

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, April 13, 2020. In attendance from staff were Messrs. Crovo, Kane, Firmin, Wallace, and Mes. Lewis, Katsiaficas, Demers, Clements and Walker. President Cote convened the Workshop at 6:30 p.m.

All Trustees were present.

**1. COVID-19 Response.** The Senior Management Team provided an update to the Board on the business of the District since the onset of the pandemic.

General Manager Lewis provided the following update.

- March 5 – SMT was asked to put in to plan how departments would handle a decrease in attendance and to identify mission critical work.
- March 13 – Opened the Incident Command Center. IC Staff met Monday, Wednesday and Friday face to face for the first week in the EOC at Douglass Street. From there it went to meeting in Nixon Room to adhere to social distancing and then to remote calls. The calls now included all Supervisors and are held on Tuesday and Friday remotely.
- The primary concern is to keep water and wastewater services operating smoothly and to keep all employees of the District healthy. Right off we had 37 employees go into isolation due to possible exposure to COVID-19. All are well.
- New SOPs have been put in place for Outside Work, Working Closely with Others, Entering Homes and Businesses.
- The District asked the Governor, by Executive Order, for a suspension of the seasonal water activation two (2) day rule for seasonal accounts served by year round and surface mains, imposed by PUC rule, or by and any other state or local requirements for activation of such seasonal water services, until such time as the public health emergency has abated, as determined by your termination of the state of emergency currently in effect. The request was denied. Thankfully, due to the District being deregulated we have some flexibility and will be asking for a waiver from the PUC.
- The Cayenta/Lucity Project is still on target for go-live in October.

Each department provided their update and are attached as part of the minutes.

Trustees Cote, Garrison and Lunt thanked the employees and management for their hard work during this crisis. Trustee Garrison also commented that this is a great opportunity to review how we do business and how we can become better in the future.

Trustee Willey inquired if water and wastewater workers would be able to be tested for COVID-19 (if the need warranted) quickly, much like healthcare workers. Ms. Lewis indicated that our industry is not a priority when it comes to testing.

**2. Other Business.**

None

**3. Adjourn.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Submitted by,

Donna M. Katsiaficas  
Clerk

## **Employee Services Presented by Mary Demers**

A crisis will test leadership and the mettle of leaders, and the way we respond determines employee loyalty and will leave an indelible mark on institutional memory. So far, I think we are doing right by employees, and this will stand by us.

Looking back, we moved quickly and continue to act pro-actively while thoughtfully, and it seems to me that we stayed ahead of what could have been a different outcome, but being ahead of it, albeit by only a few days, might have been what has safeguarded us so far. To give you a sense of what I am alluding to, consider this:

On March 12 Carrie sent out a new policy and guidelines for employees (such as removing the 40 hr. max on the use of sick time for a sick family member) because there were new developments every day, and even though on this date there were no confirmed COVID-19 cases in Maine, this proved to be a pro-active response that would move us forward and keep us a step ahead by providing clear guidelines to employees so that we could continue to provide essential services.

On March 12, business as usual ended, and limiting exposure became the priority. As a result Employee Services postponed the annual Service Awards program and student outreach, and we immediately began the process across PWD to proactively move employees to remote work, prepared to monitor and track exposures and those returning from travel. Carrie and I had a productive conference call with the Union Business Agent regarding communications to employees. We asked supervisors to account for where each employee was working (remotely/on call) and later we updated this spreadsheet to include how many have children at home due to school closures. We know that we have 49 employees with children at home due to school closures, with a predominance in the Water Department.

March 14 we were notified that two employees (2 different departments were exposed to someone who was expected to test positive for COVID-19,

March 18 we were notified that a foreperson had been exposed and exposed his crew.

We had managed to get systems in place (just barely - by a few days) before we needed them, and began tracking and monitoring (using CDC guidelines that change daily), but as of today here is where we stand:

39 employees were notified to remain in isolation (either from possible exposure or returning from travel) and subsequently released.

4 employees remain in isolation due to travel and will be released on 4/12, 4/15 and 4/25

We have ZERO with COVID-19

While we were quickly preparing and moving and monitoring employees, the Federal Government passed the Families First legislation with sweeping changes for emergency sick time and new childcare paid leave under FMLA. Employee Services worked with Carrie to clearly explain these important changes to our employees, and to again change how we were providing paid time off to support and enhance these new entitlements. Embedded in the communication was an important benefit summary including how to contact EAP, benefits under

Harvard Pilgrim and the fact that over the counter medications will be covered under flex spending accounts.

A month has flown by. It has been a non-stop race against time to safeguard employees. One of the biggest learnings has been that these situations become complicated and time consuming when there is not time to spare, and we must respond thoughtfully and adequately, but quickly to be effective.

