

Flint Water System Advisory Council (WSAC) Meeting Minutes

5-14-2024

The meeting was called to order at 5:43pm.

- Laura Erwin-Hall, Public Navigator and Communications Specialist of the Office of Public Health, City of Flint, was present to provide entry assistance and do roll call.
- Scott Dungee, Water Plant Supervisor, City of Flint, was present to provide information regarding the water plant and water testing.
- Kenneth Miller, Department of Public Works Administrator, City of Flint, was present to respond to questions.
- Jiggy Mitchell, Sewer System Maintenance, City of Flint, was present to respond to questions.
- Caitie O'Neill, Communications Director, City of Flint, was present to respond to questions.
- Diane Russell, U.S. EPA Region 5, was present to respond to questions.
- Eric Marsh, Skeo Solutions, was present to take minutes.
- Lauren Dempz, Skeo Solutions, was present to record the audio and video.

Council members present:

- Dr. Benjamin Pauli
- Gina Smith
- Jaron Houston
- Dr. Lawrence Reynolds
- Nayyirah Shariff
- Dr. Shawn McElmurry

Council members absent included:

- Nancy Love
- Sherri Hartwell
- Wendy Braun

Approval of the Agenda: 5:51pm

Dr. Benjamin Pauli (Ben) opened the meeting by giving a brief history and introduction of the Flint Water System Advisory Council (WSAC). The WSAC was formed in adherence to the State of Michigan Safe Drinking Water Act. The council's members are appointed by Mayor Sheldon Neeley and confirmed by City Council, and include residents, community leaders, and municipal water and other technical experts. The council works to improve communication between the city and residents around water quality, ongoing water infrastructure projects, and other water issues.

Public Comment and Concern

Bruce Stiers expressed concern about the sediment buildup that is still present in pipes going into people's homes, and the lack of a remediation plan to address the sediment from the city. He noted that there are companies that have the capability to sample and analyze the build-up, but the city has not authorized the funds for an investigation of this nature. He wanted to raise awareness about this issue, and the potential water-borne illnesses that could be affecting residents as a result.

One participant expressed concern about the ongoing work to the water mains and the wastewater system, especially with summer approaching, and asked if there was a plan or timeline that anyone could speak to.

Ben offered to reach out to his contact for more details, and added that the effort has been successful thus far.

One participant expressed concern about the recently issued draft Flint water infrastructure Administrative Consent Order (ACO) – specifically regarding the lack of transparency and platform for the community to ask questions and voice concerns. Additionally, participants wanted to know how the projects outlined in the ACO are going to be funded, and whether or not the city is making an effort to seek funding for the projects at this time.

Participants were advised to attend the city Budget Hearing on Thursday, May 16th from 5:00-8:00 PM to learn more about the funding plans for the upgrades outlined in the ACO.

Introduction of Skeo Team

Skeo Solutions (Skeo) is a consulting firm here under U.S. EPA'S (EPA's) Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) program. It is one of several EPA-sponsored technical assistance programs and provides services to sites nationwide.

The program's goal is to help people understand complex environmental issues to ensure meaningful community involvement in environmental decision-making. The program's services are provided independently through a contract with Skeo. The program started in 2007 with Skeo being awarded the first contract. The current TASC contract runs through July 31, 2026.

TASC support is coordinated through EPA's Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights and EPA's Region 5 Office. Specific TASC support for the WSAC includes communicating and coordinating with WSAC and EPA, assisting the advisory group with developing operational protocols and implementing effective approaches to facilitation. This will assist with finding common ground and guide discussions to productive areas.

TASC will also assist by conducting organizational and logistical tasks for the WSAC, including:

- Scheduling meetings.
- Arranging agendas and speakers.
- Coordinating communication between council members.
- Taking and posting meeting notes.
- Reserving meeting space.
- Providing equipment for presentations.
- Recording of meetings and working with council to post on city website.
- Provide facilitation support as needed.

