

WEST SLOPE WATER DISTRICT

Special Board of Commissioners Meeting

July 30, 2020

Meeting Summary

CALL TO ORDER

Present: Chair Charles Conrad; Commissioners Michael Hoffman, Carol Wild, Noel Reiersen, and Andy Smith.

Management Staff: None present

Public: None present

1.0 - CALL TO ORDER

Chair Conrad called to order the special meeting of the West Slope Water District Board of Commissioners at 5:28 P.M., Thursday, July 30, 2020. The meeting was held at an open outdoor area of Raleigh Park. All attendees wore facial masks and maintained appropriate social distancing during the course of the meeting.

2.0 - PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

There were no public comments or communications.

3.0 - DISCUSSION

Chair Conrad said he called this Special Meeting to acknowledge and discuss what he perceived as some degree of frustration and anxiety during recent board meetings and in some pointed communications between board members and staff. He thought some of the frustration occurred because the board was meeting remotely instead of in person, and personal interaction was compromised by occasional audio and video disruption. Ideally, meetings would be held in a conference room affording board members a more intimate setting. Unfortunately, the pandemic precludes this.

Chair Conrad said that as individuals and commissioners, we are anxious about the wellbeing of ourselves, our family and friends, and our district. He said the District's

general manager is also anxious about the wellbeing of his family and friends, and the wellbeing and safety of district employees, and the efficient operation of the district while adhering to the frequent changes to state and county mandates.

Chair Conrad said that the board has discussed some of the staffing decisions made at the onset of the pandemic, and in hindsight some decisions and information flow could have been handled differently. Given the lessons learned during this crisis, we will do better next time. He acknowledged that the decisions were made in the heat of the moment without any guidance or detailed instructions from federal, state, or county officials about how to significantly modify staffing and operations, protect the health of employees, and still operate the essential service of delivering water to residences and businesses. He cited examples relayed to him from neighbors who worked for local large companies who experienced significant confusion within their companies about staffing and operations despite having the advantage of fully staffed HR and legal departments. He also noted that a national company operating locally had given each employee 240 hours of paid leave in addition to what they were already entitled.

Chair Conrad stated that he has been on the board for 10 years and in that time, the board has always operated in a very professional and cohesive manner; always acting in the best interests of the District. He did not want frustration and anxiety to detract from or compromise the board's ability to continue to perform professionally and cohesively.

Chair Conrad gave each commissioner a copy of a page from the SDAO handbook about commissioners' duties and responsibilities, and a copy of the district's policy on the prevention of workplace discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. He said he thought it would be helpful to reiterate and discuss the principles of commitment, responsibility, authority, and conduct that guide board members' actions.

Commissioners' commitment started when they assumed the duties of commissioner and took an oath to serve to the best of their abilities, and always act in the best interests of the District. Chair Conrad said in his opinion every board member has lived up to that commitment in an outstanding manner.

Board members' responsibilities are limited to making and approving district policy, providing fiscal oversight, and giving guidance and direction to the general manager. Guidance and direction should come only from the board, and not from any individual commissioner.

Individually, board members have no authority. Authority occurs only by board action. Individual board members should not direct staff, get involved in the District's administrative activities with staff or customers, or take any action that is in the sole

purview of the board. He cited an example of a former board chair appropriately directing conflict resolution with a customer to a senior staff member instead of interacting with the customer himself. If a board member acts without board authority, that individual exposes himself or herself and the district to financial and legal liability. Chair Conrad cited some examples of where individual board members, duly appointed by the board to act as a subcommittee, incurred financial obligations for the district. Had those individuals acted without board authority, they could have been personally liable for the expenses.

Board member interaction with staff should always be polite, cordial, and professional. Comments and remarks should be limited to appropriate district issues. Comments and remarks unrelated to district issues are inappropriate. Such comments and remarks may make the employee feel uneasy, threatened, or harassed. Chair Conrad reminded board members that they are a separate and distinct part of the district. They are not part of the staff, part of the crew. To assume that role is inappropriate, probably unwelcomed, and blurs the line of authority and respect. He said staff's interaction with him has always been polite, cordial, and professional, and that board members should reciprocate in kind.

4.0 - COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Chair Conrad opened the floor for comments related to the subjects discussed. Commissioner Hoffman explained his rationale for notifying a person interested in becoming a district commissioner about an upcoming board vacancy. He thought that since the vacancy announcement was made in a public forum, and therefore public information, that informing the person was acceptable. After receiving criticism from the general manager for taking this action which traditionally has been staff responsibility, Commissioner Hoffman contacted SDAO and an attorney to determine if his actions were unethical and a breach of duty. He said the opinions from SDAO and the lawyer were that his actions did not violate any ethical standard. Some commissioners said that it has been the practice of the of the board to give direction to the general manager about how he should announce district board and committee vacancies, who to contact, if anyone, and schedule any interviews. Commissioners said that during the July meeting there was discussion about possible options for filling the vacancy, such as a special election, but admitted they were unsure what direction they had given the General Manager during the meeting, and that was probably the source of confusion about making notification. Commissioner Smith said he would initiate discussion about filling board vacancies at the August general meeting, and other commissioners concurred that the Board should develop written policy about filling future board and committee vacancies.

Commissioner Hoffman said he thought the District had greatly improved during his time on the Board but was disappointed that there was not much tangible progress made during the past year. Other commissioners shared this concern and recalled that

this concern was shared with the general manager during his recent performance evaluation. Commissioners acknowledged that operating the District and making significant progress on District projects would be more difficult during the pandemic.

Commissioner Conrad said he thought teleconferencing was awkward and somewhat impersonal, and he would strive to make sure that decisions and guidance made during board meetings were clear and concise.

Commissioner Reiersen said he would not be attending the August board meeting because of a prior commitment, and because of that, this would be his last meeting as a commissioner for the West Slope Water District pending his resignation date of August 30. He said his time and participation on the Board had been very rewarding and enjoyable, and he wished the District well.

5.0 - ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, Commissioner Hoffman moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Reiersen seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously. Chair Conrad adjourned the July 30, 2020 Special Board of Commissioners meeting at 7:37 P.M. No decisions were made during the Board proceedings.

Approved:

Charles B. Conrad

Allyson

Carol M. Wild