

More Than Water

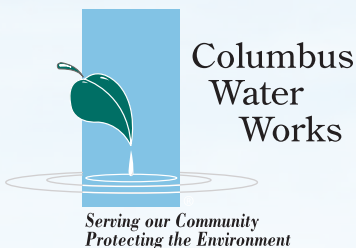
2020 Report to the Community



Steve Davis



Reynolds Bickerstaff



Dear Customers and Stakeholders,

This past year posed challenges unlike any in recent memory. As our nation battled an ongoing pandemic, faced lockdowns and quarantines and navigated history making events, our own community did what it does best: come together.

Here at Columbus Water Works (CWW), our primary responsibility is serving our community by providing clean, safe and reliable drinking water and environmentally friendly wastewater services. In 2020, the indisputable need for these services took center stage as the importance of proper hygiene and handwashing became a national call to arms in the effort to prevent the spread of the virus.

As an organization, CWW came together to identify and implement new ideas to help us best support our customers. In April, all non-payment service disconnections and accrual of delinquent fees were put on hold to help those who had experienced financial hardships. We also worked with organizations such as the Community Foundation and the United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley who rallied their supporters to provide additional funds for food programs, income assistance, personal protective equipment and more. While these groups were in the spotlight for their outstanding work, the dedicated staff at the CWW were busy behind the scenes.

Truly, the dedication shown by our employees was humbling. Our staff quickly adjusted to the new safety protocols that were established. Plant operators, field crews and others continued to complete the necessary tasks despite the increased risk of COVID-19 exposure. Customer service, financial services and other operational departments were also transitioned to virtual platforms allowing for remote working capabilities, professional development conferences, board meetings and more.

During a year full of unknowns, CWW began celebrating the 25th anniversary of the completion of our nationally recognized combined sewer treatment system. The completion of this system made significant improvements in the water quality of our section of the Chattahoochee River. It is also the foundation of the Chattahoochee Riverwalk, which helped transform Uptown Columbus into the thriving community we have today.

Thank you for allowing us to serve this community through the unimaginable challenges of 2020.

We are all in this together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Davis".

Steve Davis
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Reynolds Bickerstaff".

Reynolds Bickerstaff
Chairman of the Board



Board of Commissioners

(L-R): Reynolds Bickerstaff, Chair; Sanders Griffith, Vice Chair; Mayor Skip Henderson; Rodney Close and Becky Rumer.



Executive Team

(L-R): Gwen Ruff, SVP, Administration and Community Outreach; Steve Davis, President; Billy Cobb, Jr., Executive Vice-President; John Peebles, SVP, Water Resource Operations; Vic Burchfield, SVP, Information, Security, Environmental and Meter Services; Alex Hinton, SVP, Financial Services.



The above images show the construction of the Combined Sewer Treatment System that lies below the Riverwalk. Some of these lines are as large as 96 inches in diameter.

Chattahoochee RiverWalk and Combined Sewer Treatment Mark 25 Years

The Columbus Water Works has a long history of being a responsible community partner. December 31st, 2020 marked the 25th anniversary of Columbus' investment of more than \$100 million to construct a nationally recognized combined sewer treatment system that continues to protect our community and the Chattahoochee River today. This groundbreaking system not only helped solve the issue of combined sewer overflows into our river, but it also helped revitalize a struggling downtown area.

Seeing an opportunity for creativity, the 16-mile Chattahoochee Riverwalk was built atop the combined sewers that are embedded along the riverbank creating a linear park that spans the riverfront from the Lake Oliver city marina south to the National Infantry Museum. Due to some creative engineering we not only have a cleaner river, but also a thriving city center where citizens and visitors alike may walk or cycle while taking in the wild beauty of the rolling river and native wildlife.



Decided by online popular vote, The Columbus Riverwalk was awarded the 2020 People's Choice Award from the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO).

Along with a year of bragging rights, the Georgia Department of Transportation also selected a local non-profit to receive \$10,000!

It's truly an honor for Columbus' beautiful Riverwalk to be recognized not only by AASHTO, but by the community at large.



This innovative system led to the EPA removing the Whitewater section of the Chattahoochee River from its list of impaired waterways.

What is a combined sewer treatment system and how does it work?

Columbus citizens invested over \$100 million in the 1990s to construct a combined sewer treatment system, including two major treatment facilities and a conveyance system.

During dry weather (normal conditions), the combined sewer system ensures that wastewater is collected and moved to the South Columbus Water Resource Facility for treatment.

During wet weather, stormwater run-off from streets and other hard surfaces in the downtown area combines with wastewater flows. This triggers the combined treatment facilities to come online to effectively remove debris and disinfect flows before discharging to the river.

This system supports flows from roughly 2,600 acres in an older part of downtown Columbus—approximately 2% of the total geographic area of our community. Most communities do not even collect and treat their stormwater.

