

QUARTERLY REPORT OF INDEPENDENT CONSUMER ADVOCATE

THIRD QUARTER—JULY 1 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 30, 2021

This quarter's activities largely revolved around sewer backups and/or storm water flooding experienced by customers. Approximately sixteen complaints regarding sewer backups were fielded during the quarter. These complaints began in July and continued throughout the period. The complaints were primarily in West Hartford, Newington and Wethersfield. Undoubtedly, they were driven by the much greater rainfall in the quarter highlighted by the two storms, Henri and Ida.

While the storm water system and the sanitary sewer system are meant to be separate in these communities, there is a high degree of inflow and infiltration of the sanitary system by storm water. Hence the flooding/sewer backup events when rain is substantially greater than normal.

In addition to handling customer inquiries and explaining the situation to customers, the Advocate spent a fair amount of time understanding and communicating the program MDC has for installation of backwater valves and sump pumps to minimize damage to basements. These programs are somewhat different in the various communities responding to different conditions and different municipal requirements.

As a result of the abnormal rain amounts, these programs have received a significant increase in interest resulting in waiting lists for the service. The Advocate understands that additional resources will be devoted to these backup prevention programs in the 2022 budget now being prepared.

Related to the sewer backups is a clarification issued by EPA to the MDC reporting requirements. MDC had been reporting to the EPA sanitary sewer backups only those caused by failures to the sewer system, e.g. broken or clogged sewer mains. EPA requires that customer backups, whether caused by failures or other causes, such as excessive rain, need to be reported to it. MDC has agreed to comply beginning in September 2021.

In September, preliminary budget figures became public, and the Advocate has begun work on the budget. Earlier in the quarter, the Advocate had asked for the latest model results for the Clean Water Project Charges since that model can drive the amount of this charge. As of this date, the Advocate is still waiting for those results. In addition, the Advocate has begun looking into the total payroll projections for 2022 since this is a significant driver of the budget and therefore rates for water and sewer service. The Advocate anticipates that the final quarter of the year will be substantially devoted to budget and rate issues.

Respectfully Submitted,

Independent Consumer Advocate

By David Silverstone

October 4, 2021