

1946 City Plan to Improve Water Is Branded Failure

The 1946 program launched with so much fanfare to give Philadelphia palatable water has collapsed, the Citizens' Council on City Planning said yesterday in a blistering survey of the work of the Bureau of Water.

The report carefully traced the history of the deterioration of the city's water in the last 40 years and the failure of all moves to map and execute long range programs since the first such attempt in 1920.

The 1946 plan has gone the same way, with only one-sixth of the money which citizens believed would go toward giving them tasteless and colorless water, actually being spent on new treatment facilities, the report said. Instead, most of the money went to lay new mains and fix old ones.

LACK OF PLANS CHARGED
And no detailed plans have been made to spend the \$12,000,000 on which voters will be asked to pass in November, with the "obvious danger" that this money also will dribble away in patch-and-fix jobs on the whole city water system, the report declared.

Nonetheless, in its final 17 recommendations, the Citizens' Council recommended that the city water should neither be farmed out to a private company nor put under a separate authority but should be continued under a completely revised Bureau of Water and perhaps even a new city department of Public Utilities administering the huge business operation which water supply represents.

RED FEATHER AGENCY
The Citizens' Council which drafted this report is a Red Feather agency comprised of representatives of 126 city organizations, and is headed by E. Walter Rixon, a hotelman. Vice presidents are Harold W. Brightman, president of Lit. Brothers; Walter F. Miller, Jr., chairman of the Committee of Security; and Benjamin W. Frazier, Germanant manager for the Philadelphia Gas Works Co.

The report was sprinkled with

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observations showing that 30 percent of the Water Bureau's 1,000 employees are more than 60 years old, that in one month the Water Bureau had an "over 100" complaints of 46,000 defective water meters, while 14,830 meters were in need of repairs, and still only half the city's 470,000 water users had meters read.

ANTIQUATED BILLING

In addition to too many being too old, the employees of the Water Bureau work under a complex "job classification" system of 109 separate titles, and are hampered by a bad administrative set-up, an antiquated billing procedure and lighted City Council control, the report said.

Present officials of the Department of Public Works and the Water Bureau "can take neither the improvements" completed in the face of formidable obstacles," the report said.

"But the fact remains that Philadelphia's supply is still not satisfactory," it added. "Approve plans have been disregarded, urgent pressed with reluctant vigor, suggesting that both past and present management of the system is in some degree responsible for the continued existence of a water problem in Philadelphia."

"MILK" OF PROFITS

In justice to the Water Bureau, the report adds, citizens should be aware that for years the water supply has been "milked" of an annual "profit" of two to three million dollars on the sale of water—money which flows to other purpuses by City Council while the water system was allowed to decay. "The Water Bureau has never gotten any budget credit for its job of maintaining 20,810 fire hydrants and two networks of high pressure fire mains, the report said.

The scale of the problem confronting the city was emphasized by data prepared by the Citizens' Council on the city water system as it stands today after 30 years' neglect.

SUPPLIES 470,000 CUSTOMERS

"It's a big business, supplying almost 470,000 customers with a daily average of 250 million gallons of water. During summer months this average is exceeded. On the day of peak demand last year the output was almost 470 million gallons, or 117 percent of rated capacity."

"The plant, which includes five raw water pumping stations, five pumping stations, two filtered water reservoirs, two high pressure fire pumping stations, almost 2,800 miles of main and 26,000 fire hydrants, represents a capital investment of over \$100,000,000."

MONEY IS DIVERTED

The 1946 program's timetable has been ignored, and money remaining from the unachieved 1946 program has been diverted toward re-

pairs and laying of new mains for new housing, the survey said.

Though the "study" has been made of Philadelphia water, it observed, and as its first recommendation declared:

"1.—A comprehensive waterworks improvement program covering at least the next 10 years should be promptly developed on the basis of existing surveys and proposals."

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

"The Citizens' Council then made 16 more specific recommendations:

"2.—The program should be directed toward improvement of the quantity and quality water which can be provided from present sources of supply.

"3.—The program should include projects to permit drawing all of Philadelphia's water from the Delaware River at the Torresdale intake and to permit abandonment of the Schuylkill as a regular source of supply.

"4.—The program should have as its immediate objective the complete elimination of the Delaware River, of all necessary equipment to remove objectionable tastes and mineral content of water and to reduce its mineral content.

"5.—The program should incorporate a schedule for systematic maintenance of the distribution system.

"6.—Meters should be extended to all water services during the next five years.

"7.—As a precaution against possible future inadequacy of the existing Delaware River source of supply, Philadelphia should safeguard its claims to the Wallpack Bend reservoir site.

"8.—All waterworks revenue should be reserved for the operation, maintenance and improvement of the water supply system.

"9.—Delinquencies in payment of water bills should be reduced by enforcement of existing regulations.

"10.—Both current and delinquent water charges should be rendered on a single bill.

"11.—The Water Bureau's accounting methods should be revised and improved.

"12.—Repair of defective meters should be speeded.

"13.—Leakage surveys of the water supply system should be continued.

A New Water Plan

When the taste and odor of Philadelphia water get particularly bad the customary procedure is for the consumers to set up a loud roar of protest. This leads to the appointment of a commission of experts to study the situation. These commissions—so numerous in the past that most persons have lost count of their number—then make expensive and prolonged studies and recommendations. Then their reports are filed for future reference.

Now we have something different. The Mayor advocates the creation of a Philadelphia Water Authority to take over the control and development of our water system. It's big business, he says, and should be handled by specialists.

