

Private Control Of City Water System Urged

BULLERIN 11-24-48
Report to '15' Suggests
Lease or Turning It
Over to an Authority

The city should give up operating Philadelphia's water system, an exhaustive engineering report to the Committee of Fifteen said today.

It should turn the system over to a private enterprise under lease or an arrangement like that under which the city-owned gas works is now operated by the Philadelphia Gas Works Co., the report continued.

Or, failing that, the water system should be placed under the authority type of management, an example of which is the Delaware River Bridge's administration by the Delaware River Joint Commission.

The report listed a long series of suggested water system improvements, concluding:

"Many of the recommendations could also be carried out under the present (city) operation, but experience indicates that this is not likely."

The report is the findings of a

Continued on Page 18, Col. 8

Private Control of City Water System Urged

BULLERIN 11-24-48
Continued from First Page

survey made for the "Fifteen" by Charles Haydock, a consultant engineer. He started work on it last August. His report was presented to the committee today in the presence of Elbert J. Taylor, Water Bureau chief, and other city officials.

Haydock said the most practical of the two alternatives to city operation would be to lease the water works, so as to combine the advantages of private operation and public operation, as has been so successful with the city gas works.

Turnpike Cited

Conveyance of the water system to an authority, he said, could be done under the Pennsylvania Municipality Act. In addition to operation of the bridge by an authority he cited the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission and the Port of New York Authority as other successful administrations of this type.

Either method, Haydock noted, would "completely separate the proprietary water works function from the city governmental functions and materially change the form of administration of the water works' responsibilities and neck of the bureau's employment policy.

Under the lease or authority operation, all functions, from pumping and purification to the collection of bills, could be centralized in one agency. At present the Water Bureau itself has no control of collection and only recently was granted supervision over the meter inspectors.

Haydock delved into the historical background of the city water

works system at an estimated cost of \$62,988,000. Another report heard

The Committee of Fifteen, in one of two reports submitted to it by the Bureau of Municipal Research, has recommended for a general reorganization of the Fire Marshal's office, a second report of the same bureau's office but gave no specific information.

This report was based on a survey made by Worden and Risberg, management consultants, and pointed out that the city at present has no actual fire code to guide its officers. The result has been, it states, confusion and inefficiency in the Fire Marshal's office and the fire-fighting inspectors.

Forty inspectors now assigned to the office, it suggested, should be returned to active duty with fire companies and replaced by a lesser number of civilians. All work in addition, should be required to have a fire prevention engineering background.

Plan Would Divide Duties

It recommended that the licensing and inspection of domestic oil burners be transferred to the Department of Public Health, as well as routine inspections of buildings for fire hazards. Each fire company would then make inspections in their own area, as well as investigate complaints of possible fire hazards.

As the report of these changes, the report declared, the Fire Marshal's office would continue its uncovering evidence of fires of suspicious origin, while the police force would be called on to pin down the person guilty. This, it was pointed out, would give the office more time for fire prevention work.

Also presented to the Committee was a series of recommendations calling for a rewriting of the existing zoning law and several major changes in the Zoning Board of Adjustment. These suggestions, it came in a report drafted for the "Fifteen" by Worden and Risberg.

It asked that five members be set up to direct the rewriting of the zoning laws and maps to correct what it termed "widespread deficiencies." It would be made up of a member each from the City Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Adjustment and the Zoning Division, and two members from the general public.

Would Change Zoning Board

Existing regulations, the report stated, are "not part of an overall plan for the development of the city permit, special industrial and industrial sites. They also make no requirements for sufficient off-street parking or for off-street loading and unloading zones."

The Zoning Board of Adjustment, it suggested, should be made up principally of private citizens. At present four of the five members are city officials.

The weekly hearing of the group should be held in a courtroom, to review the water space and the cases themselves should be more widely advertised, it said. A recommendation was also made that the group be given a \$9,000 grant by City Council for inspection of properties involved in the action.

Laurence Costello, director of the Department of City Transit, appeared before the Committee at its proceedings today to dispute recommendations that his department should be merged with Public Works. His unit, he pointed out, is in the midst of a \$38,000 program which would be entirely "foreign" to any other department.

