

## Williams gives Chamber Alcosan project update

Created on Wednesday, 23 January 2013 10:31  
Last Updated on Wednesday, 23 January 2013 10:31  
Published on Wednesday, 23 January 2013 10:31  
Written by Christian Morrow - Courier Staff Writer  
Hits: 417



**WATER WORLD**—Alcosan Executive Director Arletta Scott Williams lays out the authority's \$2 billion plan to comply with Environmental Protection Agency wet weather mandates. (Photos by Christian Morrow)

by Christian Morrow  
Courier Staff Writer

While addressing the crowd at the African American Chamber of Commerce January PowerBreakfast, Alcosan Executive Director Arletta Scott Williams got the important items out of the way first by introducing her entire purchasing department and her finance director. "A woman with a budget will always be hotly pursued," she quipped. "Those are the people you want to talk to about that." Though she noted many in the room were already doing business with the authority, what they wanted to hear about was the latest on its Wet Weather Plan for dealing with sewage overflow during heavy storms. "This will be the largest public works project this region has seen, and is likely to see for years to come," she said. The wet weather project was born from a consent decree the authority signed in 2007 that took seven years to negotiate following a federal lawsuit brought by the Environmental Protection Agency. It stipulates that by 2046, the authority will be fully compliant with new standards for its combined sewer systems, which carry both rainwater and sewage. That plan, which would build a series of tunnels as wide as the North Shore Connector only longer, to funnel water to multiple catch basins and then to a vastly larger treatment facility, carries a \$3.6 billion price tag. However, using the EPA's own criteria, the authority and the 83 municipalities it serves cannot afford that price. So the authority has revised its plan proposing a \$2 billion "first phase" that passes the affordability test and does nearly everything the approved plan does. But just getting to this point, submitting their revised proposal

before the end of the month, the authority has spent more than \$100 million on engineers, planning, analysis, program management, and coordination with each municipality.

"And we've been blasted by environmentalists for not going with an entirely 'green' approach," she said. "'Green' cannot eliminate the need for 'gray.'" So now, Alcosan goes into what Williams called the big lull, waiting for the EPA to respond to their revised proposal. The federal agency has until Jan. 2014 to do so. Could they respond with a demand to move ahead with the original plan or face punitive fines? Williams said it is possible but unlikely. "It's far more likely they'll say, let's talk about it some more. I'm hopeful they'll look at what we have and approve this staged approach," she said. "And once we are approved, we still have to go into design stage. So we're a long way from starting any construction." Asked if last week's federal court ruling that the EPA had exceeded its authority to regulate rainwater runoff had any bearing on the Alcosan plan, Williams said no, primarily because the consent decree had already been signed. "It doesn't really apply to us, but I know everyone who ever sat across the table from the EPA let out a 'yea' when they heard that," she said. After her presentation, Chamber President and CEO Doris Carson Williams thanked her and gave her a copy of the award-winning book "Water." She also introduced new members and highlighted upcoming events including a showing of "Soul Food Junkies" at WQED Multimedia, Jan. 23; a members' mixer at the Heinz History Center at the "From Slavery To Freedom" exhibit, Jan. 29; and a Marcellus Shale business, jobs and supplier presentation Jan 31 at the Koppers building.

(Send comments to [cmorrow@newpittsburghcourier.com](mailto:cmorrow@newpittsburghcourier.com) .)