

City of Hendersonville

Water/Sewer Stakeholders Report



Summary Report March 2016
Prepared by Fountainworks, Inc.

The following report summarizes Hendersonville Water and Sewer initiative to explore regional cooperation in water resource management. Fountainworks Inc., a facilitation and management company was contracted to engage Hendersonville stakeholders in order to better understand their issues, priorities and end goals. This process involved a ‘listening tour’ of one-on-one interviews with its customers, interested stakeholders, and elected leaders. This summary report provides an overview of key findings and recommendations for next steps.

Key Findings

Interviews were conducted with approximately 25 stakeholders in December 2015. The interviews included Hendersonville’s Council members, municipal customers, County officials and economic development stakeholders. A detailed listing of interviewees is included in the appendix of this report. Following summarizes the key findings from stakeholder interviews.

- Overall, the communities that Hendersonville provides water to are satisfied with the city’s services and appreciate the customer service and responsiveness of Hendersonville staff.
- There is some interest in exploring a different rate structure (e.g. inside rates v. outside rates).
- Other stakeholders, who are not direct water customers, say that Hendersonville has been more responsive and collaborative in recent years.
- There is some concern among communities that the General Assembly would move the water system to a regional authority and this would limit their voice.
- There is little interest among communities for merging the City’s water system with Buncombe County/MSD or restructuring the utility.
- There is some concern that water lines are sited based on their financial benefit to the city rather than the strategic interests of the whole county.
- The Board of Commissioners would like a new organizational structure for the utility – which puts the utility under control of an independent board.
- The Board of Commissioners does not support merging the City’s water system with MSD.
- Legislators believe the Hendersonville utility is functioning fairly and as long as it continues to do so and meet the needs of everyone in the county they will not pursue legislative changes.
- Legislators support regionalism for utilities.
- There is some concern among the business community about the City’s long term water supply. Communities did not express concern about water supply, noting that during the drought, restrictions were voluntary.
- Business stakeholders see the City’s water system and staff as responsive to their needs.
- Business stakeholders expressed concern about creating a regional water system, noting it may result in a system that is more cumbersome for businesses to work with.
- Business stakeholders believe the Hendersonville’s annexation policy is a deterrent for businesses looking to expand or relocate near the city.

- Some business stakeholders expressed concern about the costs to a business for a water line extension.
- There is strong interest in having a coordinated, strategic plan for future water/sewer extensions.
- Some stakeholders believe the City’s water system is a “cash cow” for Hendersonville.
- Some stakeholders expressed concern about Hendersonville running a water system where the majority of its customers don’t live in the city – and don’t have a direct voice.

Hendersonville Council Priorities for Water and Sewer

At their annual retreat in February 2016, Hendersonville Council members were asked to develop a mission statement and a set of value statements for Hendersonville Water and Sewer. Following are the statements developed by the Council.

City of Hendersonville Water and Sewer Mission Statement

- ❖ Operate a great utility for our customers

City of Hendersonville – Value Statements

- ❖ Our water utility exists to serve our customers.
- ❖ We are committed to earning and maintaining public trust every day. We will be open, ensure access, encourage involvement and be accountable to our customers.
- ❖ We are cost conscious. We spend public funds responsibly and effectively to ensure the utility's short and long term financial strength.
- ❖ We will have the highest standards for the quality of water & effluent.
- ❖ We are committed to an affordable rate – keep price down & encouraging conservation.
- ❖ We are committed to protecting our environment.
- ❖ We are committed to protecting the water/sewer system from hazards.
- ❖ We will have access to redundancy – contingency plans.
- ❖ We will achieve the best results through effective teamwork, regional partnership and customer participation.
- ❖ We are committed to proactive, comprehensive planning, to guide the future (not just current future, better for current customers) of our utility in response to the needs of our customers.

Next Steps

The following are the potential next steps for Hendersonville in building regional cooperation with its customers and stakeholders

- External
 - Henderson County Water and Sewer Forum (tentatively scheduled for May 2016)
 - Share Stakeholder Information
 - Water and Sewer needs in Henderson County
 - Discuss creation of technical (staff) review committee
 - Continue to support all economic development activities
 - Willing to discuss partnerships if we are invited
- Internal
 - Water and Sewer Master Planning
 - Construct French Broad River Intake
 - Examine expansion and connection policies to support the goals of the City Council and Utility System

Appendix A

Interviewees

The following individuals were interviewed as part of this report:

Town of Fletcher:

Mark Biberdorf, Town Manager
Bob Davy, Hugh Clark, Elected Board Representatives

Town of Laurel Park:

Alison Melnikova, Manager
Mayor J. Carey O’Cain
Commissioner Robert O. Vickery (Bob)
Commissioner Dona M. Mennella
Commissioner A. Paul Hansen
Commissioner George W. Banta

County Commissioner Interviewees:

Tommy Thompson
Charlie Messer
Bill Lapsley
Grady Hawkins
Steve Wyatt (Manager)
Amy Brantley (Assistant County manager)

Town of Mills River:

Jeff Wells, Manager
Councilman Roger Snyder

Village of Flat Rock:

Mayor Bob Staton

City of Hendersonville:

Mayor Barbara Volk
Council Member Ron Stephens
Council Member Jerry Smith
Council Member Jeff Miller

Henderson County Partnership for Economic Development:

Andrew Tate, President and CEO

Agriculture Henderson County

Mark Williams, Executive Director

Henderson County Economic and Community Development Department:
John Mitchell, Business and Community Director

Hendersonville Water and Sewer Department
Lee Smith, Utilities Director
Brent Detwiler, City Engineer
Alvin Fuller Jr., Utilities Engineer

North Carolina Senator Tom Apodaca

North Carolina Representative Chuck McGrady