

**October 2023**

**A Note from Your  
People's Counsel  
Sandra Mattavous-Frye**

**Time To Pull The Plug On  
PROJECT*pipes*?**

Ideas for articles for the OPC Connection come from various sources. They may focus on trends staff observe in the energy industry, issues that surface in our conversations with other government agencies, or concerns residents bring to our attention that might involve a personal predicament or a situation in the community at-large. In this edition, the latter prompts us to update readers on PROJECT*pipes*, Washington Gas Light's 40-year plan to replace leak-prone infrastructure.



At a recent community meeting in Ward 3, a consumer raised concerns about the cost of PROJECT*pipes* III (PP3), whether it

compromises the District's climate goals, and the growing calls to reduce gas usage for safety and environmental protection. PP3 is the third iteration of PROJECT*pipes*, and is the most expensive, seeking \$671 million from WGL ratepayers over the next three years, while deviating considerably from prior proposals.

OPC is advocating to pause PROJECT*pipes*, citing issues with the most recent application filed at the DC Public Service Commission, including the proposal's structure, its high financial burden on consumers, and WGL's failure to address major leaks.

PROJECT*pipes* allows WGL to recover the costs of replacing old pipes and other infrastructure through a surcharge on customer bills. This cost recovery mechanism allows the utility to quickly finance pipe replacement throughout the year, without having to ask the Commission to approve a rate increase.

Historically, PROJECT*pipes* has relied primarily on computer software that predicts pipes at risk for leaking and could be in line for repair or replacement. However, the gas company recently switched to new predictive software. OPC argued more time is needed to test the new software before implementing it. Moreover, WGL is running a pilot program that uses advanced leak detection technology (ALD), which relies on sensitive vehicle-mounted sensors to identify leaks. While there have been issues with the way the pilot has been administered, it may be more cost-effective to implement ALD as it's being fine-tuned, rather than making large investments in new pipes. In addition, the District's new climate goals to reduce carbon emissions will likely result in a reduction in gas usage in the future.

It is unclear if PROJECT*pipes* is succeeding. Data shows gas leaks are rising, with Washington Gas unable to address them in a timely manner. Thus, OPC contends the program should be paused and reviewed before consumers are asked to foot the bill for a failing proposition.

As always, OPC will keep you posted on this issue. And we invite you to share story ideas for the OPC Connection. Keep reading and scrolling down to find out how.

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**OPC is the Agency of the Year**



People's Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye was honored to receive the "Agency of the Year Award" from the Center for Racial Equity and Justice. Led by Rev. George C. Gilbert, Jr. (pictured), the center recently recognized OPC for "tireless work throughout the pandemic and for being advocates for equity in the community and a model throughout the nation."

The Center for Racial Equity and Justice works to eradicate systemic racism and bias in governmental, corporate, educational, and religious institutions.

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## **A Benning Road History Story**

In the late 1980s, 43 years ago, River Terrace resident and Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner George Gurley set his sights on stopping Pepco from expanding its generating operations at the Benning Road Power Plant in Northeast DC. At the time, the generators burned a heavy grade of fuel oil and Mr. Gurley believed the smoke belching from the chimney stacks contributed to higher cancer rates in the nearby River Terrace neighborhood.



Ten years later, with the support of environmental and community activists from around the city, River Terrace successfully pressured Pepco to commit to shut down the plant in 1990. With the deregulation of Pepco in 1999, Pepco was required to sell off its power-generating resources.

Over decades, OPC has advocated for consumers on this environmental justice issue. For example, in 2019, OPC challenged Pepco's attempt to recover from its ratepayers the cost of an investigation and feasibility study to determine the most suitable plan to clean up possible land contamination and Anacostia River pollution. OPC argued a 1999 settlement agreement barred Pepco from holding consumers responsible for any costs related to a cleanup. In November 2022, the DC Court of Appeals [sided](#) with OPC.

But the story does not end there. A few weeks ago, DC Attorney General Brian Schwalb [announced](#) a \$57 million cleanup agreement with Pepco, stating that the hazardous chemicals from the plant had caused decades of environmental damage, threatening the health and safety of nearby communities. Mr. Gurley, who passed in 2009, would no doubt be pleased with this outcome.



