

## METCOM needs immediate overhaul for wayward spending

Posted by [S](#) On 04/13/2016

*Steve Willing and Jacquelyn Meiser*

The St. Mary's Metropolitan Commission needs to cut back spending and immediately account for payments of close to \$2,000,000 per year in gratuitous debt service. METCOM has borrowed up to \$50,000,000 on the books that it is not using according to its latest financial documents. The St. Mary's County Commissioners should begin to ask the tough questions as to what happened on previous watches by Metropolitan Commission executive directors Dan Ichniowski and Jacquelyn Meiser.

It is time for the Chairman of the St. Mary's County Metropolitan Commission, Mr. Steve Willing, to take the necessary steps to reduce waste and lead the charge to reduce rates for the general public. If Commission members don't immediately reduce spending and do away with waste, they should be replaced.

Year after year, the Metropolitan Commission members have rubber-stamped excessive spending and have demonstrated the inability to get the answers to underlying financial questions.

Last Thursday, there was a public hearing on rate increases and the Commission needs to finally take a stand and reduce rates instead of raising them.

After reviewing the audit of METCOM by an independent CPA firm, Murphy and Murphy, LLC, it is clear that sewer/water rates have risen 55% since 2008 while customers have increased by only 7 % since 2010.

Meanwhile, if you are a first-time home-buyer or trying to find affordable housing and think the costs of housing have risen, look no farther than the Metropolitan Commission. Over the last six years, the costs have risen from \$500 to \$18,000 for sewer/water charges just to have the privilege to build a new home. The inability of people in general to locate affordable housing can directly be attributed to the past policies of METCOM leadership .

Several builders in the Community have become so enraged of the past practices of Dan Ichniowski and Jacquelyn Meiser that they have requested a full-fledged financial investigation into METCOM's practices. It should be noted that in 2010 and 2009, METCOM set aside over \$1,500,000 in both years to fund a trust it set up for METCOM employees. That trust currently exceeds \$6,000,000.

Keep in mind that in 15 years, your St. Mary's County Metropolitan Commission has grown from 57 employees to over 98 workers even though the customer base has been stagnant during that same time period.

In addition, this was paid for by the following rate hikes:

- **2015 increase of 3% sewer, 1.4%-water**
- **2014 increase of 3% sewer**
- **2013 increase of 10%-sewer, 7%-water**
- **2012 increase of 3.7% sewer and water**
- **2011 increase of 4% sewer and water**
- **2010 increase of 8% sewer and water**
- **2009 increase of over 9% sewer and 3% water**
- **2008 increase of over sewer 19% and 28% water**

METCOM, by their own statistics, has only grown customers 7.7% from 15,600 customers to 16,800 in 2015. On the other hand, the cost for an EDU for water/sewer has risen over 500% from FY 2010 to the present and will continue to escalate under the proposed rate increases advertised over the last two weeks.

Clearly the reason behind the increase is because METCOM has continued to borrow excessively through State loan programs and instead of using the money has socked it away and made exorbitant interest payments.

Even though the money isn't being used and is costing the taxpayers close to **\$2,000,000 a year** to repay this obligation.

Even though METCOM has borrowed over \$40,000,000, the system users have remained pretty constant over the last five years, only adding 100 customers in the year 2015.

In the past, under the leadership of Dan Ichniowski and Jacquelyn Meiser, property owners were forced to connect to public sewer systems within 18 months of installation. This onerous policy was met with significant opposition in the past. The previous METCOM task force recommended that five years would not be an unreasonable time period to make the connection. (Final Report METCOM task force, June 2nd, 2010)

In many cases, METCOM has been accused of forcing elderly citizens to spend inordinate sums to make a connection and to pay debt service despite having an inability to do so.

This was exemplified in the case of Combs Toney, an elderly lifelong resident of St. Mary's County who could not afford his sewer bills and had a septic system that worked perfectly. His house was sent to collection for a tax sale by METCOM but the bill was paid by Todd Eberly from ST. Mary's College in an act of kindness.

Mr. Toney recently passed away but his situation ignited a firestorm about METCOM's practices towards its citizens of St. Mary's County.

Currently the Capital Contribution charge for residential customers is scheduled to increase to \$10,346.11 for residential water and \$12,415.33 for residential sewer in FY2017. These increases place an enormous burden on taxpayers and without some program in place to allow the governmental entity to collect these charges either on the sale of the property or to collect from the estate of the individual homeowner, property owners and people on fixed incomes face enormous burdens!

Please contact your local County Commissioner and the METCOM Commissioners to request an immediate reduction in expenses and a proposal to reduce rates. It's time for them to answer the tough questions.

---

*This article is an opinion piece from The Bay Net Editorial Board. For questions or inquiries about this piece, please e-mail [news@thebaynet.com](mailto:news@thebaynet.com)*

---

Copyright © 2019 thebaynet.com. All rights reserved.