

## Residential Advisory Council Meeting (RAC)

January 9, 2023 | 5:30 p.m.

**Attendance:** Jason Mitchell, Yolanda Winkler, Richard Luna, Keita Wells, Alexandria Leonard, LaToya Curtis, Darnell Ingram, Cynthia Ross, Shamija Jackson, Marco Merrick, Angela Cole, Carol Thomas, Edward Yelochan, Haydee Rodriguez, Dantwan Broady, Howard Hughes, John Czczulin, Lois Freeman, Crystal Parker, Rosalind Griffin, Vincent Ustach

**Transcribers:** Carmellita Green and Jamilah Johnson

### I. **Volunteer Program Updates and Thoughts on Goal of 5,000 Volunteers - Ms. Keita Wells, Director of Marketing, Education, and Volunteerism**

During our last meeting, we discussed and brainstormed ideas on how to effectively gain volunteers with a goal of 5,000 total for the Mayor's Spring Clean-Up. This meeting serves as an update on our efforts to recruit potential volunteers across Baltimore City:

- A. DPW BMore LOVE Volunteer Network Team: Cereta Spencer is a new member of the Volunteer Network Team, she is the Volunteer Outreach Coordinator. Additionally, Hilary Rosensteel has also dedicated her time and effort to the succession of the volunteer hub as our AmeriCorps Intern.
- B. Volunteer Database: Angela Cole worked with Keita Wells on setting up meetings with future partners for volunteers and groups that want to support our efforts by participating.
- C. Events and Scheduling: Coming up on the 16th of January, we're doing an MLK day of Service over Eastwood Park, with Coppin Heights, Bridgeview, and Greenlawn communities. We're partnering with the Omega Psi Phi fraternity as well as a slew of other community partners. This includes the Grand Lodge of Maryland, Baltimore Banner and Radio One. DPW will have many more opportunities to partner with community associations, sister agencies, and related programs as a primary way to promote the Volunteer Hub.

### II. **Billing Enhancements Update – Ms. LaToya Curtis, Chief Billing Officer**

Over the last year and six months, a backlog of 14,000 email requests and 10,000 property investigations were resolved by the Department of Public Works. Sixty-Three Hundred Baltimore County work order escalations have recently been reduced to about 3 work orders that the agency relies on our contractor to finish. We've mastered elimination and deduction by increasing the amount of attention and time given to serving our communities. Due to the rigorous training provided, we were able to lessen the service level given to customers. DPW has accomplished a plethora of productive activities including:

- A. Our call center previously assisted residents within 20 minutes, differing from our current estimated response time of 2 minutes.
- B. On average, cases were closed within 25 days. The current estimated timespan in which an investigation closes is within five days.
- C. 73 days were required for the creation of a new online account for Water Billing, accounts are now created within 20 days.
- D. Our Meter Shop has a 99% accuracy when completing meter reads. New hires are trained for a six-month period, during this time they are given first-hand experience from classroom learning and live observations on servicing residents. To assist in tracking staff productivity, our IT department incorporated data dashboards and a construction dashboard to help track meter shop productivity.

### **III. DPW Did You Know Updates - Dr. Jason Mitchell, Director**

#### **A. Rubicon Study**

In 2009, the City initiated the One Plus One Recycling Program which conducted 8-hour shifts of recycling routes and included 41,000 collected yellow bins. By 2021, our statistics and recycling pick-up method garnered a drastic difference. Contrasting from the signature yellow bins, we've acquired and distributed up to 170,000 blue recycling carts. Routes take 23-hour shifts to fully complete.

Sixty-four percent of our routes are alley routes instead of curbside pick-up. This sometimes creates difficulty because of how narrow alleys are compared to City waste management trucks. We have ordered about 67 additional waste management trucks, but the trucks take 2-3 years to arrive, they must be custom-built for our alleys. In 2022, DPW only missed 5 routes the entire year, garbage and trash routes, meaning we completed 99.9% of them. We have missed some routes in condo communities because our front-end loaders malfunctioning. A third-party, Rubicon, did this report.