For more information visit our website at cwwga.org.



Technician cleans automatic bar screens which remove trash and debris from combined sewer lines to prevent it from going into the river.



The pictures above show employees implementing new safety measures throughout the organization.

COVID-19 Brings Changes to Operations

Columbus Water Works is honored to provide the community with water and wastewater services. This year clean, reliable and safe drinking water and wastewater services were critical. As communities across the world sheltered in place, CWW staff took steps to mitigate the spread of the virus, protecting our employees and continuing to provide the essential services our community relies on.

In response to the pandemic, our organization made several adjustments to how we operate from additional safety measures for staff and closure of our customer lobby to remote work arrangements and virtual programs.

CWW closed our customer lobby and provided customer service through the drive-thru and on the phone. This was a difficult transition for our customers and we appreciate their patience.



GAWARN Partnership

CWW is a proud member of the Georgia section of Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (GAWARN). This is a group of Georgia utilities that provide each other assistance in times of need or emergency. In April, the EPA allocated Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to water and wastewater professionals. CWW volunteered to serve as a distribution center for our region. This provided smaller utilities a local site to collect the necessary safety equipment to keep their crews safe so they could serve their communities.



Pictured above are custom plexiglass barriers we use for team members who are unable to properly distance their workstations. This is one of the measures taken to protect our customers and our staff during these uncertain times.

Customer Service

Taking care of our customers is a top priority. As our city responded to the pandemic, CWW discontinued service disconnections for non-payment, waived late fees and partnered with community agencies like United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley and the Community Foundation of the Chattahoochee Valley to offer our customers support during these unprecedented times.

Working with our IT department, we were able to transition our customer service staff to work remotely

During the initial City-wide lockdown, our Information Technology (IT) department facilitated approximately 90 employees to work remotely.

with a secure connection to the customer service systems. Our representatives were able to assist customers with payment extensions, service orders and more while following safety protocols.

Upon return to “normal,” CWW provided extended payment arrangements for customers to help them catch up on their account without having their services disconnected. Although our customer lobby remains closed, we are continuing to provide customer service assistance through the drive-thru.



Treatment Plant Operations

Our water and wastewater treatment plant operators cannot work remotely. Without operators onsite to run the plant, we would be unable to provide these vital services to the community. Instead they were provided with strict social distancing and precautionary measures to mitigate the spread of the virus and to ensure the safety of our staff. During this past year, our operators were prepared to quarantine onsite in the event the pandemic worsened. Thankfully, they were able to continue going home after each shift.

Pictured above are dedicated treatment plant operators completing their tasks with the new protocols.

While the holidays may have been different this year, our staff ensured that the annual Christmas lights were up for the community to enjoy.



Field Crew Operations and Environmental Services

Field Crews and Environmental Services staff were unable to work remotely. In addition to strict protocols, field staff also limited department interactions to mitigate the potential exposure risk throughout the organization.

Our laboratory services staff, a division of Environmental Services, continued to process an average of 8,100 water and wastewater analyses per month. Their dedication was recognized again this year with the Georgia Association of Water Professionals' Gold Achievement Award for excellence in water and wastewater lab services.

Pictured above are the skilled field crews who continued to brave the weather making necessary repairs and completing essential maintenance work on water and sewer lines as well as pumps and other equipment.

Our Environmental Services team members also continued regulated water sampling and testing throughout Muscogee county and Fort Benning. Each of these groups incorporated additional safety measures.



Pictured above are a few of the events that were held during 2020 that all required modifications to accommodate CDC guidelines. From socially-distanced community events to offering staff flu shots and collecting used cooking grease, our staff stepped up to the challenge finding a way to continue hosting these traditional events.

Going Virtual

As with many other organizations, this year required a new approach to nearly every in-person activity. Adjustments were made to everyday operations, community events and professional learning programs. At CWW going virtual challenged us to learn new skills.

In April, we began holding our monthly Board Meetings virtually. These meetings were streamed live on YouTube and customers were able to join us online.

United Way Campaign

Our team members value giving back to the community and supporting organizations like United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley. This year, our annual United Way Campaign leveraged YouTube and other virtual platforms. For fundraisers that required gathering, we were careful to follow social distancing and other necessary safety protocols. Even with the unique challenges of 2020, our team members came together and raised more than \$104,000 to help our community.

Virtual Town Hall

On October 21 and November 4, Columbus Water Works hosted our very first Virtual Town Hall Meetings streamed live on YouTube. The Town Hall Meetings gave us an opportunity to lay out our rate strategy, as well as get feedback directly from the community. We look forward to holding future Town Hall meetings.

Grease Recycling

Collecting used cooking grease helps protect our sewer lines and environment. We were able to continue holding these events by making modifications to follow CDC guidelines and social distancing protocols.

