

MEMORANDUM

To: All Councilmembers

From: CURO By: Jared Reese

CC: Justyn Hawkins and Anita Curran

Date: March 19, 2025

RE: The Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans Meeting 03.19.2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans (SWBNO) Board of Directors (the Board) met on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. In addition, the Board received updates on the general standing of the SWBNO. The complete packet for the meeting may be found [here](#).

A. Smart Meters

The SWBNO installed 94,000 smart meters, 67% of customer base, since beginning the program last March. Data from the meters showed 31% of customers had continuous water usage, likely indicating leaks, with 46% of those identified responding to notifications. SWBNO stated the smart meters exposed issues previously hidden by estimated billing and noted many previously written-off bills probably represented legitimate charges.

B. Power Complex Updates

The SWBNO reported continued progress on the power complex with plans to host the April meeting at the plant for a tour. The director expressed confidence about the DNR and DOE grant process despite its complexities to all parties. The company outlined the implementation of three frequency changers, that converted 60Hz to 25Hz, with the first coming online in May or June, followed by the second, and third in subsequent months. SWBNO noted this phased approach increased capacity until achieving full redundancy.

C. Lead Service Line Replacement Program

SWBNO announced they planned to select a consultant for project management, and public outreach for the lead service line replacement program. The company prioritized schools and daycares for initial inspections and planned to restart

distribution of water filter pitchers soon. SWBNO directed residents to an online inventory map for questions about lead lines.

D. Compliance with New Laws

Management reported full compliance with new laws effective January 1, 2025. The company continued to offer fixed rates until smart meter installation and eliminated estimated bills as of January 1. The team described the arbitration process implementation as "imminent" though delayed.

E. Drainage Consolidation

SWBNO secured \$18 million from five different funding sources for drainage work and set a goal to clean 10-15% of the system. The company acquired five trucks from the city (four operational) and reported cleaning 39,000 feet of drainage lines and nearly 600 drains through a contractor. SWBNO created new positions for this work rather than eliminating jobs and incentivized contractors to focus on areas with the most debris.

F. Pavement Progress

Recent severe weather events and cold temperatures hampered progress on pavement repairs while increasing water main breaks requiring excavation. Despite the delays, SWBNO expressed confidence that progress on the backlog would continue. The director noted dramatic improvements in response times, with repairs completed within weeks rather than months. Management established a goal of two to three week response times.

G. People Project

The recent employee townhall and survey showed workers rejected the proposal to leave civil service for an independent HR system. The executive board expressed disappointment, characterizing the outcome as a missed opportunity to give employees higher pay, promotional flexibility, and input into HR program design. The executive board attributed the result to employee concerns about change, external political climate, distrust, and the upcoming government transition. The director committed to improving areas within their control while noting legislators could potentially mandate changes regardless of internal efforts.