

Date: 6/12/2023

TO: Missouri Public Service Commission

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Subject: Public Comment Period – WR-2023-0006

I am writing this letter to officially address my concerns and perspective regarding Confluence Rivers Utility Operating Company's request to alter water and sewer rates in my residential community, Auburn Lakes, located near Troy, Missouri.

After receiving a notice of public hearing—which was quite last minute, might I add—on Friday, June 9 announcing Confluence Rivers' efforts to adjust water/sewer rates, many members of our community became immediately angered (or continually angered, as service and product quality has been below average at best). Since moving into our home in September 2021, my family and neighbors have experienced countless issues with the service and product provided to us by Confluence Rivers.

I will briefly paint the picture of what we have experienced as a “unfortunate” customer of Confluence River – I use that description because we have no choice regarding who we can conduct business with for our water and sewer needs/rights:

1. Poor quality, inconsistent water: Be it color, smell or sediment (dirt, rust flakes, hair, etc) present in our water supply, myself and many of our neighbors have experienced on many occasions water we do not feel safe consuming. A community Facebook page allows neighbors to share the issues they're having and it's quite frequent. The discoloration is so bad at times that folks' concrete and siding has been stained, clothes are getting ruined in the washing machine. To date, Confluence never really addresses them; they'll indicate to neighbors who have reported issues that they're doing what's required by law, etc. to provide a safe drinking water (interestingly enough, over the winter we received noticed that they had missed a mandatory testing for a period of time – we were notified by later as it indicated they were “required by law” to tell us – not really something that boosts our faith in the company).
 - a. Some of the pics folks share on the Facebook page are straight up nasty. Full system water filters being clogged up due to the amount of sediment and other trash present in the water.
 - b. Many folks are having appliances (THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS) go out less than 2 and 3 years of being here; why isn't Confluence Rivers installing a better filtration system? We don't care about state standards... we care about getting a quality product that aligns with the astronomical cost we're paying for their services/product compared to many other rural water providers.
2. Pressure issues – sometimes the pressure is high enough that I can't help but wonder if it's hard on our water line. Some neighbors have had leaks with their water infrastructure – could this be the issue? I find it odd that my neighbor often has poor pressure while I rarely do (or the pressure is excessive for me but not them). They have reached out, but no explanation was provided.
3. Boil order advisory/notices – for MONTHS the only way we were informed of issues (which happened multiple times a month it seemed for a while) by them placing a very small sign by the road or at the mailboxes. When contacting them I informed them that this was not sufficient and I was “informed” that I was wrong and that emails were always sent out AND a press release was posted on their website/Facebook page stating the advisory/order. FYI – the rude person that informed me of this was wrong; NO ONE in the subdivision was receiving notices of an order/advisory, but amazingly, a short while after I called the second time we did finally start receiving them by email.
 - a. Instantaneous notification should always happen when there is a potential quality/safety concern

- b. Not everyone monitored their website 24/7
- 4. Infrastructure issues – so many times while homes were being constructed and water/sewer was being set up the water line was hit. In speaking with the folks doing the digging/exterior plumbing, they indicated the charge line wasn't connected in most places so they had a great deal of trouble finding the water lines when digging. There was one week in the fall of 2022 that a water line was hit 3 times.

Workings on that crew mentioned above indicated the infrastructure throughout the subdivision was an absolute mess. They couldn't wait until their jobs were finished because it was such a mess working here. The interesting part of that: the developer who put in place the water/sewer infrastructure continued to do so after Confluence Rivers purchased the water/sewer rights for Auburn Lakes subdivision. Many of us here have a big problem with this:

- a. Are rate increases a result of cost rise due to poor infrastructure? What's the outlook here – will they attempt to hike the rates every time something goes wrong?
- b. Every time a new house is hooked up a great amount of debris and other trash enters the water supply; why are they not working with the contractors to flush out lines vs. letting the water flow into and through the house vs. all that crap being washed back into our water lines.

Folks aren't happy here. Many of us would NOT have purchased homes in this subdivision had we known the water quality would be so poor. The prices; they're insane, but this is a monopoly, we have no other options. We don't have faith in what Confluence Rivers is doing as they're most definitely seeking to maximize their profits here vs. providing a quality service we can trust.

Based upon many conversations many of us have had, it certainly seems like Confluence Rivers overpaid for the rights to this water/sewer and that cost is coming back on us (this is speculation by us). As the infrastructure doesn't seem great, there has and will certainly be needs for more upgrades – will that cost fall back on us? We're entering a down-time for real estate sales and this subdivision may sit fairly idle for a while – will the cost rise as a result of lower than anticipated revenues? What happens when our appliances continue having issues due to poor quality water; will Confluence consider improving the filtration system?

We're dissatisfied. Our needs are not being met. The letter we received late last week pissed us off (which has become the norm with Confluence Rivers speaks communicates to us). Nothing we hear or see leaves us feeling good about this situation. Per folks that lived here before Confluence Rivers bought into this subdivision, water and sewer DOUBLED monthly rates. Yes, they deserve to reap a profit, but not but forcing us between a bigger rock and a hard place.

TL;DR – the water situation is bad enough that when someone comes around to look at a house or a lot to buy, when they stop and ask how the subdivision is the typical response is "the water sucks and the company managing it sucks." Some folks will go as far to say they'd wish they never moved here. That's a problem and if it's not addressed other problems will arise.

I hope you find these comments yourself. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Eric J. Gibson