Employees throughout PWD have been indispensable for keeping us where we need to be. This has helped us to make informed decisions and remain nimble. To name a few are Mike Koza, who has kept his finger on the pulse of CDC recommendations, Donna K who has tracked and advised regarding quickly changing legislation, David Kane and the Finance Staff for providing and implementing payroll codes to track the new Families First entitlements.

In the midst of all of this, the Employee Services Department has been committed to keep the trains running:

We have completed the restructuring of the SCADA position, which both PWD and the Union recognized as needing a new structure for retention, resulting in changing the pay grade for one employee, the annual AWWA compensation survey has been completed on schedule, updating non-union job descriptions has been completed, as well as managing specific employee relations issues.

Going forward, we are remaining vigilant in tracking COVID-19. Our conservative and proactive approach has stood well by us so far. We are thinking about what lies ahead when employees return to the workplace. Employees will be apprehensive, and we will need to transition consistently, understanding that we have a wide variance between operational needs across departments at PWD.

## **Administration and Finance**

### **Presented by David Kane**

#### **Customer Service**

- Initial group that were sent home because of possible exposure to coronavirus – immediate shut down of the Call Center and Control Center operations.
- Emergency Calls handled by the Ozone Treatment Plant Operators/Alarms by East End Treatment Plant Operators
- Within a week, Call Center up and taking 100% of calls and processing most work.
- Within two weeks, all Control Center Operators able to cover shift from home.
- Meter Reading and Billing process not interrupted.
- Field Collection Work ceased.

#### **Information Services**

- Enabled 85 employees concurrently work from home, purchased over 30 laptops
- Adjusted phone and security systems to handle remote workers and move to unattended operation at Douglass Street.
- Implemented a better teleconference program (Cisco Webex) to assist employee interaction
- Assisted Employees in learning how to operate in the new home environment
- CAN'T OVERSTATE THE TREMENDOUS EFFORT IN HELPING THE ORGANIZATION SUCESSFULLY HANDLE THE CRISIS.
- After a few days of implementing new servers/software/laptops on site, all staff are working remotely

#### **Financial Services**

- All essential business operations continue – payroll, customer bill payments, vendor payments, external mail processing and inventory processing.
- Staff working mostly from home with a total of approximately 40 hours of total office time
- Crisis occurred just as the annual financial audit field work started. Moved to doing the audit remotely.
- 2021 Budget Process starting up. As I think mentioned earlier, we are trying to streamline the process this year and trying to move Budget process items away from the Sept/October go live date of Lucity/Cayenta projects. The overall parameters we are considering are:
  - Overall expenses not to exceed an increase of 2.3%. That includes 3% labor contract wages and 3.25% non-union increase, which includes some dollars for the impact of the non-union pay study. All other expenses increasing 1.5% increase. This doesn't include the impact of regulatory changes/municipal requests such as PFAS and Windham's request for expanded sewer service.
  - Capital project completed and financed as planned in 2020 and 2021 CIP
  - Positions not to exceed current level of 186.
  - Assessment increases range between 0 and 9% - with the higher increases related to capital financing costs.
  - Water Rates, without the 3% increase this year, could be as 8-9% on average

## **Communications**

### **Presented by Michelle Clements**

**External Communications:** Since March 13, our internal and external communications and outreach have appropriately shifted gears to focus on COVID 19 messages. We are reviewing all written communications to ensure consistency, accuracy, and sensitivity during this time.

Our messages have consistently been to

- ensure customers PWD is implementing aggressive measures to ensure essential water and wastewater services continue and employees are protected,
- water is safe,
- caution on flushing wipes and other inappropriate items,
- and inform customers on measures to ease the burden at this time and temporary changes to services.

During these times, we have focused on using our web site, social media, the news media, bulk emails to MOB customers (which is about 30,000 accounts), and messages on bill statements. Corporate communications is closely coordinating with environmental education to shift outreach and messaging to provide more options for remote learning. We have cancelled Drinking Water Week plans for a water treatment tour, a guided walk and the accompanying bill stuffer to focus on a social media campaign and virtual offerings.

**Internal Communications:** Engaging and informing employees during this time is certainly a priority and has its own challenges as most of us are working remotely. But PWD has risen to the occasion. Carrie regularly sends out email updates to all employees. Many departments are conducting video or phone conference meetings and we are still conducting 2 ICS conference call updates a week with supervisors. We released an April spigot that focused mostly on messages related to the pandemic and tips and techniques to deal with these unprecedented times and have created talking points to help employees answer potential questions.