## The Water Connection

**OPC is Advocating for DC Water Consumers on Multiple Fronts**

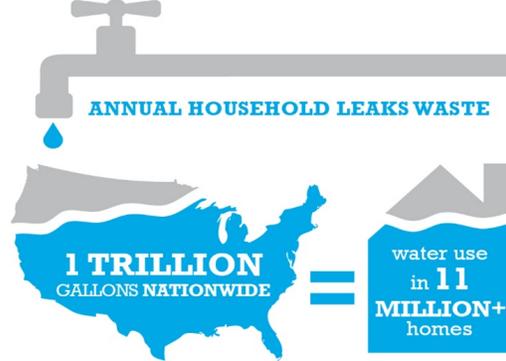
OPC's Water Services Division wants you to know about developments we are following on behalf of DC Water consumers:

- OPC has been hearing from residents who are experiencing billing inaccuracies and potential overcharges from third-party water billers. The third parties are for-profit entities that provide billing services to multi-family and commercial properties but are not utilities themselves. OPC has been in discussions with the DC Council on how best to address these issues going forward.
- OPC is deeply concerned about reports of utility disconnections affecting senior residents. We are in active dialogue with the utilities and policymakers to ensure that seniors are not disproportionately impacted by water disconnections and to find solutions as colder weather approaches.
- OPC is pleased to announce the opening of the Northeast Boundary Tunnel (NEBT). This marks a significant step forward in flood mitigation. With the new tunnel, there are expected to be fewer sewage overflows into the Anacostia River during heavy rain, and neighborhoods along the tunnel's route should see reduced flooding, including [Rhode Island Avenue](#). DC Water and federal and District government officials gathered on October 21 to celebrate the commissioning of the NEBT. The five-mile-long tunnel is the final component of the Anacostia River Tunnel System, intended to reduce combined sewer overflows into the Anacostia River, significantly improving water quality in the river. Construction on the system began in 2011. The entire project is slated to cost \$2.7 billion. DC Water customers are paying for much of it through the Clean Rivers Impervious Area Charge, known as CRIAC, on monthly water bills.
- OPC consumer outreach specialists underwent the first of a series of trainings by George Mason' University's School of Climate Communications, which will prepare OPC staff to handle a growing number of consumer inquiries about the District's climate preparedness initiatives and how they may affect utility service.

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**Are You Flushing \$\$\$  
Down the Drain?**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says 10% of homes have leaks that waste 90 gallons or more of water per day. Average household leaks can account for nearly 10,000 gallons wasted every year.



Top sources of leaks? Worn toilet flappers and dripping faucets. Experts say these types of leaks are an easy fix. Corrected water leaks can save homeowners about 10% on their water bills.

The EPA estimates that toilet flushes account for nearly 30% of your average water consumption per day. And that's when it's working correctly. A leaking toilet can lead to a thousand gallons lost every month, translating into higher water bills.

The EPA recommends the following tips to detect leaks:

- Check water usage. If a family of four exceeds 12,000 gallons a month, there are leaks.
- Identify toilet leaks by placing a drop of food coloring in the toilet tank. If any color shows up in the bowl after 10 minutes, you have a leak.
- Inspect faucet gaskets and pipe fittings for water outside of pipes to indicate surface leaks.

Check out this EPA checklist: [Detect Leaks at Home](#) | [En Español](#)

You may want to consult with your local hardware store, home improvement retailer, or licensed plumber.

Meanwhile, keep an eye on your monthly bill for unusually high charges. The bill dispute deadline is located on the right side of your bill, beneath the bill summary. DC Water states an owner or occupant may challenge the most recent charges assessed.

See: [Disputing A Bill | DCWater.com](#). Contact OPC's Water Services Division at (202) 727-3071 for additional assistance.

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**OPC Employee of the Month:  
Pamela Nelson is Lighting up**

## Neighborhoods Near You



Pamela Nelson is OPC's Employee of the Month and is recognized for exposing the benefits of solar power and energy efficiency initiatives to nonprofits and houses of worship. In June, Pamela received praise for working with Sargent Memorial Presbyterian Church on its new Community **Solar** Array Project. The church facility will provide energy credits to lower the electric

bills of 73 low-income households in the nearby Northeast neighborhood.

OPC appreciates how Pamela makes OPC's consumer services shine!

