

As voted by the Board of Trustees and in accordance with the notice of the meeting, the monthly Workshop Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Portland Water District was held remotely on Monday, January 11, 2021. In attendance from staff were Messrs. Crovo, Kane, Wallace, Firmin and Mses. Lewis, Katsiaficas, Clements, Plummer and Demers. President Douglas convened the Workshop at 6:31 p.m.

All Trustees were present.

1. Pivoting During a Pandemic: Reshaping Outreach and Communications Strategies Amidst an Ongoing Crisis.

Michelle Clements, Public Relations Manager, and Sarah Plummer, Environmental Education Coordinator, shared the District's approach to engaging audiences during this challenging time where messages require recrafting, communications and outreach strategies have had to be adjusted and redeveloped to reach audiences.

Ms. Clements began the presentation. She explained the challenges to communications as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. She explained that there are more emotional barriers to communication during a pandemic. People process information differently during a crisis; people have a harder time receiving, understanding and remembering information. People are also more likely to believe negative information. PWD could no longer rely on face to face contact. Words became even more important.

Channels to convey information were impacted. Employees were required to learn new methods of communication and new technologies to communicate and do their jobs. Print information was no longer disseminated. PWD had to develop new ways to communicate and get its message out to employees as well as its customers.

Messages changed. Messages needed to be brief, clear and concise. PWD tried to make personal connections. One example was encouraging people to explore nature and the local trails. The Sebago Lake land reserve was kept open, with messaging included to advise of social distancing and other safety measures. Drinking water week activities were changed to online and in person events cancelled.

Key messages revolved around safety, service changes, water safety and corporate responsibility as a company. The target audience for messaging was internal – employees. Ms. Clements described the various communication methods used to reach employees. These included emails, phone calls, texting, electronic boards and employee newsletters. Ms. Clements also explained the tools used to connect with customers. These efforts included social media, e-newsletter, the annual calendar, and livestreaming of Board meetings.

Sarah Plummer then provided information about the educator program conducted by PWD. Typically PWD interacts with 2,000 students a year. PWD adapted its programs as a result of school closures and remote learning. One example was the trout release program.

PWD did outreach to teachers and surveyed them for the 2020-2021 school year to understand what resources could be adapted. Lessons have been reformatted to accommodate the new way of learning. Different formats of the same lessons have been developed to try to assist teachers. Teacher training will be hosted in February to explore this further.

A video series has been created for middle school students. A follow up activity has been created for each video. Three videos have been finalized. Two others have been delayed due to the rise in COVID-19 cases. The videos have been created from scratch. The creation of the videos has been a learning experience for the staff and has been challenging. The videos will be used by thousands of students, and staff is pleased with the result. They can be used beyond the pandemic time frame.

An example of one of the videos created was shown.

President Douglas commended the education staff and thanked them for their hard work. She also thanked Ms. Clements for her communication efforts.

The videos will be available on YouTube.

Trustee Willey also commended the staff and was pleased with the videos.

2. Other Business

None

3. Executive Session regarding the General Manager's performance review

Pursuant to 1 M.R.S. §Section 405(6)(A), the Board went into executive session to conduct the General Manager's annual performance review.

A motion was made by Trustee Siviski and seconded by Trustee Beck to go into executive session to conduct the General Manager's annual performance review.

The Executive Session began at 7:06 p.m. and ended at 8:11 p.m. Motion to come out of Executive Session and adjourn made by Trustee Cote, second by Trustee Beck.

Submitted by,

Donna M. Katsiaficas
Clerk