

Clean Water Services Advisory Commission

Meeting Minutes

November 17, 2010

(revised and approved by CWAC on 2/16/11)

Attendance

The meeting was attended by Commission Chair Tony Weller and Commission members Molly Brown, Lori Hennings, John Kuiper, George Marsh, Mike McKillip, Julie Wilson, Bill Young, and Clean Water Services General Manager Bill Gaffi.

Commission members Alan DeHarpport, Victoria Lowe, Deanna Mueller-Crispin, Stephanie Shanley, and Jerry Ward were absent.

The meeting was also attended by Clean Water Services staff members Andy Braun, Bob Cruz, Nora Curtis, Karen DeBaker, Joe Dvorak, Mark Jockers, Jerry Linder, Peter Ruffier, and Sheri Wantland.

Tom Eiland, CFM Strategic Communications, also attended the meeting.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Tony Weller at 6:31 PM in the conference room at the Clean Water Services Administration Building.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes for April 21, 2010 (revised) and September 15, 2010

Mark Jockers, Clean Water Services Government and Public Affairs Manager, reminded the group that approval of the April minutes was tabled at the May meeting as requested by Victoria Lowe. The draft minutes have been revised to more explicitly reflect comments during discussions of sanitary sewer rate projections and of the Clean Water Institute.

Bill Young moved to approve the minutes from the April and September meetings. Molly Brown seconded. Motion passed.

3. Customer Awareness & Satisfaction Survey

Karen DeBaker, Clean Water Services Communications Supervisor, introduced Tom Eiland of CFM Strategic Communications, who managed this year's survey (*presentation attached*). The District has conducted a Customer Awareness and Satisfaction Survey every two years since 1989. The survey objectives this year were to determine public awareness and perception of water resources management in general and of Clean Water Services specifically, assess Clean Water Services communication strategies, and explore some issues related to Clean Water Services responsibilities.

The survey questions were almost identical to those from 2008, but this year online responses replaced phone calls. The survey was evaluated to ensure that online participants would be as broadly representative of the community as phone participants. About 25,000 email invitations were sent out and more than 1,500 online interviews were completed, compared to about 400 interviews typically done by phone. Online interviews also allowed for follow-up questions to participants

about their responses. Compared to the 2008 phone survey, more women than men participated, and participants “skewed” about 1.5 years older. Mr. Eiland said the survey results are accurate to +/- 2% and are similar to those from 2008. No differences between the 2008 and 2010 survey results were attributable to gender, age, or economic status.

Clean Water Services (48%) and Tualatin Valley Water District (TVWD) are seen by most as being the leaders in water resource management in this area. More people than last year identified the state as being most responsible. Interestingly, Unified Sewerage Agency (USA), which became Clean Water Services about nine years ago, was chosen by 17%. Mr. Eiland clarified that participants could select up to three agencies, unless they selected “don’t know.” The “don’t know” option was important as it provides a basis for educational opportunities.

Nearly a third identified Clean Water Services as the agency responsible for sewage collection and treatment, and about a fifth thought it was TVWD. USA was selected by about a tenth of the respondents. Mr. Eiland said respondents often select their city because that is where their bill comes from, and that residents of unincorporated areas are more aware of Clean Water Services partly because they are billed directly.

From a list of activities that might be associated with a water/wastewater utility, 91% of respondents chose “protects public health” as “very important,” similar to 2008. “Keeps rates reasonable” was noted as “very important” by an increased number of respondents this year, as were “education” and “environmental leadership.”

Mr. Eiland said Clean Water Services enjoys high awareness (73%), high favorable opinions (48%), and very low unfavorable opinions (4%). About half (including some of those with high awareness) have no opinion about Clean Water Services. The highest percentage of favorable opinions occurred in unincorporated areas and others billed by the District, those who saw a district advertisement, and those who fit the profile of “influentials.” “Influentials” are well-read, confident in public speaking, comfortable in engaging others’ ideas, and others turn to them for advice. These are the people to talk to when trying to understand the public’s view of complex issues, as their thinking is ahead of the general public’s. Through the online survey tool, “influentials” can now be contacted again. The most responses reflecting no impression of Clean Water Services came from those in incorporated areas, and in the south portion of the service area (Tigard-Tualatin-Sherwood). These are areas to focus on in future communication efforts.

