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NOPE outlines reasons to oppose sale of sewer system

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By **Freda R. Savana**

Neighbors Opposing Privatization Efforts (NOPE) is making a powerful push to raise awareness about the pitfalls of Bucks County selling its sewer system to Aqua Pa.

During a recent virtual town hall that drew about 100 people, key members of the grassroots organization outlined why the sale of Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority's sewer system will drive rates up significantly and abolish local control.

Further, said NOPE's founder David McMann, "water is becoming a commodity" and Aqua will be looking to buy that part of BCWSA in time.

Last month, Aqua, the largest subsidiary of Essential Utilities, made an unsolicited offer to buy the wastewater system for \$1 billion. If accepted, it would be the largest privatization of a public utility in the country.

McMann said the growing number of public utilities being sold to private, for-profit corporations can be traced back to Act 12, a law that was passed in 2016 in Harrisburg. The bipartisan legislation allowed inflated valuation of the municipal authorities. Buyers, such as Aqua Pa., can then recover fair market value through its rates.

NOPE estimated that if Aqua is successful in buying Bucks County's sewer system, the average annual rate for a homeowner will jump from \$576 to \$1,056.



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Additionally, Bucks' residents should be concerned about the loss of local control, said the NOPE panel. "The needs of the shareholders will be above those of the ratepayers," they said.

News of the deal to give Aqua a one-year exclusive right to negotiate the sale of BCWSA sewer system surprised many when it became public knowledge in April after months of behind the scenes discussions.

A July 13 BCWSA meeting, where a vote on the potentially transformational matter was planned, was hurriedly added to the agenda at the last minute.

The five-member BCWSA board voted 3-1 to approve the process. Board Chairman John F. Cordisco did not attend the meeting. The sole no vote came from Dennis Cowley, who was board chairman in 2020 when Aqua first approached the authority.

Reaction to the potential sale has prompted a growing number of BCWSA's nearly 100,000 customers as well as employees and several municipalities, to call for rejection of the agreement, citing concerns over rate hikes, repairs and accountability.

A second NOPE town hall is planned for Sept. 6 at 7 p.m. It will focus on organizing efforts.

Keywords

Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority, Aqua Pennsylvania



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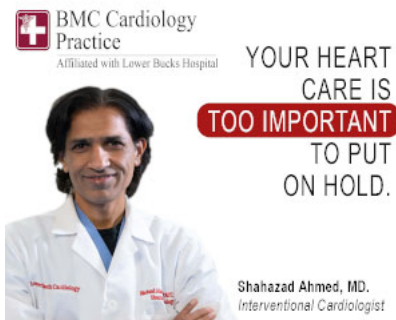
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