Discussion about Administrative Consent Order (ACO)

Ben discussed how, after attending a recent committee meeting related to the ACO, it became clear that despite being open for comment now, the ACO is going to happen no matter what the community decides, which puts residents in a disempowered position.

The city was under a voluntary agreement with Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) for many years, and they found serious deficiencies from past sanitary surveys. Why was it necessary or desirable to shift into this framework of an order as opposed to a voluntary agreement right now? The city released a statement saying that this helps to give the state a voice in any legal proceedings and so forth. Ben asked, why do we have more voice under the AOC than we had in the voluntary agreements with EGLE?

Scott Dungee (Scott) responded that, when EPA initially stepped in, they issued a stricter ACO for the city, and now they're transitioning into a more voluntary agreement between parties to help tailor the deal with goals that make more sense for the city in terms of finances and timelines.

Scott was then asked if EPA has any role in determining what is included in the ACO, or is it just EGLE that's determining what work is going to be prioritized? Scott responded by saying that there will be some goals that were identified by EPA in the past and have not been completed that will still be in effect for this updated ACO, but it will primarily be driven by EGLE. Another person remarked that the state has room to be stricter in their standards than EPA.

Discussion with Scott Dungee, Flint Water Plant Supervisor

Ben posed a question to Scott regarding TMF (technical, managerial and financial) capacity – specifically asking about the point at which Flint will have enough capacity to run its own water system in compliance with federal law as outlined in the 2016 EPA order. What is the threshold that the city will need to reach where we can say with certainty that it is able to manage its own water indefinitely into the future without any other violations on the horizon? Can we put criteria in place for that? The money for that isn't readily available at this point, so where is it going to come from to get us there?

Another participant pointed out the issue of limited personnel the city has available to deal with these issues at the moment. They're building a team for inspections, but that's taking away from the team that could be out fixing the water infrastructure. They are currently working on filling the vacant positions, and once that's taken care of, things should start progressing at a steadier pace.

Ben noted that the ACO asks the city to hire two people to address the backflow into the water system. Why hasn't that happened yet? Scott remarked that there are a few reasons why this hasn't happened yet. First, there's a lack of qualified people that want to work, and a lot of different places competing to hire the same small pool of qualified individuals. Also, there's an issue of people being hired and not showing up or going somewhere else. That doesn't mean we're going to stop working on the project or looking for candidates, but we may need to fill that gap with part-time contractors until we find someone who can do it full-time, in house.

One participant noted that there's a lot of money available for drinking water, wastewater infrastructure, etc. that is available through the State of Michigan via programs such as the Michigan Clean Water Plan. Despite a lack of resources, the City of Flint has not applied for any of this state funding. Why?

Scott pointed out that they would like to use the State Revolving Funds to help supplement some projects, and he does try to bring various other funding mechanisms to the city's attention, but ultimately, it's up to the grant writers to decide what does and does not get applied for.

Ben added that the State of Michigan, who is imposing this order, or the federal government should be more proactive in building the sustainable capacity of cities like Flint and Benton Harbor that already have limited resources rather than just doing short term contracts.

One participant expressed concerns about the efficacy of the water filters that were distributed to residents. Diane Russell with EPA Region 5 assured that the filters, which use carbon technology, have been extensively tested and have proven to be effective at removing the contaminants of concern present in Flint's water. She cited a peer reviewed study that was conducted in both Benton Harbor and Flint.

Discussion with Caitie O'Neill, City of Flint Communications Director

Ben introduced Caitie O'Neill, who was invited to the meeting as part of the council's ongoing effort to build up a relationship and rapport with the city and allow for transparent and productive conversations to be had between the residents and the city about topics of concern.

Ben highlighted the city's Consumer Confidence Report (CCR), which is the annual water quality report mailed out to residents, as one of the topics he hopes to discuss with the city in the near future. The WSAC intends to do a deep dive after the updated CCR is sent out this summer and gather community feedback about what information they would like to see included and how the document can be made more accessible and understandable.