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## The Consumer Connection

### Capturing Feedback from the Community



## OPC Makes Things Happen!

From Angela Draughn, Martha's Table Family Success Center Manager, Anacostia:

*"I personally want to thank you [OPC Consumer Outreach Specialist Valca Valentine] for your speedy response to [our client] and her immediate need. She called to tell me that her water will be turned back on. A part of the Family Success Center's mission is to provide concrete support, and sometimes that happens through referrals or partnerships. Unfortunately, there are times when those avenues do not yield a positive outcome. I recognize...how overwhelming it can be to meet every urgent need in a timely manner, but despite the challenge, you rose to the occasion and put a smile on the face of one of our*

*participants...Once again, thank you, and may you continue to find the strength to do this important work at OPC!*

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## **OPC Working for You in Working Groups at the PSC**



Continuing with our series, Working Groups at the PSC, this month we focus on the Federal Communications Commission Consumer Advisory Committee. The purpose of the committee is to make recommendations on telecommunications and to facilitate the participation of all consumers in proceedings before the FCC.

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## **OPC Connecting at the PSC**



**PUBLIC SERVICE  
COMMISSION**

## **OPC is Advocating for Consumers in the Following Cases:**

**Formal Case No. 1160: Development of Metrics for Electric Company and Gas Company Energy Efficiency and Demand Response Programs Pursuant to Section 201 (b) of the Clean Energy DC Omnibus Amendment Act of 2018**

On September 20, OPC filed a letter to the PSC in response to WGL's motion to strike the comments of the Sierra Club. OPC requests the PSC submit a public notice to allow other parties to submit comments on WGL's energy efficiency and demand response programs.

**Formal Case No. 1176: Pepco's Application to Implement a**

## **Multiyear Rate Plan for Electric Distribution**

On September 21, OPC filed a Motion for Clarification. The Motion requests the PSC to clarify the deadline for parties to submit information requests on Pepco's multiyear plan.

## **Formal Case No. 1169: Washington Gas's Application to Increase Rates**

On September 21, OPC filed a Response to the Bench Request on Recent Return on Equity Decisions. This is a review by OPC of documents that were submitted. On October 11, OPC filed its post-hearing [brief](#).

## **Formal Case No. 1156: Pepco's Application to Implement a Multiyear Rate Plan for Electric Distribution**

On October 2, OPC filed a Response to Pepco's Motion to Suspend its Quarterly Earnings Report Filings. Pepco asserts information in the report will be available in upcoming litigation. OPC feels this would prejudice the parties in the case and impair the transparency of multiyear rate-related earnings.

## **GD-2023-02-M: Inquiry into the Discovery Process of Rate Applications**

On October 16, OPC filed Revised Initial Comments to the Initial Comments filed on October 13 to the July 27, 2023, Notice of Inquiry from the PSC on recommended requirements for the filing of future rate cases.

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## **OPC In Your Neighborhood!**

OPC welcomes opportunities to speak at your Advisory Neighborhood Commission, civic association, community group activity, or meeting onsite or virtually. We can give updates on utility issues, and trends, and highlight how we serve DC consumers. Call (202) 727-3071 if your group would like our staff to make a presentation onsite or "Zoom in."

**Pepco Open House**  
Thursday, November 2  
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm  
UDC- Bertie Backus Campus  
5171 South Dakota Avenue NE  
RSVP at: [PepcoOHwards45.eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/pepco-ohwards45)

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# Photo Gallery



OPC staff and guests, including At-Large Councilmember Anita Bonds at the DC Federation of Civic Associations Awards & Scholarship Celebration. People's Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye presented Kemry M. Hughes with the OPC Consumer Advocate Award for his support of the OPC Youth Climate Summit and his work with the Marion Barry Youth Leadership Institute.



OPC staff and Ward 8 Councilmember Trayon White and his staff

discuss solutions to help keep utility services running for Ward 8 residents as disconnections continue to be a big concern.



OPC's George Gilbert, Jr., Linda Jefferson, and Jean Gross-Bethel brief the Penn Branch AARP Chapter on solar and third-party energy suppliers.



Senior Citizen Liaison Jean Gross-Bethel at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Community Health, Wellness, and Resource Fair of the Southwest AARP Chapter.

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OPC's Doxie McCoy drops the ceremonial puck to start the Boston College Women's Ice Hockey Team game. Boston College proclaimed October 13 "Doxie McCoy Day" to recognize her as the first Black female athlete and hockey player at her alma mater in the 70s. More on [WUSA9](#) and [here](#).

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## Connect With OPC!

Do you have feedback or an idea for an article that could be featured in an upcoming edition of the OPC Connection? We want to hear from you! Just drop our editorial team an email @ [info@opc-dc.gov](mailto:info@opc-dc.gov) or tweet/X us [@DCOPC](https://twitter.com/DCOPC).

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