The District’s job performance rating increased from 7.4 in 2008 to 7.5 in 2010, but about 25% did not feel they knew enough to give a rating. Job performance ratings have increased steadily over the years. John Kuiper asked how these ratings compared to other districts. Mr. Eiland said the ratings compare favorably to those of another “infrastructure” agency client in Clackamas County (Water Environment Services) and that they are higher than those of school districts and other government agencies such as cities and counties. He said it is unusual that Clean Water Services ratings continue to improve at a time when “government” is seen as “bad,” and noted that organizations with high ratings are more likely to get public approval for changes such as funding, boundaries, curriculum, construction, etc.

Another strong progression of increasing ratings continued this year in the perception of water quality in rivers and streams in this area, and of the impact Clean Water Services has had in improving water quality.

Public perception of specific Clean Water Services activities showed small increases for most compared to 2008. “Planning for the future” and “environmental leadership,” both areas of focus in recent Clean Water Services communications, showed significant increases of seven and six points. Mr. Jockers said the Governor’s Award for Sustainability and the fertilizer partnership with Ostara probably contributed to those increases. Mr. Eiland said the only rating that decreased was for “Keeping rates reasonable,” which dropped seven points. He said that is a common response following rate increases, combined with general pessimism about the economy. The highest perception ratings came from those billed by the District, those in the west service area, and those in unincorporated areas. These are also the areas most often contacted by the District. Mr. Eiland and Mr. Jockers noted that the list of activities was developed through conversations with focus groups, and those general statements identified as the most important could be further defined and clarified by contacting the survey respondents who chose them.

The survey included a series of questions related to SB 737 requiring utilities to address “priority persistent pollutants,” many of which are found in common household products. Almost three fourths of the respondents have seen information about this issue, and about half think it is a major problem while 28% see it as a minor problem. More than half favor “government regulations” to address the problem. Even though about 80% perceive the problem, only about 8% indicated they would change their behavior to address it. Julie Wilson observed there may be a parallel here with the Consumer Products Safety Commission—citizens expect that products on the market have been “approved” as safe to use and they expect the government to monitor that rather than having to do it themselves. Mr. Eiland and Ms. DeBaker said studies of other issues have shown that people will voluntarily use an alternative product only as long as it works just as well, is the same quality, inexpensive, and easy to get/use.

The most critical general water issues in the next 25 years were drinking water (36%), protecting flow in rivers and streams (23%), and water for irrigation and business. Mr. Eiland said it is common for drinking water to be identified as most important because everyone drinks water and people tend to protect their self-interest first.

Clean Water Services has been exploring the concept of voluntary extra payments to fund some of its environmental programs (similar to electrical utilities offering variable pricing for alternative energy sources), and 7% of the survey respondents said they would be “very likely” to participate. Mr. Eiland said that doesn’t seem like much, but a 7% share of any market is actually pretty good, especially if the participants are the “influentials” mentioned earlier. Respondents who said they would be very likely or somewhat likely to make voluntary extra payments preferred to support low impact development, renewable energy, and stream/wetland restoration. Mr. Eiland said there is some opportunity here, but a marketing plan and further analysis is needed before launching such a program as you don’t want to invest more than you are going to get out of it.

Mr. Eiland said the industry standard for awareness and recall of advertising or promotional efforts is 30%, and the survey showed 40% for Clean Water Services, up from 32% in 2008. Messages on Clean Water Services vehicles were cited by a third of respondents this year, the first time “vehicles”

has shown up as a survey response. Half recalled billing inserts. The responses roughly correlate with the investment made by the District in each communication technique. The highest recall was from respondents in unincorporated areas, women 45 and older, and among “influentials.” Interestingly, the highest recall was not necessarily in the target audience group (women with children at home).

