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WLABPublic: Public Input Meeting

1 message

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To: wlabpublic@como.gov

Cc: Maria Oropallo <maria.oropallo@gmail.com>, Erin Keys <Erin.keys@como.gov>

WLAB,

I had to leave prior to the closure of the meeting for another meeting with the “Army Ants” Robotic High School Team. The following is a list of public input I wanted to present to the WLAB during the final public comment session but was limited by your 3-minute rule.

1. What is being done to develop an “Electric Line Extension” policy so that the Electric Department does not subsidize the local contractors? The utility has a “Water Line Extension Policy” in place but not an “Electric Line Extension” policy. What impact would this new policy have on the Electric Annual Budget and future electric rate increases?
2. I was going to ask about an update on the development of the total project cost of the proposed 160 Kv Transmission Line by Black & Veatch for the prior “Option A” and the “Chapel Hill Option”. It is apparent since the initial total project cost estimate was completed in 2015, that the project costs would be substantially increased due to the 10-year time span. Where are the additional funds coming from to finance the additional costs of the Transmission Line? How much will the electric rates have to be increased to finance the second phase of the original 2015 Electric Bond Issue? Will we suffer the embarrassment of having to conduct another Electric Bond Issue to pay for a project from a prior bond election? Who is now in charge of this project? How much of the principal on the 2015 electric bonds has been paid since the issuance of the first phase of the bonds intended for the transmission line and nothing has been done on the transmission line? Will another consultant be hired to design the electrical transmission system since the original engineering consultant has gone out of business? We have been paying a 3% increase in our electrical rates since 2015 and nothing to show for it in terms of a 160 Kv Transmission Line.
3. There was no public update of the construction of the expansion of the Water Treatment Plant at a total project cost of approximately \$39 million. It would seem that this would be an important update with such a large investment.
4. Columbia has a capacity-only contract of about 38.5 megawatts that expires in 2027 and a potential for more than 60 megawatts from Sikeston to expire in the 2029 to 2033 time frame. It would have been appropriate at the meeting to layout what the contract for an IRP with TEA was about regarding the city’s load forecasts and MISO market volatility. The urgency is clear: key capacity contracts are approaching expiration, a major supplier may retire and MISO’s capacity market has grown volatile.
5. The Water Cost of Service Study was incomplete regarding the analysis of the Cost of Service for providing both fire protection and normal water supply at the same time. It is recommended that Stantec confer with Black & Veatch to determine how to break down the existing water system components on a flow basis to determine the real Cost of Service to provide Fire Protection in the City of Columbia with an ISO Rating of 2. Otherwise, the nominal inadequate Cost of Service for Fire Protection will remain hidden in the Base Charge. The Base Charge is a fixed cost of service with no relation to volume usage. Fire protection is a water volume/pressure capacity to fight/suppress a fire and is a major portion of the water system components. As an example, consider the wood structure fire in the early morning hours of May, 2014 at the Brookside Apartment Complex on Walnut Street/College Avenue. To suppress this fire, please imagine the City of Columbia’s water

system capacity characteristics for an ISO Rating of 2. How large does the well field have to be and the connecting raw water transmission lines to the Water Treatment Plant; the usable capacity of the Water Treatment Plant to produce the millions of gallons of water to fight the fire; how much of parallel 36" water transmission lines are used to convey the water to the West Ashe Pump Station (sizing of the components of the pump station to deliver the fire flow and water pressure); then to the Bethel Pump Station (sizing of the components of the pump station to deliver the required fire flow); then to the Walnut Street Elevated Water Storage Tank (how much of the tank is reserved for fire flow); then down Walnut Street to the Brookside Apartment Complex. Additionally, all the other water main feeding from all directions to maintain water flow and pressure for fighting a multi-story building complex fire as well as maintaining water flow and pressure for the remaining ±51,000 water customers hoping that there is not another fire at the same time. The situation is more complex when the fire is at the extreme northeast Columbia and the industrial sites (more distance from the finished water source and specialized buildings requiring more water flow/pressure).

6. There was a \$2.00 increase in 2023 to the Base Charge that was added precisely for debt service (principal and interest) and bond coverage for Water Revenue Bonds to be issued in November, 2023. Stantec redefined the components of the Base Charge in their Cost of Service Study. Since debt service is no longer a component of the Base Charge, the \$2.00 should be removed and reflect it in the usage tiers in the Cost of Service Study.

