

City Charter Special Agency for Water Needed

Fifth of Six Articles
By Frederic G. Hyde

ALREADY, because of New York City's desperate water shortages, commentators and cartoonists here are having a chance to quip that Philadelphia water, while awful to taste, was at least plentiful. It was a useful sort of humor at the time.

For the fact remains that this city faces a water-supply problem quite as stuporous in proportion, as New York's. Philadelphia now draws the bulk of its supply—approximately 357,000,000 gallons daily, according to the Bureau of Municipal Research—from the Schuylkill and the Delaware and has to chlorinate and filter it to remove the impurities dumped into both sources by upstream communities.

As New York goes ahead with its program of tapping the Delaware, the upper reaches to supplement its water supply, Philadelphia in turn will be forced to look to the Pecos for a new source. Eventually this is going to mean an outlay of millions for new reservoirs and aqueducts.

And, despite extensive but largely unpublicized replacements, the city has an enormous job ahead of it in installing a new system of water mains. Some of those now in use date back almost to the founding fathers, as main breaks and localized water shortages too frequently testify.

TS A job of that magnitude to be left in the hands of a city agency which, although it boasts one of the best engineers in the country and a competent staff, is still subordinate in status? That is another of the questions the City Charter Commission, now drafting a new basic law for Philadelphia, probably will be called upon to decide.

At present the Water Bureau, under Ebert J. Taylor as chief, is a division of the Department of Public Works, whose director is Thomas Buckley. In addition, the department comprises the Bureau of Highways and Street Cleaning, Lighting and Gas, City Property, Mechanical Equipment, Engineering, Surveys and Zoning, Aeronautics and the Boards of Highway Supervisors and Surveyors. Thus, exclusive of the Water Bureau, Director Buckley has his hands full.

Obviously the agency that handles the city's water supply in the future, by whatever title it is known, will need a free hand, and that means independent status, as a department, in its own right.

The National Municipal League, in its "Model City Charter," does not go into detail on this point, except to provide in an appendix that "the city shall have power to own and operate any public utility to construct and install all facilities that are reasonably needed, and to lease or purchase any existing utility properties used and useful in public service."

Philadelphia already has such power; the question is how and by what agency it shall be employed.

THE Charter Commission, if it decides against setting up a Department of Water under either a city manager or a strong mayor and council, conceivably could solve the problem by recommending that the city go back to the State Legislature for power to establish a Philadelphia Water Authority.

An authority, as opposed to a city department, would have the ability to issue its own bonds for the construction of a new water-supply system. This might be a decisive advantage, since by so doing, the city could avoid a further drain on its own borrowing capacity.

But from the viewpoint of establishing a competent city charter, free of loopholes and leaving as few loose ends as possible, a water authority could be considered a distinct drawback. In the Board of Education, the city already has an "unfettered" autonomous agency in the midst; city plans to set up a bank for BIRB.

As mentioned previously, all questions of setting up new departments, shifting bureaus from one department to another, and otherwise tinkering with the organizational structure of the city government become academic if the City Charter Commission recommends a city manager setup.

In such a case the manager would form his own organization. Under a strong mayor governing with council, the commission might go so far as to specify the number of departments and the jurisdiction of each.

MANy other cities, for example, have separate police and fire departments. These are now combined in Philadelphia under the Department of Public Safety. They make the department the biggest single unit in the city, in point of personnel, but the department has only a few other functions, which might be transferred to other agencies if fire and police became departments in their own right.

This might seem a purely technical question, except for one factor: the Philadelphia Automobile Club (AAA) is backing a proposal for a Department of Safety and Transportation, which presumably would take over and enlarge the functions of the present Bureau of Traffic Engineering. Such a department would have its work cut out for it in attempting to reduce Philadelphia's still tragically heavy toll of deaths and injuries resulting from traffic accidents.

Still another choice for the same department, if it is to be used, would be to find a solution for the

city's constantly increasing traffic congestion. Here is a problem that literally threatens Philadelphia's very life as a community.

Department stores here already are being forced to establish branches in the suburbs as the only means of retaining the trade of out-of-town shoppers who refuse to become entangled in the hopeless snarl of mid-city traffic.

The trend, if continued, may eventually leave the heart of the city (the so-called "high value" area which pays a heavy portion of the city's taxes) little more than a shell. Halting it is a job big enough for any city department.

TO now, this discussion has dwelt almost wholly on the powers of the managers and administrators who would conduct the city's daily affairs under the new charter, and may have seemed to neglect the ones who constitute the people's voice in government; the members of City Council. The latter, too, appear to be in a shuffling at the hands of the Charter Commission.

The basic questions concerning Council boil down to two: First, does that body as it is now elected provide adequate and fair representation for the great body of the voters generally? and second, should Council have as great an influence as it now wields in the administration of public affairs, as opposed to pure policy-making?

To take the second question first, because it requires less space, a City Council which needles to any extent in administrative matters a cardinal principle of American governmental theory: that of checks and balances.

Council is supposed to be the legislative branch of the government, confining itself to policy and law-making and leaving the execution, or administration, of its policies to the executive branch, the mayor and his department heads, while the courts, the third branch, settle any disputes between them and see that neither the legislative nor executive functions are abused.

UNDER a political setup which until last Nov. 8 closely approximated a one-party system, the lines of demarcation between the three had grown exceedingly dim. With a few shining exceptions, all were parts of what Treasurer Richardson Dilworth used to call "the City Hall gang."

