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Tom Sofield

September 7, 2022

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Credit: Tom Sofield/LevittownNow.com

A day after the Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority

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owner Essential Utilities said they will halt activity to move the \$1.1 billion sale forward.

Authority Board of Directors Chairperson John Cordisco said Tuesday in a statement he would direct the public entity to end its exploration of the sale after the Bucks County Commissioners – two Democrats and one Republican – all separately announced they were against the sale to Aqua Pennsylvania, a for-profit firm.

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“While we were surprised and disappointed by the sudden turn of events yesterday, we respect the opinions of the Bucks County elected officials and have offered to remain a resource to them. The professionalism of the staff at the BCWSA was exemplary and we hope to continue those collegial relationships as we work together to solve the water and sewer challenges in our region,” Essential Utilities Chairman and CEO Chris Franklin said in a Wednesday afternoon statement.

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Aqua President and CEO Chris Franklin speaking in July.

Credit: Tom Sofield/LevittownNow.com

The potential acquisition of the Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority wastewater system was key to Aqua's growth.

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On a recent Essential Utilities earnings call, leadership highlighted the opportunity they saw with the proposed purchase of the authority. If it went through, it would be the largest deal of its kind in America and vastly grown Aqua's sewer customer base.

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“We continue to have a strong pipeline of opportunities and continue to find elected officials interested in potential partnerships across our multi-state footprint. In light of some of the tragic events associated with long-term deferred maintenance in government owned systems across the country, we remain committed to providing viable solutions to water and sewer utilities,” Franklin said Wednesday.

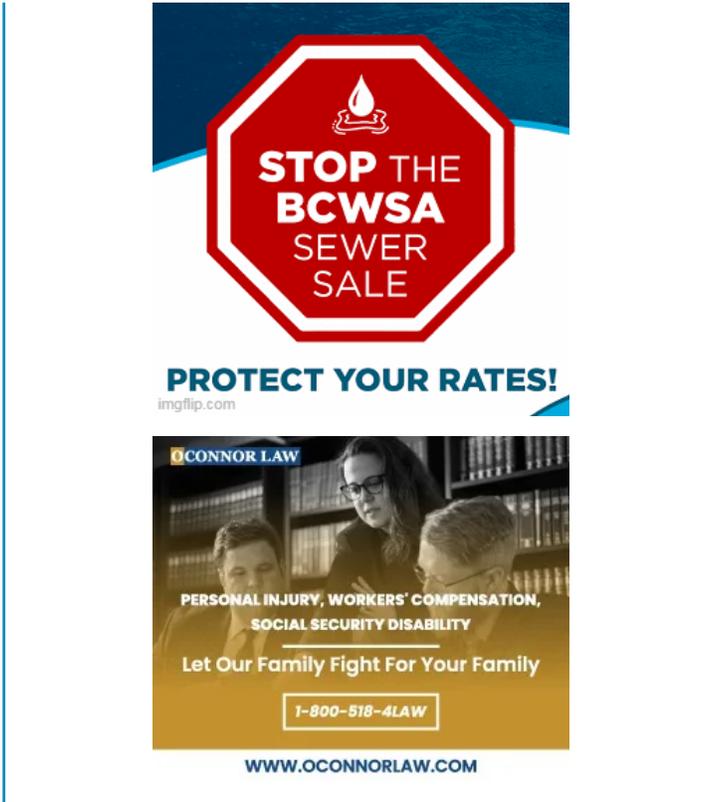
The proposed purchase of the authority’s sewer system that serves around 100,000 retail customers and a number of wholesale customers in Bucks County and surrounding areas drew almost unanimous negative reactions over the months from ratepayers and local government officials.

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The authority was established by county charter in 1962, and the commissioners have no formal power to approve or reject any sales. Despite that, the authority board promised to take the commissioners' opinions into account.



The Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority Board.
Credit: Tom Sofield/LevittownNow.com

If the sale went forward, the county government, as the chartering organization, could have received a \$1 billion in profit from the sale of the sewer system.





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Prior to the commissioners' Wednesday morning meeting at the Bucks County Administration Building in Doylestown Borough, a rally opposing the sale was held. With the sale seemingly doomed, many people involved in fighting it celebrated the win.

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Ray Post, a Middletown Township resident, was happy the sale was not going to happen, but he wanted to be sure this could not happen in the future.



The rally outside of the Administration Building Wednesday.

Credit: Tom Sofield/LevittownNow.com

The Middletown Township resident requested the Bucks County Commissioners look at safeguards, like a voter referendum and updates to the authority’s charter, to make sure the public system couldn’t be sold in the future.

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Mike Sullivan, the director of the Warwick Township Water Authority and of the Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association, celebrated the deal falling apart. He felt the sale of the public system to a for-profit company was a bad deal for ratepayers.



Mike Sullivan at the rally Wednesday.

Credit: Tom Sofield/LevittownNow.com

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“I would like to thank the Bucks County Commissioners and the Board of the BCWSA for listening to the members of their community and ensuring that these vital, life sustaining resources stay in the public trust. We recognize that there are challenges across our industry and we trust that BCWSA and other publicly owned system will rise to the challenge to meet those needs and remain accountable to their customers,” he said.

The Bucks County Association of Township Officials opposed the sale and raised concern over the certain rate increases that would impact ratepayers and wholesale customers, which includes smaller public authorities in the county.

Maggie Rash, president of the Bucks County Association of Township Officials and member of the Buckingham Township Board of Supervisors, made public comments previously urging the authority board to vote against the sale.

Stacey Mulholland, executive director of the township officials association and former authority board

With the potential of a sale in talks and rate increases that would come with it, Warrington Township, Bensalem Township, Doylestown Borough, Doylestown Township, Langhorne Manor Borough, Langhorne Borough, New Hope Borough, Pennel Borough, Plumstead Township, and Middletown Township in Bucks County and Springfield Township and Upper Dublin Township in Montgomery County were working together to oppose a sale.

Warrington Township Board of Supervisors Chairman Fred Gaines was helping lead the effort and has advocated for the commissioners to oppose the sale.

Gaines said he would work to continue to make sure Aqua doesn't move to acquire the authority and the municipalities would continue their conversations on the matter.

The Neighbors Opposing Privatization Efforts (NOPE) group made a push and worked with residents and local officials who were opposed to the sale. They were behind the planning for Wednesday's rally, which was slated before the deal fell apart.

While all statements indicate the deal is dead at this point, several people at the rally noted they wanted to make sure it really would and will be attending the next Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority meeting to ensure everyone sticks to their word.



Credit: Tom Sofield/LevittownNow.com

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Tom Sofield

Tom Sofield has covered news in Bucks County for 12 years for both newspaper and online publications. Tom's reporting has appeared locally, nationally, and internationally across several mediums. He is proud to report on news in the county where he lives and to have created a reliable publication that the community deserves.

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