This may be the right answer. It could mean more than another study and the filing of more reports. An Authority is a device to permit a governmental unit to extend its credit beyond the limits normally provided for by basic law. In this case it could be armed with other powers ordinarily denied to the City. Especially if another move is in the making to promote an up-land-source water plan.

In order to pass intelligent judgment on any up-land-source project the water consumers would have to be told:

1. Approximately (that is, within a few millions of dollars) what such an undertaking would cost.
2. What it would mean to each water-user in dollars-and-cents service charges and interest and amortization.
3. Whether water obtained from the proposed source would be drinkable without treatment, and if not, what treatment would be required, at what cost, and with what effect, if any, upon taste.

To pose these questions is not to assume that they cannot be satisfactorily answered. But the answers will be indispensable to a sound decision as to how we shall improve our water supply—whether by insisting on the purification of present sources or by looking to others.

It's a start with the proposition that the present output of the water plant is intolerable, is likely to be again; and is distinctly a detriment to the general prospect of municipal progress.

New Sewer By Nicetown

A petition protesting the new sewer in the vicinity of 22d st. and City Council yesterday. The petition

City Dissipated Fund For Water, Group Says

The 1946 waterworks improvement program has failed to advance Philadelphia toward the goal of more and better water, the Citizens Council on City Planning reported yesterday.

Money allocated for improvement and expansion of treatment plants has been dissipated piecemeal for maintenance and rehabilitation, the council, which represents about 100 city organizations, reported.

Of the nearly \$9,000,000 originally allocated for the program, it was said, less than one-third was spent for treatment facilities.

Pollution Seen on Rise
Control of taste and color in the city water has become increasingly difficult, pollution in the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers, insecticide maintenance, modernization and improvement of the water supply system have been seriously neglected, the report stated.

The council, noting that the 1946 program "has not been substantially followed" and that its timetables have not been met, warned that the \$20,000,000 the City plans to spend on water improvements in the next three years may be largely spent for patch-and-fix work other than those laid down in the 1946 plan.

The report criticized the management and organization of the Bureau of Water.

"The Bureau's staff" has been diverted from needed maintenance and modernization, and this diversion may be the cause of the present state of waterworks improvement, it was said.

Still, the Citizens' Council investi-

"The sewers down in this section were bought and paid for by the Janco said, 'But we still have to go on paying for them."

COMPLAINT SCHEDULES

Taylor, however, said Philadelphia's long-range sewerage plan will benefit the entire city, not just the new sections where new sewer lines are being installed. "When the project is completed both the odor and the kill and the Delaware River will be cleaned, no raw sewage will go into those streams and the entire city will feel the benefits," Taylor said.

Householder contacted complained sharply about the complexity of the city's archaic water rate schedule appearing on the back of the bills sent consumers.

From these schedules, the consumer is expected to learn how and why he is being assessed, but Taylor admits it would "take a good smart man" to interpret the bills.

Taylor said he would "look into our appropriations" to see if the department can afford to revise the bills to a point where they would be understandable. If the bills can't be changed, Taylor said, there is possibility that in the future a bill sent to private dwellings will contain separate accounts for each bill, and the billing method in simplified form.

WATER SYSTEM IS BAD

Conceding that the present method of making bills to those properties now without meters, Taylor added "there is no system that could be devised which would be perfect."

Taylor said householder "would make definite savings" if he would install meters. He estimated that a meter would "pay for itself within four or five years."

Taylor also admitted there was unfairness in paying for the room and sewer lines together into one bill. But, he added, "it is almost as impossible to find another way

EQUALS REALTY TAXES

"The bill for this year" said Mrs. Mary Cunningham of 2611 Reed st., "is only 30 cents less than I pay the real estate taxes."

Mrs. Cunningham resides at 2611 with her sister, Mrs. Ethel Park; three sister-in-laws, Mrs. Mary Duffy, and two young girls, Mrs. Cunningham's daughter, Dorothy, 18, and Mrs. Duffy's daughter, Elaine, 15.

Mrs. Cunningham's combined water-sewer bill for this year was \$40.50. Her real estate tax was \$40.80, and school taxes were \$38.20. Her mother, Mrs. Mary E. Duffy, purchased the property, six rooms and bath, in 1912, and that has been her home since the past 20 years.

Until 1945, the water bill was \$10 monthly. That year, the combined water-sewer bill was \$16, and the real estate tax for 1945 remained at the total for 1944, \$40.80, to \$18 in 1948.

"What do you this year's bill for?" asked Mrs. Cunningham. "I went up to the Bureau of Water," Mrs. Duffy's daughter said.

She complained to one of four clerks stationed in the hallway of the bureau's offices on the ninth floor of City Hall Annex.

"He asked me how many we had in the family," Mrs. Cunningham said.

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Water Billing by Bureau Chief Admits Protests Mounting; To Install Meters

While bitter protests against exorbitant water and sewer rents continued to flood the Bureau of Water the rates of \$60 a day, Edward Taylor, chief of the bureau, admitted yesterday that the method used by the city to bill householders of unmetered properties "is the most unfair you possibly could devise."

Taylor, strong advocate of universal metering, said the city's system "doesn't take into account the people who waste water or the good citizens who try to save it."

HOUSEHOLDERS AT HEAD

Sharp criticism of the city's rising water and sewer rates yesterday was sweeping the city. One group of Nicetown citizens already has sent a protest petition to City Council demanding immediate relief. Small householders were rising in all sections as against the rates which are scheduled for still greater increases between now and 1955.

Residents of the room and sewer lines, where one household has increased 300 percent since 1945, were in complete agreement with Taylor's opinion of the city's method of assessment.