

WASHINGTON COUNTY SERVICE AUTHORITY IN THE PIPE

NEWSLETTER

Summer/Fall 2020

No. 31

Creating a Culture of Service

WCSA's strategic plan includes financial stewardship and communications goals for providing greater operational efficiency, transparency and value

WCSA continues working toward accomplishing several long-term goals that were developed during our strategic planning process, initiated in late 2018. The strategic plan provides an organizational vision and framework to guide our course of action for ensuring a successful future. The plan's first two goals — maintaining a reliable infrastructure, and recruiting, developing and retaining a best-in-class team — were introduced in our May 2020 newsletter. Two additional goals from the strategic plan include **financial stewardship** and **improved communications**.

As an independent service authority serving 90% of Washington County's residents, WCSA is responsible for supplying more than 21,500 customers with clean, potable water, and for efficiently processing wastewater before it's safely returned to the environment. In a mountainous county, this is a challenge that requires a large, continuously evolving infrastructure, including approximately 900 miles of pipe for water services which, if laid end-to-end, would stretch from Virginia Beach to St. Louis, Missouri.

Operating a utility is a resource-intensive endeavor, which depends on appropriate operating and capital funding. WCSA's funding comes from water and sewer connections and monthly user fees. There are no state or federal subsidies, nor any revenue from town or county taxes. Grants represent a small fraction of WCSA's capital project funds and are designated for specific projects, not for operational costs. The service authority receives a few low-interest loans from the Virginia Department of Health or the USDA's Rural Development for capital projects, but those loans must be repaid with interest from money earned from customer fees.



Middle Fork Drinking Water Treatment Plant

WCSA works hard to serve as a **financial steward** of these resources, including customer fees, which are directly reinvested into the community. Over the past three decades, the utility has invested more than \$120 million in infrastructure and improvements.

These capital projects include the:

- Middle Fork Drinking Water Treatment Plant
- South Fork Intake
- Mill Creek Regional Drinking Water Treatment Plant
- Hall Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant
- Route 58 Water Storage Tank
- Exit 13 Sewer Project
- Ongoing replacement of approximately 200 miles of galvanized water lines

Continued on Page 4

INSIDE

WCSA Project Updates	2
WCSA Cross Connection Control and Backflow Prevention FAQs	3

Creating a Culture of Service (continued)	4
WCSA Calendar	4

UPDATE: WCSA's Response to COVID-19

Earlier this year, WCSA temporarily suspended disconnection of water and sewer service due to nonpayment of bills.

Disconnection for nonpayment of bills is set to resume on Wednesday, Aug. 5, 2020.

For accounts that have been paid in full, **WCSA will waive all 10% late penalties** accrued between Jan. 1, 2020, and July 31, 2020. Any 10% late penalty that you have paid between Jan. 1, 2020, and July 31, 2020, will be adjusted on your account as a credit.

As a note to our customers, **our business hours have been extended to 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday (except holidays)**. However, the lobby of WCSA's administrative office in Abingdon, Virginia, will remain closed to the public until further notice due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.

Customers may continue to have their service needs met through the following options:

- Our drive-through window (M-F, 7 a.m. - 5 p.m.)
- Phone: 276.628.7161 (M-F, 7 a.m. - 5 p.m.)
- Email: inquiry@wcsa-water.com
- Auto draft, online and phone payments (24/7) by credit/debit card or e-check
- Drop box located at our drive-through window and foyer (24/7)

WCSA Project Updates

To learn more about WCSA projects, visit www.wcsawater.com.

Recently Completed Projects:

The **Hall Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant Headworks Modification Project** replaces the aging headworks of the plant. This modification helps ensure continued efficiency in the provision of sanitary sewer service to the communities of Emory, Meadowview and Glade Spring, along with the Washington County Industrial Park (Exit 22), Highlands Business Park and Emory & Henry College. The project was completed in June.

Ongoing Projects:



Sugar Cove Road Water Line Extension Project

The **Sugar Cove Road Water Line Extension Project** will involve installation of more than 5,000 feet of 4- and 6-inch water lines, which will provide water service for 12 residences that currently rely on wells and springs. Construction began in April. The project is ahead of schedule and is expected to be completed this summer.



