

WEST SLOPE WATER DISTRICT

Regular Board of Commissioners Meeting

March 15, 2023

Meeting Summary

CALL TO ORDER

Present: Chair Paul Schuler, Commissioners Ramesh Krishnamurthy, Susan Meamber, and Andy Smith; Commissioner Carol Wild joined virtually

Management Staff: Michael Grimm, General Manager; Wendy Irwin, Finance Manager

Absent: None

Public: None

1.0 – CALL TO ORDER

Chair Schuler called to order the regular meeting of the West Slope Water District Board of Commissioners at 5:02 P.M., Wednesday, March 15, 2023. The meeting was held as hybrid meeting – in person and virtual. The public was made aware of the meeting through the District’s website (the meeting agenda and Zoom meeting link were posted on the website).

2.0 - PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

The District had not received any public comments regarding agenda items or other issues for the Board to consider.

3.0 – CONSENT AGENDA

Commissioner Meamber asked about the credit card charge listed in Agenda Item 3.3 for bottled water and why the District purchases bottled water instead of tap water in a refillable container. Mr. Grimm explained the bottled water is used by the operations staff when working in the field. The District started purchasing bottled water following the OR-OSHA requirements for employers following the heat wave in 2021. The District is required to purchase and have available cool water for field employees. Rather than trying to determine which days the water was required to be provided and which days it was not and allocate costs appropriately, staff decided to provide water all year long to make the accounting simple and assure all employees have water while on the job in the field all year long. Commissioner Wild asked if Ms. Irwin is expecting more comp time payout through June 30 (at 100% of budget estimate as of March 31). Ms. Irwin stated she does not expect any more comp time payout until July or August. The District is obligated by law to allow employees to take a cash payout in lieu of taking leave for comp time. Commissioner Krishnamurthy asked if the District has looked at purchasing gas and diesel through the contracted card purchase commonly used by cities and large districts. Mr. Grimm stated the District has in the past used that service until it was discovered the cost was

more expensive than standard purchases prior to the pandemic. Staff will conduct a cost comparison to see if the relative costs are still the same. Commissioner Smith made a motion to accept the entire Consent Agenda Items 3.1 through 3.7. Commissioner Meamber seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

4.0 – DISTRICT ACTIVITIES

4.1 – General Manager’s Report: Mr. Grimm highlighted several key issues from the General Manager’s report:

- Long term source of supply: Mr. Grimm shared that Portland is nearing the end of their work to develop a rate model with real data from wholesale utilities. It is likely that the unveiling of the new model could be in April but for sure in May.
- Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy Water Main Project: Mr. Grimm stated Emery is still working on a construction schedule. Likely construction will start no earlier than early May.
- Customer Service Line Inventory: Mr. Grimm shared 120Water is a few weeks out for showing the District the first view of our customer service line inventory. Target to submit the inventory to the state drinking water regulators at Oregon Health Authority is Summer 2024 ahead of the October 14, 2024 regulatory deadline
- GIS Project: The District is waiting for clearance from Frontier Precision for confirmation that all subscriptions & licenses have been paid so the data collection phase can begin.
- Water Quality/Consumer Confidence Report: Mr. Grimm stated work on writing the content for the report has begun and will continue through April. The content will be sent to the District’s graphic artist for formatting and layout. Deadline to notify the public of the report and post it to the District’s website is July 1, 2023
- Future CIP Projects: Mr. Grimm informed the Board that he has been meeting one-on-one with representatives for consulting engineering firms to gain an understanding of their interest and ideas for the three major CIP projects facing the District after completion of the Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy water main replacement project.

Commissioner Smith commented he likes the idea of the plan to post construction project information to the website in both English and Spanish and encouraged the District to also reach out in person to those customers impacted by the project. Commissioner Krishnamurthy asked if the District has thought about pushing the updates out through local NACs and platforms like NextDoor. Mr. Grimm stated that we currently work with the West Slope NAC, but the District does not use social media platforms like NextDoor, Ring, Twitter, FaceBook or Instagram. Commissioner Smith asked if there is any progress in discussing the transportation expenses with ODOT that are part of the District’s Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy project. To date, Mr. Grimm stated he has not had that discussion with ODOT because the final approval of Emery’s traffic control plan has not been obtained from ODOT, and Mr. Grimm is not going to potentially jeopardize the approval process by having that discussion at this time.

4.2 – Finance Manager’s Report: Ms. Irwin stated she is working on both the content and the format of the budget document. For preliminary budget analysis, Ms. Irwin stated she is starting with a modest 3% water rate increase recognizing that the new fiscal year will see a higher water purchase cost from Portland, higher employee costs (both salary and the filing of the vacant operator position as well as health care), higher general expenses, and higher capital costs. Commissioner Wild if a 3% increase would address the rising costs of the District’s expenses without consideration of capital expenses, and Ms. Irwin stated she believed it will cover some but not all of the added costs. The impact of inflation on operating expenses and capital project costs have reduced the amount of funds left as reserve for capital projects in this fiscal year as compared to last fiscal year. Commissioner Smith expressed his desire to continue to be aggressive with water rate increases to be able to continue to move forward with capital

projects to replace aging infrastructure, and Commissioner Smith believes a comprehensive strategy at planning and funding those projects over the next 10-20 years is in the best interest of the District.

