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Potential Sewer System Sale Opposed By Doylestown Township

On July 13, the authority entered into an exclusivity agreement with Aqua Pennsylvania to negotiate a sale of its sewer system.



Jeff Werner, Patch Staff

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Doylestown Township Municipal Building. (Jeff Werner)

DOYLESTOWN TOWNSHIP, Pa. — The Doylestown Township Board of Supervisors have sent a letter to the Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority opposing a potential sale of its sewer system.

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On July 13, the authority entered into an exclusivity agreement with Aqua Pennsylvania to negotiate a sale of its sewer system within the next 12 months for \$1.1 billion.

“We believe that such a transaction would not be in the best interest of our residents,” said the supervisors in the letter.

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“The sale of water and/or sewer utilities to a private entity like Aqua has been proven to lead to skyrocketing rates and fees,” the letter continues. “Local municipalities have limited to no influence or resource in preventing these rates and fees from drastically increasing. Rather than simply being held accountable to the public for the provision of safe drinking water and for safe

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profit. Private companies like Aqua do not always have the best interest of our residents in mind.”

The supervisors go on to say that authority representatives have historically been some of the most vocal in opposition to the privatization of water and sewer utilities.

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“We understand BCWSA has been working hard to ensure public ownership and management of water and sewer utilities in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and believe that a sale to Aqua would be contradictory to the strong position BCWSA has taken over the years.”

Several municipalities served by the BCWSA put the letter together, said the supervisors, to send a “clear message to the BCWSA board members and the Bucks County Commissioners, that we respectfully, yet strongly oppose any sale of BCWSA’s water or sewer utilities to any private entity including, but not limited to Aqua.

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“The members of the Doylestown Township Board of Supervisors respectfully yet strongly request that BCWSA and the Bucks County Board of Commissioners reject any purchase proposal from Aqua or any private entities seeking to purchase BCWSA’s water and/or sewer utilities.”

The Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority will hold two public open house events on Tuesday, July 26 to hear what the public has to say about the potential sale of its sewer conveyance system to Aqua Pennsylvania in what would be the largest such transaction in state history.

The first “Public Open House” will take place on Tuesday, July 26 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Bucks County Community College’s Perkasie Campus (Great Room located in the North Building) at One [Hillendale Rd., Perkasie 18944](#). The second public open house is scheduled for Tuesday, July 26 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Bucks County Community College – Newtown Campus (Gallagher Room in the Rollins Center), [275 Swamp Road, Newtown 18940](#). Use the parking lot by the West Entrance.

Aqua Pennsylvania submitted an unsolicited proposal to the BCWSA in late 2020 to acquire the system. To date, that document has not been made public.

“The BCWSA was presented with an initial acquisition offer and the authority had the fiduciary responsibility to examine every detail and determine the most beneficial decision for all concerned,” wrote board chairman John Cordisco in a letter to ratepayers. “This analysis ensured that customers would have rate protections, municipalities and their taxpayers would realize financial benefits, programs would remain in place to achieve the highest environmental

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standards, and no current and former employees' pay and benefits would be negatively impacted.”

After receiving the initial offer and conducting an analysis, the BCWSA says on its website that it has taken the procedural step to enter negotiations with Aqua Pennsylvania, which triggered a series of public meetings on the proposed sale.

“There is no decision to sell until we hear from the public,” says the authority.

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On its website, the authority said any decision to sell the sewer system must meet the following criteria: ensure ratepayer protections over the next 10 years; provide \$1 billion in proceeds for the county and its taxpayers; provide the highest-level of environmental regulations; provide job security for all employees; and public transparency.

If a sale is approved, after paying off the debt that's associated with its operations, the authority said Bucks County would receive about \$1 billion in proceeds from the sale, which it would use to eliminate the entire county debt, create a fund for customers to stabilize sewer rates over the next decade, cover future tax increases, and provide funding for essential services as needed.

While the BCWSA is contemplating selling its sewer system, it would continue to own and provide water service.

Entering into its consideration, BCWSA says it anticipates infrastructure challenges in the future that will require a significant financial commitment to maintain improvements for all customers.

“Communities across our footprint are serviced by an aging sewer system that needs ongoing repairs and upgrades. A private entity like Aqua Pennsylvania

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can handle infrastructure needs more efficiently and effectively since they can spread costs and work over a larger system,” it says.

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“Additionally, many of our customers have already experienced the costly headaches caused by aging laterals that have failed and damaged their properties. Aqua Pennsylvania will also seek PUC approval for the ability to replace damaged customer wastewater laterals to address the stormwater inflow, which is something BCWSA is not permitted to do.”

Along with a one-year rate freeze, the authority said the county could establish a Customer Benefit Fund, which would be used to allow only minimal rate increases over the next 10 years.

“The sale of only the sewer operation means significantly lower rate increases,” said the authority. “Low-income residents will continue to have access to grant or discount programs to help pay bills.”

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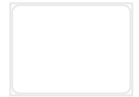
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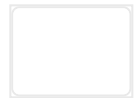
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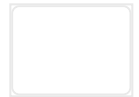
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