



Sanctuary Sentinel

For and About the Sanctuary on the Park Community

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Our Water World

Our home's January bill for 4,000 gallons of Arapahoe County Water and Wastewater Authority's water and our accompanying sewage cost us \$81.44. That's 114% more than we paid a mere three years ago. How could that be?

We posed that question to ACWWA's managers at their January public-relations effort called an open house. They fumbled, and maybe fumed, at the audacity of the question until Martin Stegmiller, operations manager, gave us a clear answer. These are the folks providing our water to drink, flush and bathe in.

"It's primarily related to bringing you renewable water at a reasonable cost," Martin said without too much PR frosting on this ugly cake.

Here's ACWWA's problem. It now relies on two sources. One is the four wells sucking water 1,000 to 1,500 feet down in the Arapahoe Aquifer. The aquifer's water table is falling at the rate of 35 feet a year. The second is a series of alluvial wells sapping near-surface water off of the Cherry Creek watershed. That water must be replaced gallon for gallon, and some of that must come from the deep aquifers.

What to do? ACWWA has begun partnering with a labyrinth of other water entities stretching around the southeast corner of metro Denver. They've got a lot of names but the big top in which they all perform their watery duties is the South Metro Water Supply Authority. They've built water-supply pipelines north to Barr Lake and west to Chatfield Reservoir. But what about water for the pipeline? They've got to buy it. The hope is they can



purchase water rights in the Brighton/Barr Lake area soon. The western water also will be needed.

To process it, two water providers are building a \$280 million state-of-the-art water treatment plant southwest of Jordan Road and Bronco Parkway. ACWWA will own 7/9th of the plant called the Joint Water Purification Plant. The other partner is Cottonwood Water & Sanitation District. It'll eventually provide 12 million gallons of water a day from renewable sources.

ACWWA serves a jigsaw-puzzle-shaped eight-square-mile area from Centennial Airport eastward into that housing jungle east and south of Arapahoe road toward E-470. We're now using 1.2 to 1.4 million gallons of water a day and dumping 2 million gallons of sewage back to ACWWA to be processed. Martin says this area is now only 35% to 40% "built out." But a look at the map doesn't show a lot of residential land left, just a lot of commercial. ACWWA just completed a sewage treatment plant that can return non-potable (you can't drink the stuff) water to Cherry Creek. They call this \$28 million plant their Lone Tree Water Reuse Facility and it's next door to the office at 13030 E. Caley Ave.

Okay, why are our rates \$30 a month higher (in our case) than Aurora's. They don't like that question much. Jennie Achee, assistant general manager, kind of bristled. "We don't compare our rates," she said. Instead, ACWWA bases them on their costs. And we know who's paying. It's we folks. [See related story on Page 2.]

By Jim Banman

How We're Being Water Boarded

Psssst. Don't mention this out loud, but somehow we're not in the Public Improvement District (PID) that pays off our Arapahoe County Water and Wastewater Authority's bond debts. If we were our property taxes would be at about 20% higher.

Todd Weaver, our Arapahoe County budget manager, confirmed that and notes the ACWWA mill rate now stands at 16.7 mills. You need to multiply .0167 times your property's assessed value to figure out that amount would be \$716.43 more a year in taxes in our case, or about \$60 a month on top of what we pay for water and sewage. The mill rate brings in \$5.3 million a year to ACWWA, Todd said.

And that brings us around ACWWA's budget. This little news item for our dinky neighborhood newspaper cost \$12.50 to get a copy of that 2009 document. That's 25 cents a page for 49 pages. Nothing's free in this \$14 million-a-year government entity whose mission statement is "to provide unparalleled service and accountability to our customers." For that money we got 42 pages of descriptions filled with buzzwords of the water and financial worlds, and a self-congratulatory pat on the back for its budgetary wizardry that won a bronze award.

The summary says: This budget reflects three key areas of emphasis for the coming year (2009): capital improvements project needs identified in the 20-year capital improvement plan, proactive maintenance of the water and wastewater infrastructure and operating costs. ACWWA budgets \$14 million in operating revenue and \$3.7 million in non-operating revenue; it expects to spend \$8.2 million in operating expenses and another \$27.7 million on non-operating expenses, and then use \$18.2 million in surplus funds to balance the budget. The largest single operating expense is \$2.8 million in salaries and benefits for 44 employees, who'll get a 4% raise "to keep salaries competitive."

As for the board of directors of our water company, the eight positions are appointed at the discretion of the Arapahoe County commissioners and include two of the commissioners, Rod Bockenfeld and Jim Dyer, and one ex-commissioner, Marie Mackenzie. The board's president, vice president and assistant secretary live five or so minutes from each other in the Chaparral area.

If anyone would like to have a copy of the budget we could make one for you. That'll be 50 cents a page based on the capital needs in this neighborhood.