## **Water Services Presented by Jim Wallace**

*“the EPA has heightened expectations for public water systems...expects operators of such systems to continue normal operations and maintenance”*

### Admin

- Eight office staff and supervisors are working remotely

### Water Field

- Social distancing
  - Forty employees at Douglass St. at the same time, especially at the beginning and end of the day
  - Worked to reduce morning gathering at stockroom by providing more notice of the next day's schedule, specifically for the Utility Specialists
  - Have employees take home assigned vehicles, report directly to jobsites, when done head straight home
- Personal Protective Equipment scenarios
  - Employees working within 6 ft. of each other in a trench, such as leak repair
  - Employees trying to communicate on a jobsite around running excavation equipment
  - Entering customer homes to install water meters
- Stay-at-home order further reduced work to essential only
  - When there is not enough field work to keep them busy, employees are home on standby
- Now, a month in, regular communication with employees is becoming more important to keep them informed, to remind them to working safely

### Transmission-Distribution

- Setup fixed crews for day and on-call schedules, keeping small group together to minimize mixing of EE's
- Projects
  - River Rd off-set main and renewed services to support MDOT's widening project
  - Repaired a transmission valve on Spring St.in Westbrook, included temporary water main that will be left in place for the time being
  - Replaced a transmission valve in preparation for the roundabout for the Brighton Ave/USM area
  - Another project on Maine Mall Rd for the Turnpike widening is delayed due to contractor being stuck in Delaware
  - Leaks in March were a normal, April is slightly below normal to date

### Utility Services

- Daily schedule is assigned and delivered remotely
- Essential Work
  - Digsafe
  - Checking for leaks, hydrants, low pressure
  - Meter service – limited to ensuring customers have water
  - Construction Inspection for water main related projects

### Treatment-Systems

- Plant operations continues, with social distancing being helped by different start times per employee
- Operators received most of the Douglass St. incoming phone calls, until Customer Service Representatives were setup to work from home
- Closely monitoring treatment chemical inventories, taking more frequent, smaller deliveries to maximize
- Down two operators, requested assistance from AMaP for distribution sampling and security checks
- Continuing to perform critical preventative maintenance on assets
- Reviewed plant start-up and operation procedures with Joel & Jim, in the event they need to cover an absence

## **Wastewater Services Presented by Scott Firmin**

Our plants and systems are operating well. Focused on careful attention to higher priority activities with an eye on how to increase activity when appropriate. Maintenance is one area where we hope to increase efforts in a bit. We are aggressively monitoring chemicals and supplies - right now we are doing well and when we order, the chemicals arrive on schedule.

Following DEP and EPA guidance, as well as Carrie's directive to maximize resiliency, minimize material and chemical use, and to simplify operations, we are preparing to begin the warmer season in an operational mode to avoid nutrient optimization at the East End. This would also position us to manage any unlikely interruptions to out biosolids hauling by having less inventory in the plant (we could allow it to build up without permit violations during the interruption).

There have been no COVID-19 related compliance issues.

To maintain a productive workforce, we are actively creating physical separation. In systems, Charlene has employees taking vehicles home and then reporting directly to assigned locations, often by community. Currently, to avoid too many people in one place we are alternating employees daily. Several employees have access to our Citrix environment and are able to be productive remotely. In treatment, we have one person at each remote plant 5 days/wk., with a second short shift at Westbrook to complete PMs and to accomplish dewatering in a single day. The East End has limited staff isolated to specific assignments in specific parts of the plants. One maintenance person works at the plant each day. Dustin reports to work 3 days per week to support staff. We have developed a close proximity working SOP that involves PPE we already had one hand. They are practicing with that right now in preparation for upcoming team effort maintenance. The work is getting done. Our employees are doing a wonderful job under weird circumstances and we are certainly appreciative of the board's support in our current staffing modes.

We are actively capacity and content for remote work – actually a chance to catch up with those things we never seemed we would have time do (compliments ongoing CMMS efforts).

Flushed items causing some minor issues – aggressive wet well cleaning and media efforts may be helping but if you know who's flushing dish towels in Cape Elizabeth, ask them to stop.

Regular contact with DEP and stakeholders. From involvement in some state and regional calls, we are consistent with what I'm seeing in other places (at times a bit ahead).

Biosolids item – last month we discussed the next term in our agreement. I'm regularly speaking with representatives from Casella. They are taking similar steps, although today we discussed the impact of reductions in bulky solid waste they need to mix with our biosolids due to slowing economic conditions. After some deliberation and several discussions, Casella says they will negotiate the final term. Based on general support, the dynamics of the past month, Carrie and I recommend that we negotiate an extension with Casella. This will be delayed as we all work through whatever is in front of us.

## **Asset Management and Planning**

## Presented by Chris Crovo

*AMaP Divisions consisting of Engineering, Facility and Environmental Services - 46 employees, 37 working remotely and the remaining are currently rotating shifts and on call to cover the Lab, Facilities, Inventory, and SCADA*

### **AMaP Engineering and Facility Services**

Main Extensions and New services –

- Everyone is working from home and connected (7 people)
- Phone calls are routed to homes and emails are being responded to
- Call volume and email volume back to normal for this time of year (Very Busy)
- Overall – Technicians and Engineers not restricted performing the job
- Inspections services inspecting MEANS projects -Currently 3 main extension projects along with numerous services. Water Main Replacements projects have started. Inspection is being supported by Water Operations and supplemented by contract inspection services.