One participant and member of the press asked Caitie about the residents of Flint that have received notices threatening to place liens on their homes due to unpaid water bills, despite the city promising that property liens will not be placed on active water accounts.

Caitie noted that liens will be withdrawn for active water and sewer account holders, but arrangements will still need to be made for residents to pay outstanding water and sewer bills.

Additional Discussion and Wrap-up

Attendees stressed the importance of communication and transparency.

Nayyirah Shariff asked for clarity on process for pursuing funding for water infrastructure. Ben asked about the possibility of having staff who are working on grant applications attend one of the WSAC meetings to learn about what they do and how they do it.

The question of the size of Flint's water system relative to its population was also raised. Ben commented that the question of right-sizing Flint's water system was a presentation being considered for this evening's meeting.

Ben opened the floor for folks to comment if there was anything additional anyone wanted to raise before concluding.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10pm.

Related Links

- [May 2024 Draft Administrative Consent Order](#)
- [City of Flint – Progress Report on Flint Water and Water Infrastructure News](#)
- [EGLE’s Water System Advisory Council Webpage](#)
- [Past Flint Water System Advisory Council Meeting Minutes](#)

Attached

- TASC Introductory PowerPoint presentation



FLINT WATER SYSTEM ADVISORY COUNCIL TASC SUPPORT OVERVIEW

MAY 2024

OVERVIEW

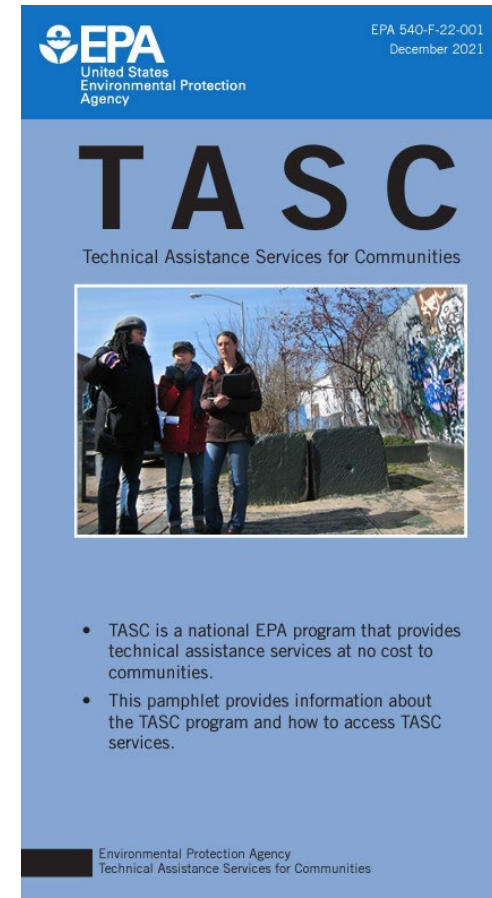
- Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) Program Overview
- TASC Support for Water System Advisory Council
- Q&A



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EPA'S TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES FOR COMMUNITIES (TASC) PROGRAM

- Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC)
- Provides non-advocacy, independent technical assistance for the community
- The program's goal is to help people understand complex environmental issues to ensure meaningful community involvement in environmental decision-making
- EPA's TASC program provides services through a national EPA contract with Skeo