Whether the Charter Commission can produce a lasting and effective

antidote for this unhealthy sort of amalgamation remains to be seen. The recent abrupt shift in the city's political climate may very well seem easier—but the commission can't count on it.

A city manager form of government would be one way of restoring effective separation of functions, a sound, pure professional manager, to protect his job and his reputation, would see to it that council did not encroach on his domain as administrator.

If such a plan were adopted, the commission might also provide for a much smaller council than the present one of 22 members. This is standard practice in other major city-manager cities, such as Cincinnati, Kansas City, Mo., nine, and Rochester, N. Y., nine.

A smaller council gives its individual members more work to do in committee, less time for politicking—and, since the prestige of the job is in inverse ratio to the number of council members, it is argued, better candidates will seek election.

IF INSTEAD of a city manager the commission were to retain the present system of a mayor and council, but give greater powers to the mayor as a means of centralizing responsibility, it would still be possible to reduce the size of council, with the effects set forth above.

Council then would become more of an advisory group—though this is something that cannot be carried too far, lest the people find they have handed over their powers to a potential dictator.

Quite aside from the place of council in the city government, the part it is to play, is Question No. 1, asked earlier. How well it represents the people is a matter which involves the basis on which it is selected, and whether any provision is made to assure the minority of some voice, regardless of how badly it has been outvoted. These topics will be taken up tomorrow in the final article of this series.

Concluded Tomorrow

Guard Our Water Supply

Worth heeding is Judge Grover C. Ladner's warning that Philadelphia should be wary of New York's plans to help solve its water shortage problems by diverting more millions of gallons daily from the upper Delaware River and its tributaries.

The veteran water conservationist says that such a project would "rob the people of Pennsylvania and New Jersey of their rights to the water of their own watersheds." It is his belief that New York should undertake a stream clearance program in the Hudson River similar to that now being conducted by Philadelphia in the lower Delaware and the Schuylkill, to ease its water difficulties.

A tri-State water pact, allocating to New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey the amounts to which each is fairly entitled, is needed for the Delaware watershed. A preliminary report on this subject by the Interim Commission on the Delaware River Basin suggests a three-State compact for an integrated water project in the upper Delaware to supply the metropolitan areas of New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. It calls for reservoirs which, according to Judge Ladner, would be used initially to provide a billion gallons a day for New York.

A full report by the Commission is due in August. Before it is approved, and the go-ahead signal given for new large-scale dipping into the Delaware by New York, assurance must be given that the rights of the Philadelphia area in the distribution of Delaware water are fully protected for the future.

Metering Survey

City Council is under ever increasing pressure to keep water and sewer operating costs down and income up. The whole public improvement program depends upon keeping these facilities on a self-sustaining basis.

Universal metering would help keep operating costs down, and would make it far easier for Council to face consumers on the question of fairness of its charges. On the issue of fairness, the heat on Council has grown so intense that the Director of Public Works has been asked to make a survey of the charges for unmetered service and recommend a program for complete metering of all properties.

The Director will encounter some knotty problems, but they can all be solved. Purchase of meters by the City in quantity, and systematic installation by city forces or persons working under city supervision, would probably make the work cheaper.

Metering every unmetered service is a fairly long operation, at best. The City Planning Commission has been suggesting that \$1,000,000 a year be spent on it for six years. Its plan is to assess the property owners for the cost, a method which they might welcome if it brings relief from high water and sewer rents. Such a process carries just a step further the assessment of frontage charges for laying water and sewer pipes.

City ownership of the new meters is to the essence, and that raises the question of acquiring title to the privately owned meters now in place. Perhaps the city could buy them. With depreciation written off, many of them can't be worth much any more.



UNEARTHING TREE-TRUNK WATER MAINS ON VINE STREET
Frank De Pelipies (left), foreman of a construction crew, and Al Tymna, a city water inspector, looking over the tree trunks which served as water mains under Vine st. for more than 200 years. They were dug up yesterday near 10th st. as work progressed on the Vine st. improvement program. Tymna holds one of cast-iron pipes that served as a connection between the logs. The wood seems unharmed by the long service.

Don't Waste; First Against Water Shortage

Philadelphians haven't had to put up with Dry Fridays and Save-Water Thursdays. They haven't been able to alibi a needed shave by boasting that a fuzzy face proved civic patriotism. They haven't had to stint on baths and dish-washing.

The well-advertised plight of New Yorkers has been due to an unusually prolonged period of drought. The shortage brought to public attention a long list of wasteful practices which aggravated it. The drip-drip of countless leaky faucets wastes millions of gallons in every big city. Philadelphians are as wasteful as other Americans in the use of water.

New York's plight, however, may have made many grumblers at the quality of Philadelphia's water realize the city's great good fortune in having such enormous potable resources in the two rivers that flow by its doors. No one questions that the system needs improvement, the beginning and indispensable foundation of which would be the cutting off of waste.

New York's troubles generated a nationwide scare because they raised the fear of serious depletion of the country's water resources. There was apprehension of an ominous general lowering of the water table in the underground sources. But the national situation, according to Secretary of the Interior Oscar Chapman, is reassuring. We shall never run out of water in the foreseeable future, if adequate protection measures are taken, say departmental experts.

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