Pump Station for the Sugar Cove Road Water Line Extension Project

The **Abingdon Water Storage Tank Improvements Project** will provide upgrades that directly impact approximately 6,600 water connections. The project was opened to bids in April and has been awarded to King General Contractors of Bristol, Virginia. It is expected to be completed by spring of 2021.

Upcoming Projects:



Site of the upcoming Hidden Valley Phase 2 Project

The **Hidden Valley Phase 2 Project** will extend water service to 31 additional residents who currently rely on wells and springs. The project is being funded by the Virginia Department of Health, the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, and the Department of Housing and Community Development. The project was advertised for bids in July and is expected to begin this summer.

The **Galvanized Line Replacement — Phase 3 Project** is the third step in a three-phase project to replace all galvanized pipe in WCSA's distribution system over the next several years. The project is widespread across Washington County and will consist of numerous contract divisions. The project was initially opened to bids in April 2020, but will be re-advertised this summer.

The **Lee Highway Corridor Sewer Expansion Project** will extend public sewer service to residents and businesses along Lee Highway between Exit 13 and the city of Bristol, Virginia. The first phase of the project is currently in the design stage. The project is expected to begin in the spring of 2022 and be completed by summer of 2023. 💧



WCSA Cross Connection Control and Backflow Prevention FAQs

It is imperative for all Washington County, Virginia, residents to do their part in protecting our water distribution system and our community's public health. WCSA's Cross Connection and Backflow Program is an important component of those efforts. Here are answers to the most frequently asked questions about this program and how it affects all of us.

Why does WCSA have a Cross Connection Control and Backflow Prevention Program?

The purpose of this program is to abate or control actual or potential cross connections, and protect public health and WCSA's distribution system. It is also required by the Commonwealth of Virginia, State Board of Health, Waterworks Regulations.

What is a cross connection?

A cross connection is any temporary or permanent connection between a potable (i.e., drinking) water system and any source or system containing non-potable water or other fluid. Contamination can flow into the public water system from an unprotected potable water line entering a wastewater treatment plant, for example, or even from a simple garden hose being left in a bucket of cleaning solution.

What is backflow?

Under normal operating pressure, a cross connection may not present a threat to the drinking water supply. Backflow can happen, however, when pressure is lower on the public supply side than the non-potable side, and non-potable substances flow back into a consumer's plumbing system and/or into the public water system. There are two types of backflow: backpressure and backsiphonage.

What is backpressure?

Backpressure can occur when pressure on the customer's side overcomes normal operating pressure on WCSA's side. For example, the use of boilers and water pumps could create a situation where customer-side pressure forces contaminants back into the public water system. New WCSA customers that previously had a well or spring with associated pumps and pressure tanks could be a source of backflow due to backpressure. WCSA customers served by new line extensions must provide proof of physical disconnection between their old private water systems and the WCSA system.

What is backsiphonage?

Backsiphonage can occur when county water line pressure is greatly reduced by a line break or under conditions of high usages, such as a fire flow. Non-potable substances can be drawn to the

water main through any existing cross connection. For example, if a 6-inch water main develops a leak, WCSA crews have to cut off water service on that particular line to make repairs. As the remaining water in the line flows out of the leak, water in unprotected homes and businesses reverses flow. At this point, something toxic could enter the public water system.

How is backflow prevented?

Preventing backflow is a matter of avoiding the reverse flow of unwanted substances into the drinking water system by using special plumbing devices and practices, including air gaps and installation of backflow prevention assemblies. An air gap is a physical separation between the water supply line (such as a sink faucet) and the topmost (flood-level) rim of the receiving vessel (such as a sink basin). Outside, check to make sure your spigots have anti-siphon protection, which is usually indicated on the spigot or backflow prevention device. Make sure garden hoses are not submerged in buckets, ponds, troughs or other non-drinkable water sources, and that previously used wells or spring boxes are physically disconnected from plumbing.