He also told the Committee that the only possible use of the unused Locust Street Subway would be to equip it for its original purpose.

The Arch st. tube, he said, should

U.S. Withholds Appl. Of City Water Supply

The United States Public Health Service, it was learned today, has withheld its formal approval of Philadelphia's water supply since the beginning of October.

City officials, however, hastened to explain that it isn't as bad as it might seem.

The Government, said Elbert J. Taylor, chief of the Water Bureau, has held off until Philadelphia supplies them with a list of the planned improvements to the system and details of the financing. They are concerned, he said, about the pumping and filtering capacity and not with the quality of the water itself.

"The water is well above their standards," Taylor continued, "and we have their verbal approval until we furnish them with the details they have asked."

It is suggested, should be "filled in with the next highway repaving."

The 400-foot stretch of subway beneath Arch st. was constructed 30 years ago. It was abandoned when the city dropped plans for a proposed central-city delivery loop.

Buckley Asserts Taste of Water Has Improved

BULLERIN 11-24-48
Says It's Noticeable, Will Be Nearly Perfect In Four More Years

How does your city water taste? Any other lately?

Thomas Buckley, city director of public works, said yesterday that the improvement is noticeable in most neighborhoods.

In another four years, he said, the water should be well-nigh perfect.

The Chamber of Commerce, eyeing the proposed increase in water rates to 25 per cent, said in effect that it had better be.

"If Philadelphia industry and Philadelphia residents must pay for their water," Clement V. Conole, general manager of the Chamber, said, "they are entitled to better quality."

The Chamber's position is, he said, that the city should be given a chance to show that its water works improvement program will eliminate disagreeable tastes and

Alternate Intake

If that fails, says the Chamber, then the city should go somewhere beside the lower Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers for its supply. The Chamber's choice would be an intake on the Delaware near Trenton.

To this, Buckley replied that better water is the object of higher water rates. The new rates, if adopted by Council (whose public utility committee now has the contract), would enable the city to borrow \$30,000,000 more for water works, he said.

An \$18,000,000 loan authorized in 1940 is nearly exhausted, Buckley said. So is the city's general debt limit. Higher rates will enable loans to be made against Water Bureau revenues, outside the debt limit.

The 17-25 per cent plan was prepared by the Committee of Fifteen to replace the straight 20 per cent increase enacted to go into effect the first of the year.

Results from the expenditures of some of the \$18,000,000 are beginning to show at the water tap, Buckley said.

Finds Improvement

"I think you'll find that in most neighborhoods there is an improvement," he said. "That improvement is on. Every few months, you can almost say we have fixed a new standard of quality."

Insufficient maintenance, he has been slow in appearing because of three factors: (1) wartime shut-down on construction, (2) skyrocketing scarcities in materials; (3) skyrocketing construction costs; and (4) the necessity of extending water facilities into newly-developed residential areas, on an unexpected scale.

It would take \$38,000,000 or \$40,000,000 today to accomplish what \$18,000,000 would have accomplished in 1940, Buckley estimated. In addition, residential expansion has taken about 15 per cent of the original loan.

Nevertheless, Buckley said that the waterworks improvements undertaken under the original loan are three-fourths completed— which does not mean that three-fourths of the facilities are in operation.

Lease of Water Works Urged By '15' for Private Operation

BULLERIN 11-25-48

Lease of the city-owned water system for operation by private enterprise was recommended for greater questioning efficiency in an engineering report to the Committee of Fifteen yesterday.

The report should ease operation of the system and turn it over to private operation under a system similar to the plan under which the Philadelphia Gas Works Co. runs the city-owned gas works, the report continued.

A constructive suggestion of the exhaustive study was that the system be placed under an authority type of management, such as the operation of the Delaware River Bridge by the Delaware River Joint Commission.

The report listed a long series of suggested water system improvements, concluding:

"Many of the recommendations could also be carried out under the present (city) operation, but experience indicates that this is not likely."

