issue.

Tonight's meeting is another example of our Board's efforts to leave no stone unturned in deciding whether continued fluoridation is in the public's best interest. Before we begin tonight's discussion – which is roughly centered on Dr. Connett's book – a quick review of where we are and how we got here.

Timeline

- Over the past several years the Board has periodically heard from both its customers and folks outside our community about the continued practice of fluoridation.
- Summer of 2012, the Board heard 2 petitions from customers requesting that we discontinue fluoridation. Subsequently, the Board referred these petitions to this sub-committee (NRTS).
- December of 2012 the NRTS Committee facilitated a panel discussion of the pros and cons of water fluoridation. The public was invited to attend; no public comment was permitted.
- After that December meeting, a petitioner expressed concern that the case against fluoride was not adequately championed within that panel format.
- Through late Winter and early Spring 2013 - January to April - the Board worked with the petitioner and discussed options for including input from Dr. Paul Connett, an expert they considered more appropriate.
- As a consequence, the Board reviewed its meeting policy and decided that a video conference to take testimony from Dr. Connett did not align with the Board's commitment to public outreach.
- Given that Dr. Connett couldn't attend an OWASA meeting, the petitioner agreed that having the entire Board read Dr. Connett's Book, *The Case Against Fluoride*, was a suitable substitution. The petitioner also helpfully provided Board members with copies of the book.
- Tonight, May 21st, about a year into this current review, the NRTS committee meets to supplement the information from December's panel discussion and discuss the issues raised by Dr. Connett that potentially impact OWASA policies.

Sources:

To date, the Board has considered a breadth of input from both primary/expert sources and secondary/published sources including:

- Testimony to the Board of directors including:
    - customers, local coalition and national/global coalition representatives
    - the dental and public health community
    - a panel discussion with Dr. Rebecca King, Section Chief of the NC Oral Health Section and environmentalist Mr. Allen Spalt, co-founder of Toxic Free NC and former Carrboro Alderman
- Information from OWASA staff on relevant OWASA practices and procedures, material data, and testing data
- Review of relevant peer-reviewed literature, news articles, press releases, and trade magazine articles.
- Internet sources provided by petitioners amongst others.
- Connett, Paul. *The Case Against Fluoride* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2010).

Issues

As we have engaged on the fluoridation issue, we have recognized several common themes. Concerns appear to center mainly on:

- Efficacy of fluoride - Does it actually accomplish its intended goal? And if not, why use it?
- Safety of fluoride in general in relation to reduced mental development, organ or bone damage, and/or other substantial harms?
- What is the appropriate level of fluoride? Note that OWASA uses lowest CDC recommended level . Are current standards calibrated correctly given the amount of incidental exposure folks have through toothpaste, mouthwash and other dental treatments?
- Tainted fluoride - Is OWASA's supply safe or is it tainted with dangerous secondary constituents?
- Civil liberty – What is the propriety of "medicating" the water supply especially given no easy "opt out" solution? What of consent?

We've also heard of the positive impact of fluoridation, including:

- Impacts on public health – the best public dental health policy a community can adopt.

The Board is committed to fulfilling our responsibility to engage with our community, to reflect their concerns as we work to provide a high quality, reliable and safe drinking water supply.

We hope that this review of the time, resources, breadth and depth of research this Board has put into the fluoridation question underlines the seriousness we take that charter.