



Bucks County Association of Township Officials

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BCATO
P.O. Box 856
Doylestown, PA 18901

Mission

BCATO's mission is to provide support and guidance to townships of the second class in Bucks County to ensure the health, welfare, and safety of its residents.

July 13, 2022

Robert J. Harvie Jr., Chairman
Bucks County Board of Commissioners
55 East Court Street
Doylestown, PA 18901

Dear Chairman Harvie,

As elected officials, we share the common goal of providing valued and cost-effective services to our constituents. Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority (BCWSA) provides services to about 100,000 households, nearly one-third of the County population, in 31 municipalities. BCWSA is the largest single provider of water and sewer services in the county.

Recent news articles report that Aqua America and possibly others have expressed interest in the acquisition of the Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority. Concurrent with this story we have also seen the shock and impact of announced rate increase approvals of up to 80% by the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission for municipal utilities systems recently acquired by regulated utilities. As former Township officials yourselves, we are certain you are cognizant of the fear of uncertainty such news causes water and sewer rate payers. Please consider the long-term financial impacts that major increases in water and sewer rates will have on the residents and businesses being served and Bucks County in general.

The acquisition of municipal water and sewer systems is a growing national trend spearheaded in our area by the proximity to the national headquarters of the two largest investor-owned utilities in the United States, Aqua America, and American Water. In Pennsylvania as well as in New Jersey, legislation has been created to enhance the consideration and implementation of privatization.

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Water and wastewater services such as those provided by BCWSA are essential to protecting the environment and particularly in this time of high inflation and escalating costs, it's imperative that those services be provided at cost effective and reasonable fee structures. Our concern is that privatization ultimately results in negative impacts for local municipalities and their residents.

We must point out that this issue has been of major concern in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for years now. Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association (PMAA) has been conducting programs to identify nearly all of the risks and cost impacts of privatization. PMAA formed a committee to address these concerns and published in 2018, "Proud History Bright Future – Value of Authority Ownership of Public Water and Sewer Systems."

In this publication, an analysis shows that for an average home, private water supplier costs were 85% higher than public entities in Pennsylvania and nationally 56% higher. Recently, the Philadelphia Inquirer reported that Aqua rates in their comparison to be 18 % higher for sewer services and 58% higher for water.

Past and present members of the BCATO Board have extensive utility management experience, and we offer their support if so desired. We recognize there are benefits to privatization, but they largely exist where the water or sewer utility was not well managed or lost key staff, developed compliance issues, and became overwhelmed. This is clearly not the case here.

As elected officials representing townships across the county, the sale of BCWSA raises grave concerns. We respectfully request the Authority continue operating as an independent, non-profit agency, as intended when it was created in 1962 by the Bucks County Commissioners.

We thank you for the opportunity to express our thoughts and concerns.

Sincerely,

Best,

Maggie Rash

Maggie Rash, President
Buckingham Township Supervisor

Dave Nyman

Dave Nyman, 1st Vice President
East Rockhill Township Supervisor