It's Time to Clean Up the Neighborhood

Our neighborhood spring clean-up and picnic, a combined effort of the Grounds and Social committees, will be Saturday, May 30, Joan Liebchen, Social Committee chairperson tells us.

The Grounds Committee is compiling a list of suggested spruce-up tasks which will be distributed when we meet at 9 a.m. in the paved area near the Dirks residence, 6204 S. Blackhawk Ct., where there will be light snacks to enjoy. After a busy morning, we will reassemble for a picnic lunch at 11:30 a.m.. A park ranger will join us to answer any questions we might have about the park. There is no charge for the picnic, but please RSVP by May 22 to Joan Liebchen, or anyone else on the Social Committee so that there will be enough food available. You are welcome to

attend the picnic lunch regardless of whether or not you are able to assist with any clean-up activities. It's a great time to socialize after a long winter. Future social events for the year will include some casual "drop by for drinks (BYOB) & snacks" get-togethers over the summer, a pay-as-you-go progressive dinner in the fall and the annual Cup o' Cheer in December. Joan is at her wits' end trying to remember who spoke to her at the last holiday party, volunteering to host this December's event. It was such a kind offer, but somehow it escaped a permanent place in her memory during the hubbub of the wonderful party at the Races' home. Please contact Joan (303-400-3389 or jliebchen@comcast.net) if you are still interested in making your home available for this gala function. All expenses are paid from the social committee budget; the food and beverages are catered

Board Gets Reprieve on Common Area Sprinkler Rates

Our homeowners' association dodged a substantial financial bullet over an immediate and quietly instituted increase in Arapahoe County Water and Wastewater Authority rates for watering our common areas.

With little notice ACWWA last November raised the cost of a 3-inch supply line to \$625 a month for all 12 months, effective in December. We have a 3-inch line. When the board learned of this it was too late for December through February. Sorry, they said, about the notice coming after our budget was approved. The ACWWA message was simply you owe us.

Gulp. The board roared into action, meeting with the folks at ACWWA and indignantly demanding relief. The board learned it could reduce the size of the line to 2 inches without any effect on the water quantity or pressure, but there's a catch. Only ACWWA could do the engineering and installation of a new meter at a cost of \$20,000 plus another \$7,000 to review the plans.

Joe Dirks, chairman of the Grounds Committee, reported to the board at its April meeting that he'd succeeded in talking ACWWA out of this. ACWWA agreed to waive the cost of the meter and review, and when the conversion and meter are installed the monthly rate goes down to \$290 plus water used, Harvey Starr told residents at the meeting. The board also says it has learned its lesson about notifying ACWWA about shutoff requirements in the winter months to save paying the \$290.

The water will be untreated and straight from a well, but will cost just as much as treated water. If and when the long-promised common-area sprinkler upgrade takes place, any new heads will need to be color coded to indicate we shouldn't drink the water.

Remember the conflict over whether three property owners could mow in the common area around trees they'd planted there? That got resolved, thanks to Vice President Barbara Sydow's intervention. But explaining the deal at the meeting required a math major and none was present. Barb said they could mow a three-foot circumference around the trees. She was challenged by the math-challenged. Circumference would be the difference around. Wouldn't that be the diameter? No, but do you mean three feet out (radius) in both directions from the trunk? Well, yes. And what is that? Since this newsletter is designed to inform and instruct that would



be $C = \pi * D$. You knew that, of course. Thus the circumference is $3.1416 (\pi) \times 6 (\text{diameter}) = 18.85$ feet in a circle around a tree. You folks get that? We'll be watching you closely.

Still, Malcolm Jones wanted the board to make sure "tampering" with the common areas doesn't recur. Barb assured him the Architectural Design Committee's request form in the future will include words, in effect, saying "don't tamper with the common area."

The ad hoc For the Birds Committee received criticism. Most of us received an e-mail in which the committee said it need not report its activities to the board. Oh yes you do, the board replied in its own e-mail. The ad hoc group can't do things in the common area without board approval, Harvey said. His words: "Can't become renegades." We're fine with what the committee is doing, Harvey said, but we won't permit the group to act outside the board's purview.

Treasurer Dale Jensen reacted to "a certain level of nastiness" over this committee's actions. Janet Hanna agreed. "It grieves me deeply that we are talking like this," she said. Others nodded in agreement. "As time goes on, our meetings are getting more heated and things are said against each other," she said. She offered to be a mediator, and she and Sandy Hill were named to co-chair the committee with the job of smoothing feathers. Janet was asked to report on committee activities to the board. Barb said she did not disagree with Janet's views, and that she joined the board because of a need to listen to the community and do what's best for the community.

