

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 at the District, 225 Douglass Street, Portland, Maine on February 12, 2018. In attendance from staff were Messrs. Crovo, Kane, Wallace, Firmin, Johnson, and Mses. Lewis, Demers and Katsiaficas. Union Stewards, Donna Barnes, Nate Whalen, Chris Teret and Joe Piccone, Business Agent for the Teamsters Union were also in attendance.

All Trustees were present except Trustee Siviski and Trustee Douglas.

President Lunt convened the meeting at 6:40 p.m.

1. Conversation with Union Stewards.

Union Stewards presented to the Board their thoughts regarding lower union member scores on the Employee Satisfaction Survey.

Joe Piccone made introductory remarks. He thanked the Board for inviting the stewards and noted he had asked for greater involvement of Trustees in labor issues. He welcomed the opportunity to create a Trustee and union relationship. He said that in 2013, 2015 and 2017 there had been no change in the union relationship. He reiterated that the present meeting was different and a start at forming a relationship. He asked that the Trustees appoint one or more Trustee to participate in the collective bargaining process and asked for their participation in the grievance process.

Chris Teret took over the presentation. He has been employed by PWD for 5 years. He thanked the Board for their interest and letting the stewards address the Board. He highlighted that almost half of the union employees did not feel safe expressing their opinion to management. He asked that the Trustees have a labor committee or a labor liaison so that communications with the union would be better. He said that long-term employees have seen a deterioration in conditions over time. He seeks a more balanced relationship between the union and management; he renewed his request for Trustee participation in the collective bargaining process. Mr. Teret also addressed work done by private contractors instead of employees, and stated that PWD felt that newer employees are not as likely to stick around for the long term as employees had in the past.

Nate Whalen next addressed the Board. He has been employed by PWD for 20 years. He noted that employees felt that the new General Manager has had a positive impact on PWD. He then highlighted the issue of policies and consistency in the manner in which they are applied across the District. He said that union employees should be surveyed to determine exactly which policies are not being applied consistently. Pay has been an issue. He noted that veteran employees and rookie employees are paid the same – seniority is not recognized. He believes this is unusual in the public sector. He believes this is a reason why the issue of pay continues to come up in these employee surveys. He suggested perhaps a step up in pay for long term might be acceptable to address this issue.

Trustee Cote asked about whether it was just union members or non-union members as well who felt they were not being treated the same way. He also asked about the issue of pay differences between long term and new employees. After the probationary period, both would be paid the same according to Mr. Whalen.

Trustee Libby asked about the Trustee attending bargaining sessions, and expressed his concern about the Trustee roles in defining what should be accomplished in collective bargaining and participating in collective bargaining at the same time. He noted that the Board delegates accomplishing the Trustee goals to management. He explained that ultimately, Trustees are management, and they have explained to management representatives what they want in the collective bargaining arena. He stated that having a Trustee at the collective bargaining sessions will not fulfill the hopes of Mr. Teret. Mr. Teret noted that Trustees are elected and that PWD is public. He believes that the Trustees have a responsibility to provide “decent jobs” for the communities that the Trustees serve. He went on to state that Trustees are not typical management, and that during the last negotiation, management was combative. He believes that the Trustees would have a different perspective than the attorney representing the District during negotiations.

Trustee Willey noted that the discussion was going beyond the scope of the meeting, which was to discuss the employee survey.

President Lunt asked for a list from the Stewards of their reasoning for their presentation.

Trustee Cote asked if the union members were going to be surveyed as to what the policies are that members are claiming are not fairly applied. The response was yes, they will be surveyed.

Trustee Garrison asked how the union leadership determines what union priorities are in negotiation. Mr. Teret said members would be surveyed and priorities determined as a result of a democratic process.

Trustee Beck asked if there is a way to check in with union members on a more regular basis other than every couple of years. As a Trustee, he would appreciate the opportunity for a check in.

Trustee Willey stated that he had issues of trust, and that the General Manager was hired to carry the Board’s message. He noted that having a Trustee attempt to represent the complete Board was problematic.

Mr. Piccone offered to discuss the matter further. He believes that a Board member could easily participate. Mr. Teret stated that there is a structural adjustment that needs to take place to make union members happy; a Trustee could be appointed to observe.

Trustee Garrison noted PWD is a public body, and there is always an opportunity for the union to participate in a public meeting. He said that union members have not come forward in the past.

President Lunt thanked the union stewards for coming in; saying that they had done a good job expressing their concerns. He asked them to put together an outline of what the issues are that they brought to the Board this evening. He would like to meet with them on a more regular basis. He also said that most of what the stewards said was not a big surprise. PWD is a public utility and it deals with the public. He thanked them again for their appearances before the Board.

Trustee Libby noted union members can speak with him at any time. President Lunt agreed and said Trustees can’t fix what they don’t know about. The presentation was a good start at addressing issues.

2. Response to prior inquiries.

Staff addressed and answered open inquiries from the Board made at prior meetings.

Carrie Lewis, General Manager gave a summary of outstanding issues. She also distributed a letter template, which Trustees could use when drafting responses to constituent letters related to the Portland Pipeline.

Corporate Counsel, Donna Katsiaticas, gave a brief presentation regarding PWD's tort claim history for 2017 and 2018 to date. She advised the Board that the Golf Traditions claim was settled by Traveller's, the District's insurance company, for the sum of \$85,000. There is a vehicle accident claim pending in the Cumberland County Superior Court with potential exposure of \$400,000 for the District. In addition, PWD has received a notice of tort claim in the amount of \$500,000 for an accident which occurred in the fall of 2017 in Gorham. PWD has received a total of 8 claims so far in 2018.

Trustee Willey noted there were a few more outstanding issues from prior meetings, and raised the issue of a charter change to deal with the issue of appointing a person to step in when a Trustee leaves the Board before his/her term is completed.. This will be discussed in the future. He also asked about placing videos on the web site and a plan that is integrated into a communications plan. Ms. Lewis said a video is being produced on employee recruitment. Trustee Willey suggested that a communication plan could be brought to the Planning Committee.

Trustee Willey then addressed the issue of Trustee compensation and said it has been 20 years since it was adjusted. He suggested it was time to increase compensation.

Trustee Garrison asked about commercial meter testing, and noted that he wanted assurances that they are being tested.

Trustee Levinsky noted that there are three videos on PWD's website.

3. Other Business

None

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

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

At 7:40 p.m., Trustee Libby made a motion to go into executive session; it was seconded by Trustee Willey.

At 8:50 p.m., Trustee Libby made a motion to come out of executive session; it was seconded by Trustee Willey and the meeting adjourned.

Submitted by,

Donna M. Katsiaticas
Clerk