Condensed Statements of Revenues, Expenses and Changes in Net Position

For FY ended June 25,	2019	2020	\$ Change	% Change
Operating Revenues				
Water Sales	\$24,782,421	\$27,835,864	\$3,053,443	12.32%
Sewer Charges	26,850,864	28,145,593	1,294,729	4.82%
Fort Benning Water and Sewer Charges	7,664,892	8,289,251	624,359	8.15%
Fort Benning CM100 O&M Services	6,564,172	6,830,562	266,390	4.06%
Tapping, CSO Fees and Miscellaneous Charges	3,922,732	3,982,382	59,650	1.52%
Total Operating Revenue	69,785,081	75,083,652	5,298,571	7.59%
Total Operating Expenses	68,675,702	71,234,490	2,558,788	3.73%
Operating Income	1,109,379	3,849,162	2,739,783	246.97%
Total Non-Operating Revenue (expenses)	(2,097,053)	(5,001,262)	(2,904,209)	-138.49%
Loss Before Capital Grants and Contributions	(987,674)	(1,152,100)	(164,426)	-16.65%
Capital Grants and Contributions	5,297,936	5,084,330	(213,606)	-4.03%
Change in Net Position	4,310,262	3,932,230	(378,032)	-8.77%
Net Position at Beginning of Year	414,173,702	418,483,964	4,310,262	1.04%
Ending Net Position	\$ 418,483,964	\$422,416,194	\$3,932,230	0.94%

Financial Summary

The Columbus Water Works financial condition remained strong at year end with reliable plants and systems to meet demands. A solid liquidity position, conservative budgeting, and programmed annual rate increases continue. Projected rate increases over the next five years are projected to be below the national average. Columbus Water Works maintains one of the lowest rates among Southeastern cities.

Total combined Columbus and Fort Benning operating revenues were \$75.08 million, an increase from Fiscal Year 2019 of \$5.3 million. Operating expenses before depreciation and amortization increased \$2.2 million as compared to Fiscal Year 2019.

Operating income for the year was \$3,849,000 million as compared to \$1,109,000 for Fiscal Year 2019. This amount includes activities related to Fort Benning contractual operations.

Total Assets at year-end were \$657 million. Reserves were maintained within established goals of 90 to 120 days for operational and coverage of capital improvements/depreciation for capital reserves.

The 2020 Report to the Community is a condensed version of what may be found in our Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR), which is located on our website at www.cwwga.org.

Condensed Statements of Net Position

FISCAL YEAR 2019 TO 2020 COMPARISON

For FY ended June 25,	2019	2020	\$ Change	% Change
ASSETS				
Current Assets And Other Assets	\$ 107,010,339	96,443,974	(10,566,365)	-9.87%
Capital Assets	556,168,957	560,341,755	4,172,798	0.75%
TOTAL ASSETS	663,179,296	656,785,729	(6,393,567)	-0.96%
DEFERRED OUTFLOWS				
Deferred amount of bond refunding	4,697,555	3,954,807	(742,748)	-15.81%
Deferred amount from pensions and post retirement benefits	6,725,220	8,299,657	1,574,437	23.41%
TOTAL DEFERRED OUTFLOWS	11,422,775	12,254,464	831,689	7.28%
LIABILITIES				
Other Liabilities	19,894,291	21,507,200	1,612,909	8.11%
Long-Term Liabilities	228,314,648	216,977,502	(11,337,146)	-4.97%
TOTAL LIABILITIES	248,208,939	238,484,702	(9,724,237)	-3.92%
DEFERRED INFLOWS				
Deferred from post retirement benefits and pension plan investments	7,909,168	8,139,297	230,129	2.91%
NET POSITION				
Net Investments In Capital Assets	382,253,799	378,885,562	(3,368,237)	-0.88%
Restricted For Capital Activities and Debt Service	21,310,776	28,354,466	7,043,690	33.05%
Unrestricted	14,919,389	15,176,166	256,777	1.72%
TOTAL NET POSITION	418,483,964	422,416,194	3,932,230	0.94%



Columbus
Water
Works

Our Purpose

We protect our neighbors by providing essential water - the fuel of life.

Our Vision

Columbus Water Works is recognized by our customers and employees as providing the most caring experiences.

Our Strategic Initiatives

- Customer Experience
- Employee Experience
- Environmental Focus

Our Core Values

Wow Customers by listening, caring and responding to their concerns and ideas.

Act with Integrity by being honest and sincere in everything we do.

Trustful Community Partner by being engaged to improve the quality of life.

Energize Employees by celebrating, encouraging, developing and rewarding their diverse capabilities and contributions.

Resource Protection by being an innovative leader in watershed management, protection and education.

Visit Us:

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Account Information:

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