Our snow-removal policy was revised, based on the results of the 30 of 53 homeowners who replied to the survey. Dale said he gave each response a "weighted value" and the average came out to 2.1 inches of snow in the driveway and 5.3 inches in the streets before shoveling and plowing occur. The board averaged that out to 3 inches on the drives and sidewalks and 5 inches (Continued on Page 4)

Snow Removal Policy Revised

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on the streets. Previously the standard was 2 inches on drives and 4 inches on streets. So far snow removal has cost about \$7,000 of the \$10,000 budget, but with any late 2009 snow still ahead of us.

Muriel Leff, a Grounds Committee member, said The Green Plan has been given the contract to maintain flowers at each of the four entrances for a cost of \$2,139, about half of what a previous company had charged the HOA. The plan is to use perennials toward the rear and annuals in front, and get rid of an invasive mint that is gaining ground.

As for that major overhaul of the common-area sprinklers, Muriel said the bids far exceeded the landscape architects \$15,000 estimate. Thus, the Phase I work will be scaled down to fit the available funds.

Last year's annual meeting took up revisions of community documents, but left open one matter about the size of fines for violations. Barb recommended a small increase in penalties for rules and bylaws infractions. Whereas now they are a warning followed by progressive fines of \$25, \$50 and \$100, the proposed increase will be a warning followed by fines of \$50, \$100 and \$150. That and other changes to the community documents will be submitted to the community for a vote at the annual meeting in December.



Getting Cold Feet A pair of ducks paddle through the icebergs in Lake Sanctuary after a spring snowstorm.

Happiness Is a Nesting Bluebird

*Life is sweet, tender and complete
When you find the bluebird of happiness.
You will find perfect peace of mind
When you find the bluebird of happiness.*

Our For the Birds Committee hopes next spring Bluebirds will find happiness in our Sanctuary birdhouses. Or at least that is the plan.

Three species of Bluebirds are found throughout North America. Locally we see the Mountain Bluebird. Actually the name bluebird is a bit misleading. Most bird colorations are due to pigment deposited in their feathers. A Northern Cardinal, for example, is red because of the red pigment called carotenoids. In contrast, bluebirds do not have a single molecule of blue pigment in any of their feathers. The top transparent layer of each bluebird

feather is filled with miniscule pockets of air. When sunlight strikes these pockets, all of the other visible wavelengths of light are absorbed. Only the blue escapes and is scattered in all directions for the eye to see.

All bluebirds are cavity nesters and will use artificial nesting boxes like we have throughout our community.



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Hummingbirds Need Our Help Too

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We seem, however, to attract more Tree Swallows to our habitats. Those of you who have closer access to these nesting boxes might be on the lookout for the Mountain Bluebird. We are considering a plan that should afford us a better opportunity to enjoy these special birds, which we hope to instigate next spring.

Bluebirds love to eat mealworms, and they consume about four grams of food per day, which is 12% of their body weight. Eastern and Western Bluebirds sit on elevated perches seeking their food. In contrast, Mountain Bluebirds can hover while searching. This enables them to live in areas with few trees and shrubs.

Mountain Bluebirds arrive here from the south. These spring migrations routinely consist of small groups of birds, but, on occasion, they migrate in flocks of more than 100 birds. Unfortunately our late spring snowfalls prove fatal to some of these birds. Natural nesting sites such as abandoned woodpecker cavities are in high demand but aggressive starlings often usurp bluebirds from these sites. As a result they often turn to the artificial boxes like we have.

All habitats are now set for the upcoming season. For the record we have 12 total boxes throughout the community. 5 are for Kestrels / Flickers, 4 are for Swallows / Mountain Bluebirds and 3 are for Wrens / Chickadees. All boxes have received a coat of boiled linseed oil to help protect them. The Kestrel / Flicker boxes have been filled with woodchips and openings covered with a soft wood (e.g. popsicle stick) blockage to deter the blackbirds from encroaching (the Flickers and Kestrels will work at the covering, the blackbirds will not). By now we have noticed that all these boxes have been prepared by either the Kestrels or Flickers. You may have noticed the activity around the habitats. All these cavity nesters have started looking for nesting spots.



Checking Out the Real Estate
Ain't mama happy, ain't nobody happy. Nesting swallows inspect one of our Sanctuary birdhouses west of the Arnolds' home in February.

Remember, also, that April and May are the months for us to start seeing hummingbirds in our area. They usually return in August and September. Actually last year we had them all summer even if in less numbers. If you enjoy having these amazing birds around, it's time to put out a feeder. Use a 1-to-4 ratio of sugar to water for best results. We suggest boiling the water (use a pyrex measuring cup in the microwave) and adding ¼ cup sugar to it. Let it cool fully before setting it out. Also if you are buying a feeder, give the little guys a break and get one with a perch. Even though it is fun to see them hover, they are only there to get energy. Their protein comes from the insects and insect eggs they eat.

For The Birds, Carol, Jim and Ron