7. There was no update on the funding/implementation of the AMI meters for water or electric.

8. The Water Department was asked the following question in writing and the written response is in parentheses. What historical published design criteria ordinance does the water department use in designing water distribution systems that provide irrigation demands? What year was this design criterion incorporated into the city ordinances?

Response: "To my knowledge there is no irrigation design criteria in City Ordinance. The City designs its water system to MDNR and AWWA standards, as well as our city water main specifications." How can the city sell water for irrigation purposes when the entire system has not been designed for the irrigation demands throughout the city? Secondly, how can the city propose an ordinance to regulate irrigation watering when water irrigation has not been designed for the water system throughout the city? The non-designed irrigation demand is eroding the required fire flow/water pressure of the ISO Rating of 2 for fire protection. How do you propose to develop the Cost of Service for fire protection when the city achieves an ISO Rating of 1 if you have not developed the Cost of Service for Fire Protection with an ISO Rating of 2?

9. There was no update on the status of the draft of the ordinance for regulating water irrigation.

10. Once the Water Treatment Plant improvements are completed, the new assets created will be assessed the city's property tax rates and create an additional water expense in the range of \$850,000 per year that will be transferred to the General Fund. This is a significant increase in the water expense and should be made public by the WLAB. The tax rates include those from the Fire Protection District, Library, Columbia Public Schools and other taxing entities but are not remitted to these entities like they would be if the water department were a private utility. The WLAB should study this issue more and make a recommendation to the City Council only the city's property tax rate should be assessed, collected and as an water department expense be transferred to the General Fund. How much does \$850,000 per year represent in a water rate increase?

11. A request was made to the water department to place the data logger (Water Pressure) on the fire hydrant at the southwest corner of Thornbrook Parkway and Thornbrook Ridge. This data logger during the summer months allows the residents to see what the water pressure is at any time of the day at that location. The Water Department declined the request even though the data logger had been placed at this location in prior consecutive years. Additionally, the water department was unwilling to meet with the HOA to develop the best staggering sequence of the operation of the irrigation systems that exist in the Thornbrook subdivision.

12. The Water System CIP has millions of dollars allocated to the painting of all of the elevated water storage tanks. When will this happen and can the tanks individually be taken out of service to be painted?

13. What is the latest update for Battery Storage to support the electrical system?

14. The Finance Department continues to compute the Debt Service Ratio (DSR) with and without PILOT. What does PILOT have to do with Debt Service Ratio? PILOT is not a debt of the water department or electric department. It is evident that when the DSR is computed with PILOT that it will always be less than the DSR without PILOT. Would the city ever increase the PILOT to increase the DSR with PILOT? No! Please recommend to Finance Department that this computation be removed from any financial reporting documents. As another note, the city's outside Auditing Firm never does the computation with PILOT and report it to the city. It is not in the tables produced from the Annual Audit that shows the historical 10-year Debt Service Coverage trend for the Water and Light Department's Water and Electric System Revenue Bonds.

15. There was not any reporting of the construction progress of the West Ash Water Booster Station.

16. There was not any reporting of the status of the progress for the addition of the 1.0 million gallon Southwest Elevated Water Storage Tank. I attended the "Let's Talk" session for Ward 5 in October and Don Waterman publicly announced that the city was taking steps to condemn some of the original tank site in the southwest corner of the intersection of Route K and Scott Boulevard. Please remember that the Water Department approached CPS (Beulah Ralph Elementary School) for a tank site but actually was rebuffed when I informed CPS that the Water Department did not have sufficient funds for the Total Project Costs for the tank project. The city has some \$3.65 million available but the estimated total costs exceed \$6.0 million. Yes, there was some local opposition in Thornbrook but was not the compelling reason because CPS did not want to sell the property for a tank site when the city did not have sufficient funds to complete the project. CPS does a significant number of CIP projects but do not move forward with the site acquisition unless they have all the total project costs. The WLAB needs to consider their advisement to the City Council in proceeding with a condemnation for a site without having the full estimated total project costs.

17. There was no reporting of how the WLAB had completed their most recent annual report to the citizens and the Council as per the City's Charter.

Thanks for your service and I would be available to discuss any or all of the 17 public input topics!!

Best Regards,

John T. Conway

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