The report is the findings of a survey made for the "Fifteen" by Charles Haydock, a consultant engineer. He started work on it last August. His report was presented to the committee yesterday in the presence of Elbert J. Taylor, Water Bureau chief, and other city officials.

Haydock said the most practical of the two alternatives to city operation would be to lease the water works, so as to combine the advantages of private operation and public operation, as has been so successful with the city gas works.

Turnpike Cited

Conveyance of the water system to an authority, he said, could be done under the Pennsylvania Municipality Act. In addition to operation of the bridge by an authority he cited the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission and the Port of New York Authority as other successful administrations of this type.

Either method, Haydock noted, would "completely separate the proprietary water works function from the city governmental functions and materially change the form of administration of the water works' system."

Under the lease or authority operation, all functions, from pumping and purification to the collection of bills, could be centralized in one agency. At present the Water Bureau itself has no control of collection and only recently was granted supervision over the meter inspectors.

Four Failings Cited

In general, Haydock found four principal failings in the present operation.

1. Insufficient maintenance made acute by wartime shortages of labor and materials. This condition, he reported, was noted early as 1920, and has been accentuated since then by providing insufficient funds and using the water works as a revenue producer for the rest of the municipal government, during depression years.

2. Intermingling of water revenues with those of other city agencies. This, Haydock found, made it difficult to operate the water system on "a business basis by reason of divided responsibilities and lack of a proper accounting system."

3. Inadequate personnel, some unqualified and others physically unable to properly perform their duties. In this connection, Haydock noted that 30 per cent of the 1,031 employees are 60 years of age and over, and called for a revision of the bureau's employment policy.

4. The large number of un-metered homes and other consumers and the inadequate meter program. Fully one-half of the 475,000 users, he said, are without the devices, which he described as the cash registers of the system.

Recommendations Made

To offset these conditions, the report urged expenditures of sufficient funds to maintain and operate the system, based on an estimate from the rest of the government; complete control of all meters and their installation and control; and an employment policy to bring about a "balanced age group."

Upon recommendation of the Committee of Fifteen, City Council authorized a 20 per cent increase in water rents to bring in an estimated \$5,000,000 annually in additional revenue.

Private Control Of Water Urged In Report to '15'

LAQUIER 11-25-48

Non-city control of Philadelphia's water system, through leasing it to a private enterprise or placing it under an authority type of management, was proposed yesterday in a report to the Committee of Fifteen.

At the same time, the committee received a number of other reports, including one regarding future sources of city revenue in which the suggestion was made that assessments be based on a minimum of 70 per cent of the sales value of properties.

ENGINEER MAKES REPORT

Charles Haydock, a consulting engineer, made the Water Bureau study report. It contained the results of three months of extensive research. He pointed out that many of the recommendations contained in it could be carried out under the present operation "but experience indicates that this is not likely."

The lease arrangement could be similar to the city-owned gas works, now operated by the Philadelphia Gas Works Co. An authority could be similar to the administration of the Delaware River Bridge by the Delaware River Joint Commission. It was pointed out.

Under either, all functions of the Water Bureau, from pumping and purification to the collection of bills, could be carried out by one agency. Both methods, it was added, auto-

Continued on Page 3, Column 5

Dubious Water Proposal

Philadelphians will want to look long and hard at any proposal to turn the city water works over to private operation or a public "authority."

The suggestion is based on the view that certain unsatisfactory aspects of city operation cannot otherwise be cured. That may be a groundless assumption. Nor should it be overlooked that the alternatives proposed would have their own special disadvantages.

This recommendation is akin to many others that have recently been heard. There has been a rash of proposals that problems of city government be solved by taking them off the desks of the city officials who are elected and appointed to deal with them.

More emphasis might well be placed on toning up the city management and administration. A lot of current thinking leads toward public officials paid for doing nothing and public business several steps further removed from public control.

For operation of the water system by a private corporation, the city, or more accurately, the water consumers, would have to pay a substantial management fee in addition to all salaries and other expenses. Perhaps one remedy for present ills would be for the City to pay salaries more nearly comparable with what a private corporation would surely pay. The salary of the Chief of the Water Bureau is carried in the Mayor's 1949 budget at \$9,700.