

Report on Current Water System

By Michael Wigal

As most are aware, our water system is facing many problems. We are facing issues that most communities are facing across the U.S. Issues such as an aging water infrastructure, maintenance, upkeep of our current assets, rate increases, the cost of upkeep, personnel shortages and a loss of water consumers are at our feet and measures need to be taken.

As you know, I am relatively new to my position. I have done my best to identify problems and suggest solutions. Most of the problems that have been identified should have been addressed a long time ago. Hindsight is twenty/twenty. To get where we need to be will take time and my hope is that we have not addressed these problems too late.

The age of our water system is many decades old. Major replacements or improvements to our water distribution system have not occurred. As a result of this, we are dealing with continuous water line breaks. Any other proactive programs to address our water distribution system are hard to implement because of this and any planning that is put in place goes right out the window. A fund for the replacement of water lines and improvements has been put in place. A plan is moving forward to address problem areas and improve the reliability of our system. This plan will be ongoing for years to come with frequent changes made in priorities as problems arise.

Maintenance of our current water distribution system is almost non-existent at this time. Valves in our system have not been maintained. A valve exercising program needs to be in place. If this is not done, valves rust and corrode and become inoperable. Numerous valves in our system do not work and need to be identified.

Hydrant maintenance cannot be kept up with. Approximately 20% of our hydrants do not work or have operating issues. Currently, my goal is to attempt

to replace a hydrant per month. I don't feel this is adequate but at least it is progress.

Unbillable water is the major aspect of gaining control of our water fund. Part of this is being addressed with the replacement of all of the water meters in the city. We are losing a considerable amount of money to underperforming meters. The other part is water loss due to leaks. Identifying leaks has to be a high priority. Shortly, I will be bringing in a leak detection contractor to survey the entire downtown area for leaks. We will concentrate on the downtown area first and then begin to move west. This will increase the work load of repairing water line breaks because of the ones that occur on a daily basis.

The upkeep of our current assets is vital. Due to cutbacks in personnel and a lack of funds, some of our assets have not been maintained as they should. Maintenance items at the water treatment plant have been put off. Our water towers have maintenance and inspections that are overdue. The raw water pumping station needs attention and the raw water intakes in the river have never been inspected.

Recent water rate increases have gone into effect and the revenue generated will go a long way in addressing the maintenance of our assets. However, costs will not go down. I feel some consideration should be given to a yearly inflationary increase of 1-2% on the water rates. The status of the water fund can be evaluated yearly and if it is solid, relief from the inflationary increase can be given for that year.

As you can see, there are many things to keep the water distribution crew busy. I can keep 2 additional crews busy besides the crew that we currently have. I know this comes down to finances but I want to impress the need for more personnel. We currently have one assistant operator at the water treatment plant which impacts the maintenance there. The staffing that we have now might be adequate if our system had been maintained.

As far as the loss of customers and population, I will once again refer to the implementation of the comprehensive plan. Businesses and residents need to be

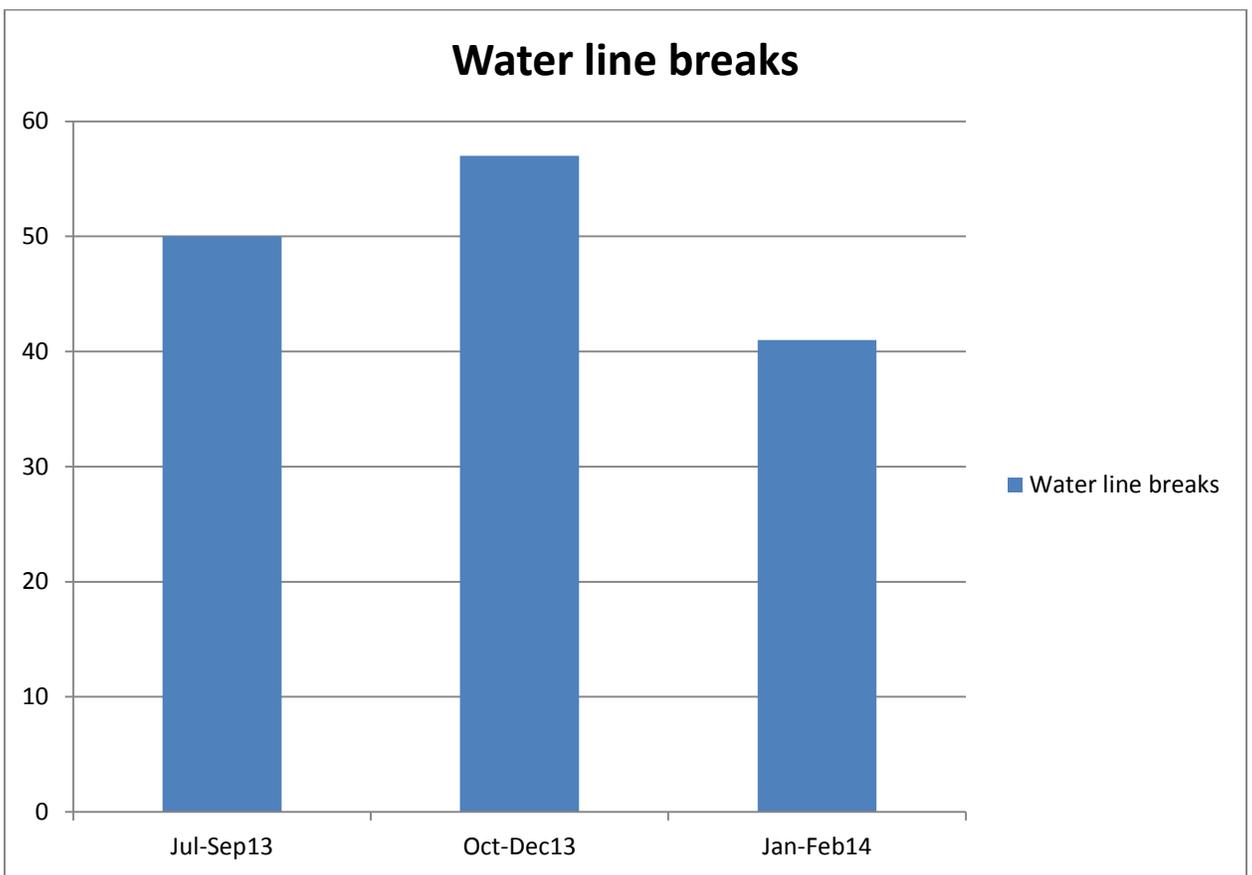
attracted to our community. If economic development of our community occurs, many things will fall into place.

Also, our current water policy is being reviewed. This review will identify any deficiencies with the policy and isolate areas that can be improved. As most people have already stated, we need to enforce our own policies.

Finally, I would like to mention the “City of Steubenville Drinking Water Supply Emergency Response and Contingency Plan.” This document provides protocols to be implemented in the event of emergencies that can affect our water system. Guidance is provided regarding chain-of-command, notifications that are necessary, and recommended procedures regarding various emergencies/disasters.

At this time, I feel that this document is adequate but there is room to improve upon it. I am currently working on updating the call lists in the plan and would like to expand on possible emergency scenarios that are not covered. Also, some of the current plan seems a little generic and I am making these more detailed. During our recent survey by the Ohio EPA, part of their focus was on the part of this plan that addressed inorganic contamination due to the recent events in Charleston, West Virginia. Once again, while this section was adequate, I feel it can be improved. When I complete this update, I will have it approved by the City Manager and distributed to the appropriate offices and the Ohio EPA.

Water line breaks



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