Water Main Replacement Projects-

- The current projects that are ongoing are Portland – Preble, Brighton(Roundabout), Newbury St. and Falmouth – Leighton and Gray Road
- Engineers are working from home to support the projects. Inspections is supported as noted above.
- Holding on awarding contracts for water main replacements in South Portland on Burwell, Mt Vernon, E Street and Highland. We have to April 27th to decide. Contractors have been notified.
- Standish – Oak Hill and Portland – Motley St. projects starting April 13<sup>th</sup> and at the end of April Portland -Warren Ave, Mackworth

Vertical Projects – WW and Water Treatment and Pump Stations and Facilities

- As now contractors have elected to continuing working by practicing social distancing. Inspection for these project will be outside contract Engineering. On-going projects that require field present are in Portland – Fore River PS, East End and Cape HVAC project, East End Primary Project. Approximately 25 projects are in various states of design all being supported by our Engineers, Technicians and Consultants primarily working remotely.

SCADA-

- 3 –technicians working from home with SCADA Laptops – on call. Moving forward with W&C to program Chlorine back-up feed to replace Ozone if necessary. Supporting ongoing capital projects including Cape UV and HVAC upgrades, Fore River, Littlejohn, and Baxter Blvd. pump stations.

Facilities – Inventory, Garage and Facility Technicians – 9 employees

- Currently rotating one person in each day to cover Inventory, and Facilities with the Garage personnel (2) on call. Josh developed a fillable PDF stock issue slips so inventory can be preordered for field personnel.

### **Environmental Services**

#### Source Protection

- All working from home.
- Have established communications with Code Enforcement Officers in the seven lakefront towns to stay in touch about contract work that is going on.
- Two Lake Office staff are now collecting distribution system samples to assist Water Ops.

#### Security

- Rod and two of his security staff are doing a once-daily Lower Bay patrol by truck.
- Security is also conducting security checks of some water storage facilities to assist Water Ops.

#### IPT

- Working from home. Contacted DEP to inform them that we have suspended sampling industries for now. Fortunately the sampling crew had nearly completed all sampling needed to be done by Spring.
- Enforcement and permitting still ongoing remotely.

#### Lab

- Labs are staffed Monday through Saturday. One person is assigned to each Lab (Ozone, EE) daily. Schedule is generally 8-12 but once the work is done they are leaving and working from home for the rest of the day.
- Lab is running all routine compliance samples as well as samples that come up (leaks, etc.).
- Field people are sending e-mails ahead of time which helps with scheduling lab set up work.
- If there are off-hours testing needs just let them know. They are in constant contact with one another and we'll find someone who can come in.

#### Environmental Education & Outreach

- Working from home. Working on developing video lessons to share with teachers and coordinating with Michelle on any social media or email communication with the public to be sure there is a consistent message.

#### **Southern Maine Regional Water Council**

- Meeting each Tuesday (Zoom) on the agenda is – Mutual Aid, Chemical Inventories, sharing COVID-19 Policies and PUC rules and regulation changes.

#### **Lucity**

- We are meeting with Lucity and supporting the integration development. Work is continuing on Asset and Work configuration.
- Looking to ramp up. Lucity has freed up resources to concentrate on the project. Will be reaching out for more resources.

**Legal**  
**Presented by Donna Katsiaficas**

Legislation passed at the federal level dealing with emergency sick leave and emergency family medical leave required a lot of research and incorporation into policies.

Department of Labor Guidance on the new laws has also had to be reviewed to determine how the new laws should be interpreted.

Organized the remote meeting packages and process with Carrie W.

I have assisted the GM in contacting municipal legal resources to try to get legislation changed that would allow a public entity like PWD to get reimbursed for costs related to giving emergency medical and FMLA leave

I have assisted on the drafting and execution of PWD seasonal activation policy. This has included conversations with the PUC and with City of Portland legal counsel. I has also included the drafting of correspondence with the Governor's office to request an executive order allowing water utilities more time to activate water service.

Have drafted two contracts with developers of two major Fore Street projects (58 and 100) that lay out the terms and conditions of water service to their projects.

Complied with an Order of the PUC and filed a response on 4-13 on a billing matter that has been pending at the PUC for 2 years (property on Commercial Street). The water bill is worth \$15,000.

Continue to process routine contracts

Continue to process real estate matters including easements and licenses and also real estate matters related to projects (Depot Street)

Work on issue related to contract and bid issues, including what can legally be expected of a contractor in these pandemic times, and what PWD and contractor responsibilities are in bid and contract situations.