

Sewerage and Water Board Task Force
January 9, 2019 1:30 pm
Sewerage and Water Board Board Room, 625 St. Joseph St.

Roll Call:

Ramsey Green, Chair: Present

Councilmember Banks, Vice Chair: Present

Board of Liquidation, Poco Sloss: Present

La Engineering Society, Dr. Robichaux: Present for David Gereighty

SWBNO, Ghassan Korban: Present

New Orleans & Co, Cheryl Teamer: Present

Business Council of New Orleans, Elisa Speranza: Present

Ramsey Green, Chair opens meeting

Roll call

Poco Sloss motions to call to order, Cheryl Teamer seconds, meeting called to order.

Ramsey Green: Our deliverable is due Jan 31. Thank you to Tyler for keeping us all on task and keeping our information together. Congratulations to Councilmember Banks for joining the SWB next week, a vote of the people. The order of business today is simple. Tyler will give us where we are today. Dr. Robichaux you wrote us a document - I'll give you a couple minutes to go through that at the end.

Councilmember Banks motions to approve the minutes, Elisa Speranza seconds, minutes approved.

Ramsey Green, Chair: Tyler would you like to run through your slides then we will let Dr. Robichaux go ahead then we can go over what we've covered.

Tyler Antrup: Today we will start to go through the draft recommendations. One week from today we will look at those in final form then I will distribute a draft report on the 23rd, review and provide comments on the 28th, finally reconvene on the 30th and finalize report for distribution.

Elisa Speranza: I'll be unable to attend on the 30th so if I'm able I'd like to vote by proxy.

Poco Sloss: Ghassan we have a strategic planning session on the 30th.

Discussion around changing of the date to the 28th or the 29th, then changing the previous dates - ensuring everyone has enough time to look through the document and provide feedbacks.

Final draft circulated on the 22nd via email and publicly available on the website, send comments back via email by the 25th, final meeting is on the 28th to ratify final report.

Discussion around ensuring Rep Hilferty is informed of the recommendations sometime between the 16th and 22nd, someone will sit down and talk with her.

Tyler goes through his presentation:

Funding, coordination, equity, and mission creep were all addressed by experts.

From the community we heard support for a stormwater utility and support for a unified approach. There was a general call for accountability and leadership - these values were more important to the community than the specific logistics.

Elisa Speranza: However, most people were supportive of our recommendation to take privatization off the table.

Ramsey Green, Chair: This task force has taken privatization off the table and that happened quickly.

Tyler Antrup: To revisit our desired outcomes - we added improving efficiency and accountability as well as direct engagement with ratepayers (these came from the community).

At the last meeting we discussed a phased in approach.

Short term - SWB looking at management, customer service, and establishing a citizen advisory board

Dr. Robichaux: There are two consumer advocates on the board of directors now, how do they play into the citizens group. Don't they do that now?

Elisa Speranza: It's not a governing board, it's an advisory council. They don't have governing powers but they are an outreach body.

Elisa Speranza: To the extent that our report will be a public document, it may be useful for us to document the positive things that are going on already.

Ramsey Green: Did you put the rate-payer advocate piece in here?

Tyler Antrup: So I think that is still up in the air, with how specific the recommendation will be.

Ramsey Green: The main difference is that this advisory committee is voluntary and the rate payer advocate is a paid position.

Ghassan Korban: I am supportive of establishing a citizen advisory board. How would that board form, how do we know they are capturing the stakeholders we want at the table?

Tyler Antrup: The task force can choose to get more detailed. If we put forth the recommendation as it's written it would be up to you how to form it.

Elisa Speranza: Some of our recommendations will be legislative and this will not be one of those.

Tyler Antrup: Largely the recommendations in the short term are to you (Ghassan).

Medium term strategy: fund drainage with a fee - consolidated city and SWB system - as of now in drafting I have not specified where this should live, develop system master plans.

Councilmember Banks: Passing the drainage fee may not be an easiest thing to do, but I've been having conversations with people and people understand when you talk to them.

Ghassan Korban: There needs to be one system and one responsible party and I think everyone is in favor of that.

Tyler Antrup: Do you think that the idea of consolidating the system rises to the level of its own recommendation?

Discussion around the fee and the single entity idea feed off of each other and they both necessitate the other.