#### **B. Paperless Billing**

We will be integrating our current payment system with our paperless billing online, making it easier for customers to pay their bills. You can do an estimated bill and view your balance daily or weekly. This paperless billing is the first step to modern convenience. The system will be updated in the Fall of 2023.

#### **C. Promise Pay**

Promise Pay is a new method of water bill assistance created to help customers that are struggling to pay their bills. Promise Pay introduces low-income families to the right program, similar to the Housing Water Affordability Act (HWAP). The Governor recently stated \$20 million would be funded towards delinquent bills for customers in specific periods, meaning we can potentially provide our customers credits.

#### IV. Questions, Comments, and Concerns

**Jessica Morgan:** How does Baltimore City water billing metrics compare to other cities or municipalities?

**LaToya Curtis:** We still have areas that need to improve. We are working on improving every day. Our data will continue to reflect hard work. We are setting metrics in place going forward and actively working on that to get to the numbers we want. For example, we want our call center response times to be under a minute, with dedication we are currently keeping our calls under two minutes now. Our next goal is to get it under a minute.

**Jason Mitchell:** Ms. Morgan, these numbers aren't too far off, depending on where you go and the municipalities. When you look at casework, sometimes it takes a while to close the case because the customer needs to send a document to verify the information. When we hit the 3 to 7-day period, we are in the sweet spot with best practices. Referring to our data, you can see in many areas we are moving very close to best practices.

**Jessica Morgan:** And, I don't know if this correlates in terms of the numbers or data, but I wanted to know if there are any programming or any programs available to address water billing concerns for those who may have hearing impairments or may need additional assistance with addressing their bills?

**Marco Merrick:** As we look at enabling equity in all that we do, I hope you'll appreciate and accept this answer. I recognize that we all have needs and I don't identify people or communities as people who are disabled. Our office tries to accommodate everyone. There are some programs and services that are in place, if you reach out to us for any additional assistance that we can provide to you, we will help. DPW has a very confident and capable staff. Do not hesitate to reach out. We are the office of Equity and Environmental Justice, but you can also express to us customers' needs.

**Yolanda Winkler:** The customer may also connect with 3-1-1 and have a guardian or someone share that they need special services and they will be connected accordingly.

**Ed Yelochan:** Just to clarify one issue, can City customers now can pay online?

**Jason Mitchell:** Correct, yes.

**Ed Yelochan:** Is that only with the credit card or can you make other payment arrangements?

**LaToya Curtis:** You can pay with a credit card, ACH, or check. Some of our billing will transfer to our system upgrade in the fall. There will be additional options that will be

available. Customers will be able to use Google Pay, Apple Pay, or PayPal, allowing more innovative ways for people to pay their bills.

**John Czczulin:** I think it's covered by the volunteer sites, but have you added the residential committees of each district and neighborhood like the Mount Vernon Committee, the Fed Hill Committee, and others?

**Yolanda Winkler:** John, we have sent the volunteer information out to all 315 communities as well as to the CRC. And, you all know because you received that information. We received feedback from NECO, which is the Northeast Baltimore umbrella of about 30 community associations that will participate. I will pass that on to Keita after I get all the detailed information on what they are planning to do to make sure they understand what the expectations are for this effort. We are getting that information to all the community leaders.

**Peggy Jackson-Jobe:** Thank you for that excellent report. I have a question and a comment. My question is, is there an age limit for the volunteers? I'm particularly interested in the opportunities for students who scramble to get community service volunteer credits in the City. Have you coordinated with them? When I looked at your marketing and promotions, I did not see any information about the schools.

**Keita Wells:** Yes, we are working with schools. I did not elaborate on this because that was considered one of our target audiences. I've gotten DPW to be an accredited service learning site for the students to be able to get their 75 hours and we can sign off on the forms through MSD. We have three school partnerships so far, those schools are Matthew Henson Elementary, Coppin Academy and Carver Vocational Technical. We've also recruited Coppin State University.

**Rosalind Griffin:** Thank you for the presentation. I'm trying to connect with some of the organizations in my area. If possible, could you send me some material that I can share with them because they need to be aware of the volunteer opportunities and the information, If you think the slides or other information would be appropriate to help educate my neighbors and the organizations that I interface with, that would be very helpful.