In summary, Mr. Eiland said the 2010 survey shows Clean Water Services has a solid reputation among ratepayers. The organization is well-known, favorably perceived, and receives high ratings for job performance. Even so, half the ratepayers have no impression of the District and that should be seen as an opportunity to make a good impression. The District should also keep abreast of the impact of rate increases on public perception, and may want to focus communication efforts to address that. The District should continue to publicize its efforts and leadership in planning for the future. Mr. Eiland said the District’s education and communication efforts are effective in that people remember the messages and are getting the information from a variety of sources, but they are not fully reaching the intended audience so ad placement and marketing budget may need to be reallocated. The District could consider using social media (two thirds of respondents are users) but should have a clear purpose in doing so and should be sure it fits the larger strategy. Finally, people are concerned about future water supplies and the impact of common household products on water quality, but are not likely to change their behavior significantly in response.

4. Sump Pump Disconnection Policy Update and Implementation

Nora Curtis, Clean Water Services Conveyance Systems Department Director, introduced Joe Dvorak, recently hired by Clean Water Services as a Senior Engineer responsible for Inflow/Infiltration (I/I) Abatement and developing a pilot program to disconnect sump pumps which discharge into the sanitary sewer system. The Commission helped develop a Sump Pump Disconnection Policy in 2009, which is the basis for the pilot program.

Mr. Dvorak reviewed the Sump Pump Disconnection Policy recommended by the Commission and approved by the Clean Water Services Board of Directors in June, 2009 (*presentation attached*). Sump pump discharges unnecessarily increase the load on wastewater treatment facilities, increasing expenses and use of resources while using capacity that could otherwise be used to accommodate population growth instead of expanding treatment plants. The policy and rationale behind it were discussed in detail at several previous Commission meetings.

Despite little response to an earlier survey of homeowners to determine which properties have sump pumps, monitoring and other techniques were used to determine that in some residential areas sump pumps may be improperly connected to the sanitary sewer system. The Sump Pump Disconnection Policy outlines eight alternatives in order of preference, beginning with the least expensive and quickest way to return stormwater to the soil. The policy also provides for incentives and assistance to homeowners who disconnect their sump pump, and penalties for those who refuse to do so.

The area for the pilot project has been identified and a public outreach campaign has begun. Legal review for Permits of Entry is complete, and Clean Water Services is contracting with Washington County to have their inspectors visit each property. Andy Braun, Clean Water Services Principal Engineer, explained that a Permit of Entry signed by the homeowner usually enables Clean Water Services to look at the sanitary sewer lateral line and make any needed repairs, but for this pilot program it also allows entry to the home to look for a sump pump.

The target area includes 70 single family residential parcels, built in the 1960s and 1970s, in the Madeline neighborhood just south of Aloha High School. The monitor in the sanitary sewer line for this area shows some I/I (unwanted water coming into the sewer line through cracks in the pipe or via improper discharges such as a rain gutter), but during storm events the flow in the line does not start to spike until a day or so after the peak of the storm event. Other monitors in the area show peak flow in the line coinciding with peak rainfall during the storm. The lag time at the Madeline monitor coincides with the amount of time it might take rainfall to move through the ground into a crawl space, kicking on a sump pump and sending water into the line.

Mr. Dvorak said one advantage in targeting the Madeline area is that sewer pipes there flow into the Aloha 3 pump station, which logs run time by the minute and for which there are logs going back years, so any reduction in flow after sump pumps are disconnected should be detectable even though the pilot area is a small part of the total that runs through Aloha 3. The Madeline flow monitor should show a more pronounced difference. Another advantage to the area is that there are three distinct drainage profiles—curbs with weep holes, no curbs with a ditch, and partial curbs with storm sewer system—which allows for consideration and evaluation of the full range of discharge alternatives described in the Sump Pump Disconnection Policy.

