

# In the flow

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*"The Mission of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department is to exceed our customers' expectations through the innovative treatment and transmission of water and wastewater, and the provision of services that promote healthy communities and economic growth."*

## Director's Council already showing results



December 2008 participants in Global Settlement join Federal Judge John Feikens in celebrating a new chapter in regional cooperation.

A landmark Director's Council, established in December 2008 to proactively address important water and wastewater issues affecting the region, has already gained momentum, having worked with state regulators to cancel two non-critical projects that totaled \$1.2 billion and would have had significant rate implications for all customers.

The five-member council, with representation from the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, Oakland, Wayne and Macomb counties, came about as part of a regional agreement last December settling a host of water and wastewater service issues, including all outstanding litigation among the parties. The council is considered an unprecedented venue for regional cooperation among the four large service providers.

"When you collectively serve nearly 50 percent of Michigan, any issue is complex and has far-reaching ramifications," says

DWSD Director Pamela Turner. "This council provides a forum to work with the representatives of Oakland, Wayne and Macomb counties so that we can minimize misunderstanding and iron out any issues before they become points of conflict."

In addition to providing an opportunity for discussion of service issues, the council provides a unifying front for these large municipal service providers to seek infrastructure funding and other state and federal support. "We all have the premier responsibility of delivering clean, safe water and reliable sewer service to our customers and constituents," Turner said. "And we are all working in historically challenging economic times that make our job harder. By working together, we can reach a broader audience with a unified voice about important funding issues."

The council came about as a result of the settlement brokered by U.S. District Court Judge John Feikens and his designees:

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# Bottled water: in all of its variations, it still can't touch the tap

A major phenomenon of the past 15 years has been the rise in popularity of bottled water. These days, you see it everywhere: athletes grab a bottle after a workout, moms keep it in their cars, and kids take it to school with their lunches.



There's an overall perception that drinking bottled water is better for you than consuming tap water.

And, while many would argue that the convenience of bottled water has led to more water consumption and is a healthier habit than, say, drinking soda pop, others would point to the high cost and vague standards regarding H<sub>2</sub>O in plastic.

So, just what is bottled water? Is it a magic elixir? Or is it no better than what comes from your tap?

"The answers are complex," said Mary Lynn Semegen, DWSD's Water Quality Manager.

Tap water — like that produced by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) — is regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), a food regulatory agency, regulates the quality of bottled water.

## EPA vs. FDA

"EPA (regulatory) standards are stricter than FDA," said Semegen. She then cited several reasons why EPA-regulated tap water is the better choice for consumers than FDA regulated bottled water:

- "(Bottled water producers) are not really required to test for e-coli and fecal coliform.
- "(Bottled water) testing is (required by FDA) once per week, versus EPA, which is continuous.
- "Bottled water producers don't always reveal the source of their water," such as Coca-Cola's "Dasani" brand, which in

Detroit is good old DWSD tap water in a plastic bottle. That means that if you live in a community served by DWSD and drink Dasani, "you're paying for it more than once," said Semegen.

- While bottled water producers do test their product, Semegen said, "Bacterial testing (of bottled water) is not required to be performed by a certified laboratory facility (as is required of DWSD and other water utilities. Bottled water producers) are not required to submit test results to state and local government agencies."
- Also, "With tap water, you have to have a trained and certified water plant operator (on duty 24-7). There are no similar requirements under FDA regulations. And," she said, "there is no CCR requirement for bottled water."

A CCR, or Consumer Confidence Report, is a report the federal government requires water utilities like DWSD to publish annually. The report contains details, in plain English, about what specifically is in your water, including any contaminants, as well as details about complaints or violations brought against the utility.

"Some bottled water producers provide information about their water, and some don't. Bottled water companies that provide any kind of equivalent information do so voluntarily."

Here is something else to consider: if it is so pure and wholesome, "Why do bottled waters have expiration dates?," said Semegen.

Good question.

The bottles in which bottled water is packaged are one good reason why they include an expiration date. There is no uniformity in the plastic used to manufacture the bottles used for bottled water from one bottler to the next.

The plastic from which water bottles are manufactured can contain BPA (bisphenol A) and other potentially harmful substances that can leach out of the plastic into the water from which it is consumed.\*

## Taste

Taste and perceptions concerning purity are frequently cited as reasons why some people choose bottled water over the tap despite a lack of corroborating evidence. Their anti-tap water biases may be more a testament to the effectiveness of advertising than anything else.