**Keita Wells:** OK. I certainly will.

**Ed Yelochan:** My plan is to pitch some ideas about the volunteer network and persuade other residents to get involved. Within that plan I would love to include the distribution of incentives. What would be the process for receiving goodie bags?

**Keita Wells:** We are working on promotional items now, but as far as the marketing tools and what we can get through, I can send it electronically as well as give Yolanda hard copies to distribute. As soon as we get the promotional items in, we will let you know what is available. We do have T-shirts that are available that could be included in goodie bags, but that would be one that they would require volunteers to be registered and active.

**Ed Yelochan:** I'll be in touch with you, Yolanda. Thank you.

**Keita Wells:** You're welcome, and you can also reach out to me. Our office is always willing to help volunteers who partner with our Clean and Green initiatives.

**Yolanda Winkler:** Keita, I'll send you the e-mail addresses for each of our members, that way you can do the updates as you have them.

**Keita Wells:** Perfect. Thank you.

**Yolanda Winkler:** Carmellita, please take care of that either tonight or tomorrow morning.

**Carmellita Green:** Yes ma'am.

**Ed Yelochan:** I have another question pertaining to picking up materials or tools. Do I strictly come down to Holliday Street?

**Keita Wells:** If you're picking up tools, it would be at Kane St. If you're picking up promotional items, then you would work with me and that would be at the Abel Wolman Municipal Building on Holliday St.

**Yolanda Winkler:** Or, you can contact the liaison for your council district. If you reach out to me or Carmellita and let us know what you need, we can also help coordinate it and get those items to you.

**Ed Yelochan:** Okay, I'll get back to you then, thank you.

**Jason Mitchell:** Last, but not least, I want to address the elephant in the room myself. As you probably know, I submitted my letter of resignation today to Mayor Scott. It was a very difficult decision. I did not do it because of water bill challenges or bi-weekly recycling. I did it because my wife has been experiencing some significant health challenges and recently, they have become re-occurring. I must continue to support my family. The media will have their assumptions, but family comes first in my life especially when serious issues arise. I'm sorry to my DPW family, I feel like I'm letting you down, you know I love you all. We've done a lot over the last year and I am getting little emotional. I will continue to reside in West

Baltimore, I'm not going anywhere. I love this City. You have all have treated me very well. I tried my best, but I have to take care of my family right now. Just as simple as that. RAC is important to me, I plan on assisting and being present within the Council until my last day. You all recognize the importance of our work first-hand. We don't give up because Baltimore depends on us to continue to keep rates down, collect garbage and recycling and to make sure they receive quality water in a clean and healthy environment. This group will still be able to push our agenda to Baltimore communities around the City. My last day will be April 28th of 2023. As you see, I'm on the call today, I did not shy away from it. I still have some of my DPW family that I must talk to this morning as well. You could potentially hear and read a lot of false statements. I'm resigning because I have to, I need to be attentive to my family. With this ending statement, I'd like to answer any more questions.

**John Czeczulin:** I just wanted to thank you for everything that you've done and for getting the RAC started. Being here has really helped shed light on how the City runs the Department. Thank you again for this opportunity.

**Peggy Jackson-Jobe:** I appreciate you dearly. God and family come first, and know that I will have you and your family in my prayers.

**Rosalind Griffin:** I want to wish you well and I think you have done an excellent job with a difficult job. I'm saddened by the choice that you are making, but I understand it. Thank you so very much for the work that you've done.

**Jason Mitchell:** Thank you all, I appreciate it deeply.

**Yolanda Winkler:** Director, I also want to note that in the meeting chat that other members have commented and wished you well. In closing, I just want to applaud Director Mitchell and the work that he has done. We all join the members in thanking you for your service. We know you will be around for another three months and we will continue to pick your brain and do great things. Under your leadership, DPW has been progressing along in a way that it has never progressed before. On behalf of everybody, I just want to say thank you. With that team and RAC members I will close this meeting. It is 6:31p.m. and we promised not to keep you here longer than an hour. Thank you and have a great night.