Information about the pilot program has been sent to residents of the area and Mr. Dvorak will meet with them on November 30. He hopes to collect signed Permits of Entry at that time so inspections can begin soon. Construction associated with disconnections, alternate discharges, and lateral repairs would begin next June. He will keep Commission members updated as the pilot program is implemented.

Chairman Weller suggested narrowing the scope of the pilot to define more specifically what is coming into the sanitary system now, which would allow a more accurate measurement of changes when sump pumps are disconnected and a more useful cost/benefit analysis in evaluating the program's effectiveness.

Mr. Dvorak shared a copy of the information sent to residents of the Madeline area and a draft of a brochure he wants to distribute at the meeting on November 30. He requested comments and suggestions by Friday, November 26.

Mr. Dvorak also noted the City of Hillsboro is funding a similar pilot project on 50 single-family residential lots in the Eastwood area. The City will be sending residents a survey and requesting Permits of Entry to dye test for roof drains improperly discharging into sanitary sewers and to inspect for sump pumps. The Hillsboro program will not include sewer lateral repairs.

5. Questions and Announcements

Mr. Young asked about the first test results under the SB 737 program for priority persistent pollutants. Mr. Gaffi said for most jurisdictions there were very few (cholesterol and coprostanol were common examples) that hit the threshold to require further action. He said that new regulations based on fish tissue consumption levels will probably become the controlling factor for water quality in the future. Peter Ruffier, Clean Water Services Regulatory Affairs Department Director, said Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) will propose those regulations to the Environmental Quality Commission on December 9, with final rule-making projected for June, 2011.

He expects those regulations to set levels that are at least as challenging as the SB 737 thresholds. Mr. Young asked how certain conditions might influence samples and test results and if samples would be purposely taken during a storm event. Mr. Ruffier said DEQ sets the sampling schedule at random so it may or may not hit a storm event. The second round of samples and tests will occur this month. Two samples are required under SB 737, but Clean Water Services will do four. Mr. Gaffi added that a storm event would probably provide increased dilution, rather than a spike in pollutant levels, in streams, even though pollutant levels would likely be elevated in stormwater runoff, especially during the first big storm of the season.

Mr. Jockers said last year coho salmon were reported in the upper portions of the Tualatin watershed, including Dairy Creek, McKay Creek, Scoggins Creek, and Gales Creek, and this year the reports have increased. He shared a video by Rob Baur of Clean Water Services showing spawning coho in the Tualatin River near Cherry Grove. Mr. Jockers said according to Tom Murtaugh of Oregon Department of Fisheries and Wildlife (ODFW), coho are not native to the Tualatin basin but its backwaters and other features provide ideal habitat. ODFW began stocking the streams with hatchery fish following construction of Scoggins Dam and Hagg Lake in the 1970s. Stocking was discontinued in 1998, but the number of fish returning to the Tualatin system has been climbing from about 1,000 in 2002 to an expected 5,000-8,000 this year.

Mr. Jockers thanked George Marsh for his six years as a Commission member and presented him with a wildlife photo. Mr. Jockers said Mr. Marsh's perspective and assistance were of tremendous value, especially related to the Enhanced Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (ECREP) and other programs and issues related to agriculture. Mr. Marsh said he was sure he had learned more than he had contributed.

Mr. Gaffi said Clean Water Services has received results of the March, 2009 federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) inspection of the collections system operations. There were some notices of violations, but no fines so far. An example of the "violations" was when Verizon drilled holes into sanitary sewer laterals and it was not reported as an overflow even though the discharges were confined to the holes and DEQ did not consider the incidents reportable. The inspection did not note any significant violations.

Mr. Jockers said the Clean Water Services 40th anniversary went very well, with fabulous weather and excellent program content. There were 70 people attending the brunch and about 200 community visitors, including several Commission members. He added that the anniversary event was covered in a variety of publications, and sparked additional coverage of Tualatin River improvements and other water-related issues.

The next meeting is scheduled for December 15.

6. Adjournment

Chairman Weller declared the meeting adjourned at 8:10 PM.

(Meeting notes prepared by Sue Baumgartner)