In 2005, John Stossel of the ABC News show 20/20 hosted a blind taste test in which participants rated samples of municipal



tap water and several different brands of bottled water. Participants frequently preferred tap to the bottled waters. Of the bottled waters, the top rated choice was the least expensive, "American Fare," a discount brand sold by K-Mart. Interestingly, a number of participants rated "Evian," the most expensive brand sampled, the worst. One man even said the eau de France tasted like "Toilet water."

If you're put off by tap water's smell or taste, aerate (shake vigorously) before consuming to speed the dissipation process.

For tap water on the go, there are a number of reusable bottles available on the market. These are available in aluminum, stainless steel, and food grade plastic containers (plastics with the numbers 2, 4, or 5 are recommended\*\*).

And if it isn't already obvious, tap water is cheaper than bottled. Based on current rates, a gallon of DWSD water costs less than a penny, said Raphael Chirolla, Rates Section Manager of DWSD's Financial Planning Division. Actually, you can buy about five gallons for a penny. Depending on the brand, the cost per gallon of bottled water is anywhere from 750 to 2,700 times as much as tap water.\*\*\*

For more information:  
Common Dreams.org ([www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org))  
DWSD ([www.dwsd.org](http://www.dwsd.org))  
Environment, Health and Safety Online ([www.ehso.com](http://www.ehso.com))  
Natural Resources Defense Council ([www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org))  
NSF International, formerly National Sanitation Foundation ([www.nsf.org](http://www.nsf.org))  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ([www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov))  
U.S. Food and Drug Administration ([www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov))

\* CBS News & Mindfully.org  
\*\* Mother Earth News, 2008  
\*\*\* [www.responsiblepurchasing.org](http://www.responsiblepurchasing.org)

## Director's Council

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attorney Thomas Lewand, Feikens' former law clerk Valerie Brader, and former Ford Motor Co. vice president Timothy O'Brien. Among the concerns addressed by the negotiating group were resolving payment issues stemming from repairs of a sinkhole, caused by the 2004 collapse of the massive Oakland-Macomb interceptor; and cost-sharing issues associated with the 800 Mega Hertz radio system purchased by Detroit to improve emergency communication capabilities among agencies and departments. As part of the settlement, Detroit agreed to repay DWSD and its customers a \$27 million overcharge for the \$130 million radio system, and DWSD agreed to sell the Oakland-Macomb Interceptor to a joint Oakland-Macomb County wastewater authority which will now be responsible for repairs, operation and maintenance of that line.

"It was important to all of us that we not only resolve the issues that were on the table, but that we have a mechanism to deal with new issues in the future," Turner said. "That's where the Director's Council comes in and we can already see its potential."

Though guidelines for the council call for one meeting per quarter, the group has already exceeded that goal with numerous meetings held since January to work through the details of the December agreement.

"I believe Judge Feikens is happy to see that we've solved all these litigation issues and are working together," Turner said. "I think that DWSD will continue to improve our relationships with our wholesale customers... I don't believe anyone's interested in going back to the old days."

This sentiment was echoed by Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner and Council member John P. McCulloch who said, "We now have a seat at the table... to improve communications and avoid any misunderstandings."

**Members include:** Pamela Turner, DWSD Director; John P. McCulloch, Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner; Anthony V. Marrocco, Macomb County Public Works Commissioner; Butler Benton, Deputy Director of the Wayne County Department of Public Services, and Working Chair of the Consortium, Tim O'Brien.

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## Historic High Lift Station is a monument to Detroit's past

If you've ever been on East Jefferson Avenue in Detroit in front of Water Works Park, you may have wondered about that stately old building on the grounds. Well, it's not a museum, if that's what you're thinking.

That elegant old building (and it is old) is known today as the High Lift Building. Back in the days when Detroit's water was steam-driven, however, it was known as Pumping Station Number Two. The high lift pumps discharge water treated by a water treatment plant at sufficiently high pressure to maintain adequate pressure within the distribution mains. At the intake end are the low lift pumps, which only need to raise the raw water from the intake high enough for it to move through the plant by gravity.

The High Lift Building had its beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century when Detroit was hard pressed to stay abreast of Detroit's exploding industrial and residential sectors for water.

The station went on line in 1914 and eventually housed six gigantic steam-driven pumps.



The towering, 30-foot-tall behemoths were painstakingly dismantled and removed in 1962, when they were replaced by smaller, even more powerful, fuel-efficient electric pumps. Substantial renovation work — including lighting,

exterior façade, doors, windows, and ornamental features restored to original condition — in 2001-02 helped to restore the old building's original charm and grandeur.

The building was designated a Historic Civil Engineering Landmark in 2002 by the Michigan Section of the American Society of Civil Engineering.

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