Can my sprinkler or irrigation system be hazardous to the water system?

The Virginia Department of Health classifies lawn sprinkler systems and irrigation systems as a high risk. Sprinklers, bubbler outlets, emitters and other equipment are exposed to substances such as fertilizers, fecal material from pets or other animals, pesticides, or other chemical and biological contaminants. Sprinklers may remain submerged under water after use or storms. Should the water system pressure suddenly decrease, such as in the case of a water main break, line flushing or major fire involving multiple fire hydrants, these harmful substances can be backsiphoned into the water distribution system.

Does my sprinkler system require a backflow preventer?

Per WCSA's Cross Connection Control and Backflow Prevention Program, premises having fire protection services, lawn sprinkler systems or irrigation systems that do not protect the WCSA distribution system through the use of approved backflow prevention methodologies shall require the installation of a backflow prevention assembly. For a list of approved backflow prevention assemblies, please contact WCSA.

By taking steps to prevent backflow, you are not only protecting your neighbors and other WCSA customers, you are protecting members of your own household. For more information, please contact WCSA at 276.628.7151.



Mill Creek Water Treatment Plant

determine future investments. In addition, with a flat customer growth curve, we look to continually improve the efficiency of our operations and seek value in our investments for the benefit of our customers.”

Another strategic plan goal is **improved communications**. Enhanced and expanded internal and external communication and engagement are important for achieving capital projects and other initiatives, as well as successful implementation of all strategic plan goals.

Communication measures include an online customer portal for providing opportunities for customers to conduct business electronically, enhanced website content, employee training, and an employee portal for information sharing and organizational updates. Additional communication efforts include enhancement of multi-disciplinary teams for managing projects and issues, and expansion of team building and networking for greater organizational success.

User fees have also been used to extend water and sewer service to thousands of customers throughout the county, from Rich Valley to Exit 7, and from Brumley Gap to Damascus. These capital projects ensure that WCSA is able to continue meeting customer needs, both now and in the years ahead.

“WCSA’s focus is on creating financial stability through sound, conservative financial decisions, and we work very hard to keep our rates low,” says Robbie Cornett, general manager. “It’s our responsibility to manage our customers’ business as efficiently and effectively as we can. WCSA will continue to exercise the same precautionary, critical thinking and transparent processes to

“Our job as an organization is to deliver top-quality services to our customers, and they rely on us to share information with them in all our areas of responsibility,” Cornett says. “These include providing water and wastewater services; protecting the environment; improving, expanding and maintaining the infrastructure; and optimizing organizational productivity and efficiency. Consistent communication to customers through a variety of mediums, along with strategic internal communication protocols and procedures, is essential not only for creating a culture of service for our customers, but for achieving our goals to ensure that Washington County residents can depend upon WCSA for many years to come.”💧



Exit 13 Phase 2A Sewer Project



WCSA Calendar

WCSA offices will be closed on the following holidays:

Labor Day	Sept. 7
Columbus Day	Oct. 12



Board Meetings

UPCOMING BOARD MEETING DATES

Aug. 24, 2020
Sept. 28, 2020
Oct. 26, 2020

Board meetings are held at WCSA in the E.W. Potts Board Room at 6 p.m. The public is welcome to attend.

Actual dates may vary. Please contact our office to confirm meeting schedule.

Customer Contact Information

Should WCSA need to contact you regarding your water service, we generally do so via text message, email or telephone. If you prefer not to be contacted by one or more of these methods, please call our office at 276-628-7151.

If you would like to be contacted but are not sure we have your information, please contact us at 276-628-7151 or inquiry@wcsa-water.com with that information.

E-CHECK PAYMENTS

WCSA NOW OFFERS A 24/7 E-CHECK METHOD FOR PHONE AND ONLINE PAYMENTS. YOU MAY PAY BY CALLING 276-628-7151 AND CHOOSING OPTION 2, OR BY ACCESSING YOUR ONLINE ACCOUNT. CALL CUSTOMER SERVICE AT 276-628-7151 FOR DETAILS.

WCSA

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