

**PUBLIC HEARING  
OF THE BRISTOL COUNTY WATER AUTHORITY**

**Wednesday, June 5, 2013  
199 Chestnut Street, Mt. Hope High School, Bristol, RI**

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Chairman Klepper called the hearing to order at 6:00 pm.

William Gosselin, John Jannitto, Allan Klepper, Bradford Louison, Raymond Palmieri, Sr., Frank Sylvia

Directors Absent: Robert Allio, Paul Bishop, Georgina Macdonald

Manager of Customer Service/Purchasing J. Granata made a brief presentation explaining that BCWA is proposing changing its policy of charging landlords for water used instead of charging the tenants. BCWA would also change its policy to place a lien on the property owner, if he failed to pay the water bill. Last year BCWA charged-off \$41,000 from delinquent accounts, over 70% renters.

Director Jannitto made the following motion

**MOTION: Dispense with this hearing and maintain the present billing system.**

There was no second to the motion.

Chairman Klepper stated that this item will be on the agenda for June. As this is a public hearing, not a Board Meeting, motions or voting is not allowed.

Chairman Klepper stated that the Board had requested staff to look into the issue of reducing write-offs and improving operation efficiencies. All of our programs are being questioned, said the Chairman, we must do all we can to lower costs.

28 persons offered testimony:

- Citizens testified against rate increase yet BCWA passed an 11% increase, thus this change is a done deal.
- Landlords cannot get a security deposit from tenants.
- If a landlord who now has 7 meters requests just 1, he will lose the cost of the 7 meters which were paid for, and the water charge will move into the higher rates block with only 1 meter.
- Landlord fight may entail lawyers and suits.
- If the tenant doesn't pay the water bill, chances are he/she didn't pay the rent as well, so this will hit landlord even harder.
- Eviction is a lengthy process – 6 months – during which time no rent is collected and the water may be left running out of spite.
- From a mill owner: we must carefully assess the effect upon the entire community when changing this kind of policy.

- We are not a business, we are a service, and all should share the non-payment loss burden, as is the case for the cost of pursuing system leaks, not pushed onto landlords.
- If we can't reach the tenant, how do we think the landlord can?
- Knowing the policy, tenants will be inclined not to pay their last bill.
- This new policy will put some landlords over the edge; theirs is not a major profitable business.
- We should revise the billing cycle, perhaps monthly, thereby catching non-payers sooner, as a lower loss.
- If we turn debts over to a collection agency, what is the long-term recap of funds?
- Landlords may not pursue tenants for payment of water bills as this is considered harassment and against the law.
- A disgruntled tenant might just leave the water running to make trouble for the landlord.
- Those who use the water should pay for it. This process applies to heat and electricity as well, otherwise tenants overuse all utilities.
- If we place a lien on landlords, it may jeopardize their credit rating over abuse they had little control over.
- If students are a main problem, can we make some arrangement with RWU to withhold grades or graduation pending payment?
- Scathing rebukes that we were created not as a business but as a utility to serve the communities.
- Several pointed out that a tenant would have not incentive to conserve water use, and may let the water run to get back at the landlord.

Chairman Klepper thanked the audience for their input.

There being no further business, the hearing was closed at 7:30 pm.

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Allan C. Klepper  
Chairman