

Scranton Sewer Authority to hold public hearing on proposed purchase of sewer system

JIM LOCKWOOD, STAFF WRITER

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Scranton Sewer Authority will hold a special meeting Tuesday on a proposed purchase of the sewer system.

The authority [published a public notice Friday](#) in The Times-Tribune announcing the meeting Tuesday at 1 p.m. at Marywood University, in Swartz Conference Center Room B.

The public notice states the special meeting will be held “to deliberate and receive information relating to a proposed transaction involving the purchase of the sewer system and sewage treatment works” of the authority.

On Wednesday, The Times-Tribune [reported the authority is almost done formulating a plan](#) to sell, lease or hire a private manager for the sewer system that serves Scranton and Dunmore.

That article said that the authority is negotiating with two large utilities — American Water and Aqua America — that are the finalists of the four that submitted proposals.

The companies that submitted proposals in May were American Water of Voorhees, New Jersey, parent firm of Pennsylvania-American Water Co.; Aqua America Inc. of Bryn Mawr; United Water of Harrington Park, New Jersey; and Veolia North America of Holden, West Virginia.

The authority’s public notice Friday of its special meeting is the first indication

that the transaction would be a “purchase” by a firm, and not a lease.

Efforts by phone and email Friday to reach sewer authority Executive Director Gene Barrett

for further information were unsuccessful.

One of the finalists also was mum.

“Pennsylvania American Water has been the water service provider for Scranton for decades, so we have a keen interest in the authority’s decision on how to manage its wastewater assets in a way that benefits its customers and the community,” Spokeswoman Susan Turcmanovich

said in an email. “We understand that the authority has scheduled a meeting for December 8, to discuss the future of the wastewater system. However, we are still under the confidentiality agreement as one of the potential partners and are not able to comment further at this time.”

Scranton Mayor Bill Courtright on Friday

echoed what he said Wednesday, that he hasn’t spoken to anyone at the authority for a few weeks about where things stand and word of the special meeting at Marywood came as a surprise to him.

Monetization of the sewer authority is a key part of Mr. Courtright’s recovery plan to fund the severely underfunded pension system. Under a recovery plan in 2014, city financial consultant Henry Amoroso

estimated the city could net \$20 million from a sale of the sewer system after paying off authority debt, other expenses and paying a share of the sale price to Dunmore. That would save the city about \$1.5 million a year on required annual payments to its police and fire pension plans.

“If there is any guarantee in keeping the rates where they are now for awhile, then we should listen at least,” Dunmore Borough Councilman Paul Nardozi

said in an email. “The money to the borough could be substantial, in the millions, as I’m hearing. But just like with the landfill expansion, the actual control of what ultimately happens is in the hands of others, not Dunmore Borough Council. I do fear higher rates are coming for the ratepayers of Dunmore and Scranton with this sale.”

After The Times-Tribune article on Wednesday, Scranton City Council hand-delivered a letter to the authority asking it to hold its special meeting at City Hall, so council members and the public could attend, and so the meeting could be televised

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from council chambers. However, Councilman Joe Wechsler noted during Thursday's council meeting that council had not received a reply from the authority.

Kyle Wind, staff writer, contributed to this article.

Contact the writer:

jlockwood@timeshamrock.com,

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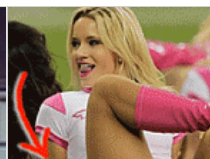
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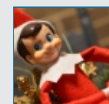
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