Tyler Antrup: Developing a master plan looks like a 100 year vision.

Ghassan Korban: You build a system that you want to last 100 years.

Long term strategy: Governance review (should we switch to a PBC or a Regional Utility? - determining if a governance change is needed), systems integration (levees, canal pumps, drainage - connected but governed separately)

Elisa Speranza: I want this piece to be very aspirational, with public support and the right model SWB can become something we are all proud of.

Tyler Antrup: As we have started to settle on these it's important that we look at if we have missed anything.

Discussion around adding some sort of loan to replace lost funding from August 5th flood as a recommendation.

Poco Sloss: Just to give out our report then leave seems wrong. We should continue to exist in an advisory capacity.

Discussion around exploring putting all the power for SWB at the city level.

Elisa Speranza: Could we put in the medium term recommendations that we take a look at taking away state power?

Cheryl Teamer: The City Council should be able to make decisions around this.

Ghassan Korban: Looking at legislative needs to accomplish goals- I know there will be times when answers aren't clear.

Cheryl Teamer: Maybe a recommendation is that the state legislator does a study.

Ramsey noted additions: Seek legal clarification on drainage fee and other issues (short term), a bridge loan or turn around financing, etc - investigate available funds (short term).

Discussion around how a loan would impact our budget.

Ghassan Korban: I wouldn't specify the number but I would say emergency funding expense.

Ramsey Green: Basically to make up for the loss.

Ghassan Korban: This is so hypothetical. We should just make the ask

Ramsey Green: Basically a stabilization fund.

Ramsey Green: The '92 CEA doesn't work and we have to consolidate drainage into one place.

Revisiting short term:

We've added 4 things to the short term, but is there anything we need to develop?

Dr. Robichaux: I'd like to add to the interface with the rate payers that some people are still very unsatisfied with their bills.

Tyler Antrup: Part of the reason I initially put the citizen advisory board in the short term is because that group informs the other two.

Ghassan Korban: We are beefing up customer service to manage these situations specifically related to these billing issues.

Ramsey Green: A lot of these short term things are Ghassan's shop.

Ghassan Korban: Truthfully, you could put ongoing behind a lot of these and the legislators could see that.

Elisa Speranza: There may be some legislative changes that need to be made so you can have more flexibility. We should include those.

Discussion around which legislative issues the SWB has been running into, specifically civil service. Possibility of creating another set of policies that match SWB's needs better.

Cheryl Teamer: There's a coalition of businesses that came together to support changes in the Civil Service Commission.

Ramsey Green: The notion of giving some time period of money, flexibility of hiring, an advisory body, and a timeline. For the money piece we will talk about the loss after august 5th and replenishing that. Medium term - converting from a state to a city charter agency, '92 CEA.

Councilmember Banks: Politics is about perception and we need to make sure that we show our positive steps and strengths.

Elisa Speranza: The preamble could definitely cover that I think.

Dr. Robichaux presents to the task force:

In spite of the 8 people representing the citizens on the SWB, I have repeatedly heard that the SWB is not responsive to the individual customer. Adding Councilmember Banks was a good step. I believe adding two engineers (one civil and one electrical) to the board would be another good step. This was presented by the presenter from the ABS group, he stated that experts were helpful. I've been working to help Ghassan.

Cheryl Teamer: Are you making a recommendation?

Dr. Robichaux: I'm making a personal recommendation.

Ramsey Green: I want to be cautious about getting into power and pump issues specifically with this task force.

Opens to public comment.

Public comment:

Lloyd Lazard:

I want to talk about the concept of everyone paying for drainage. Who is everyone? Every property owner? I'm also concerned about the citizen advisory committee - it's a good idea, but is it biased? I find that those focus on college graduates and that's a small percentage of our population. I don't understand the concept of regional utility because I don't see any other Parishes surrendering their source of revenue. The state thought that the first thing that was needed was to drain the city. Then it was about creating the SWB. It should be a part of the suggestion of the board that New Orleans manage what is New Orleans'.

Allen Arnold:

*See appendix

Nathan Lott:

Water Collaborative - working there for two more days. The topic of groundwater management is kind of a secret sleeper in your recommendations. If you really mean subsidence mitigation, I suggest you spell that out. For the drainage fee model - specify if it's on top of the user pays or on its own.