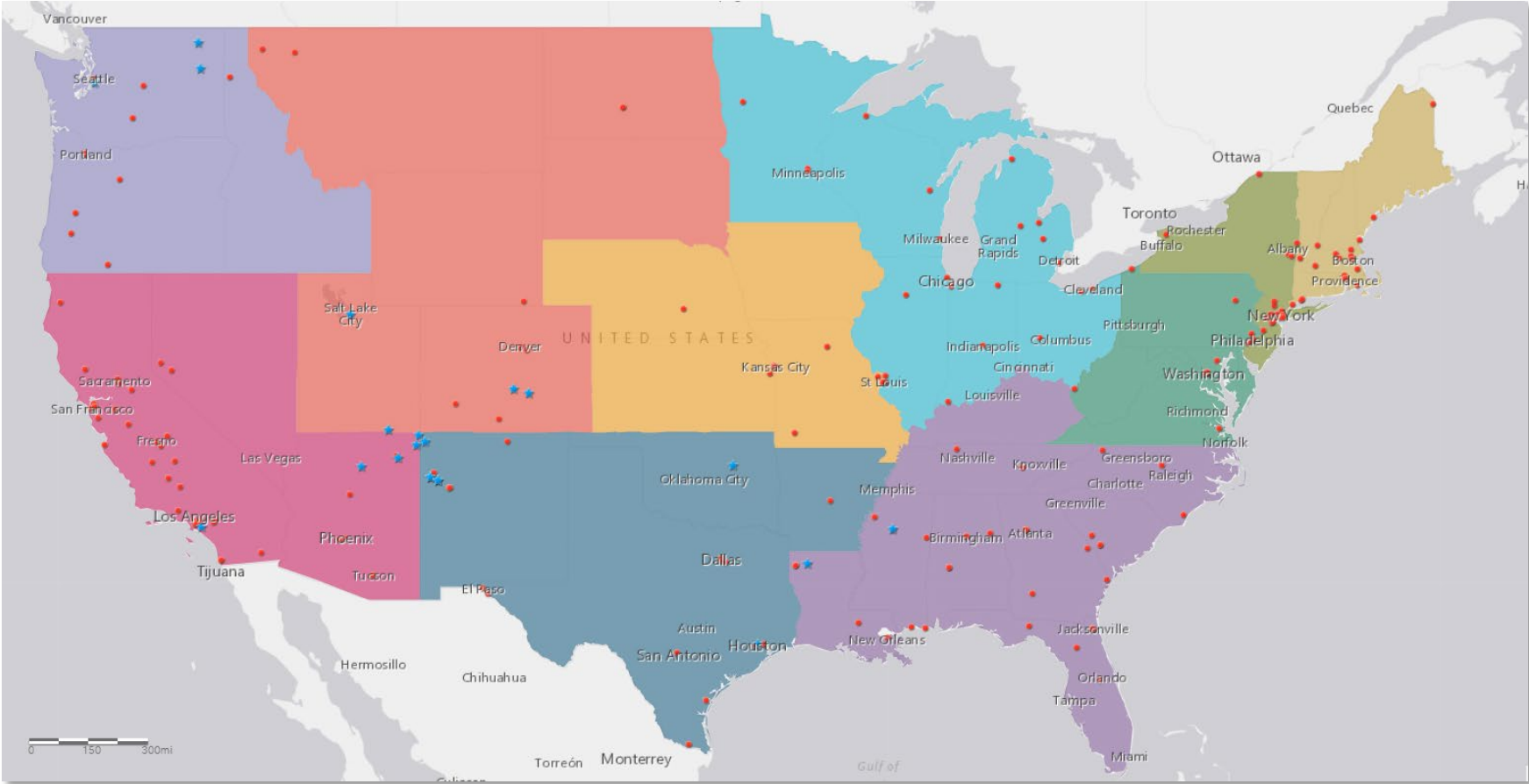


TASC PROGRAM SERVICES

- Reviews and explanations of technical information
- Technical comments on site-related documents
- Community trainings or workshops on site-related issues
- Research on site-related community questions
- Technical Assistance Needs Assessments (TANAs)
- CAG formation support
- Meeting facilitation
- Outreach materials



TASC SUPPORT ACROSS THE UNITED STATES



TASC SUPPORT OVERVIEW FOR THE ADVISORY COUNCIL

- TASC support coordinated through EPA's Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights and EPA's Region 5 Office
- Support activities include:
 - Communicate and coordinate with Advisory Council and EPA
 - Assist Advisory Council with developing operational protocols and implementing effective approaches to facilitation
 - Conduct organizational and logistical tasks
 - Schedule of meetings
 - Arrange agendas and speakers
 - Record meetings and take notes
 - Provide facilitation support, as needed