Ms. Irwin informed the Board that there are numerous fees and costs to the District that continue to increase that when totaled together appear significant. As an example, the District is charged a \$1/transaction fee by the accounting software providers when customers pay a water bill by credit card or debit card. Currently, the fees are paid by the District, but in the future those costs can be recovered by the District by passing the fee on to the customer if the Board so chooses.

Ms. Irwin stated that Matt Evans is the District's newest employee hired to fill the vacant utility worker position for the field staff. Mr. Evans brings experience from his past work with an irrigation district and professional maturity and has blended well already with staff. The new Springbrook software is live and working well as migration has been completed, and work is still progressing on the migration to the District's new website through Streamline. Commissioner Meamber asked if the merging of Umpqua and Columbia Banks will have any impact on the District, and Ms. Irwin stated the District is working with the new merged bank to migrate the District's account and banking processes.

Ms. Irwin shared with the Board that the staff is shifting the District's insurance brokerage (SDIS, workers compensation, benefits, etc.) from Leonard Adams to WHA Insurance. WHA is an SDAO partner and understands the needs and coverage for special districts. The level of customer service from Leonard Adams has dropped through the years, and WHA has been very customer-friendly and helpful. Commissioner Krishnamurthy asked if the change from Leonard Adams to WHA will change the cost to the District or reduce coverage and benefits, and Ms. Irwin replied that there will be no changes in cost or coverage/benefits.

4.3 – Staff Work Schedule Change: Mr. Grimm shared with the Board that staff wanted to try a new work schedule of four 9-hour days Monday-Thursday and an 8-hour day on Friday. Over a two week period, 2 of the 4 field staff would have the 1st Friday off along with 1 of the 2 office staff. On the 2nd Friday, the other 2 field staff would be off along with the other office staff member. There would be no change in the District office hours, and the General Manager would continue to work all five days each week. The benefit of the work time shift is to reduce transportation time and costs by 10% over a two-week period (only driving to & from work 9 days instead of 10) and arriving at the office before 7 AM instead of 8 AM avoids the busiest part of the morning rush hour. Commissioner Krishnamurthy asked what would happen if there were an emergency or urgent situation that would call for all employees to be at the District on a Friday where only half of the staff were at work. Mr. Grimm responded that most main repair tasks can be accomplished with 2-3 staff. Larger, more complex repair tasks would require an "all hands on deck" request for staff to assist. Since 2015, the District has experienced only one such event, the Gardenview main break in 2022 ... on a Wednesday ... so, staff believes the logistics needed to address an urgent or emergency situation are very workable. Commissioner Wild asked if staff working over 40 hours one week and less than 40 hours the other week (44 hours one week, 36 hours the second week) would be a problem or would require the District to pay out overtime wages. Ms. Irwin stated exceeding 40 hours in a single week is not an issue since staff would still work 80 hours in two weeks, and staff monthly pay is normalized throughout the year at 173.33 hours/month so that paychecks in February are the same as in July.

5.0 – COMMISSIONERS COMMUNICATIONS

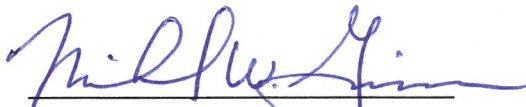
Chair Schuler asked if any commissioners have attended any outside meetings (no meetings were attended as representatives of West Slope). Chair Schuler mentioned he attended a national water reuse conference and was able to meet the heads of several federal agencies who are engaged in the “one water” national discussion. Chair Schuler asked Ms. Irwin when staff will come back to the Board for a cost of living determination, and Ms. Irwin replied staff will have the COLA adjustment for the Board to approve at the May 17 meeting. Mr. Grimm proposed to the Board to have a Board/staff work session to discuss capital projects (priority ranking, funding, etc.). The Board agreed to a work session on April 6 at 9 AM that would be held in person as well as through Zoom video conferencing. Commissioner Wild stated that she would like to hear from the other Commissioners about their thoughts on water rate increases and varying levels (fixed vs. consumptive rates and tiered water rates) and whether or not the District is in alignment with other utilities (wastewater, gas, electric, etc.) on the cost of having the service at a customer’s home. Commissioner Smith agreed and commented the larger discussion that needs to take place is how does the District equitably raise revenue to stay ahead of infrastructure replacement over the next four decades and reassure the District’s rate payers that the District is looking strategically at its investments. The general consensus of the Board was that this current meeting was well run and valuable.

6.0 – ADJOURNMENT


There being no further business to discuss, Commissioner Krishnamurthy moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion, and the motion was approved unanimously. Chair Schuler adjourned the March 15, 2023 Regular Board of Commissioners meeting at 6:18 PM

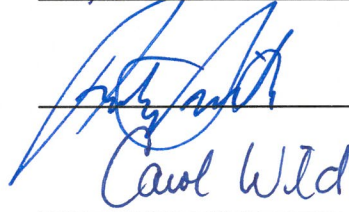
Respectfully Submitted,

Approved:



Michael W. Grimm, P.E.
Acting Secretary





Carol Wild