

Sewerage and Water Board Task Force
December 12, 2018 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 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

Meeting is called to order.

Elisa Speranza makes a motion to approve minutes, second by Councilmember Banks, approved.

Discussion of outreach meetings:

Elisa Speranza: no one showed up at the East meeting, may have to find a way to reach out to that community. We did have a conversation with Councilmember Nguyen

Councilmember Banks: Not sure how to move forward regarding the East. The other 4 meetings have gone very well.

Elisa Speranza: Councilmember Nguyen suggested videotaping Tyler's presentation and distributing that.

Ramsey Green, Chair: Tyler has the input forthcoming. Reminder on timeline - we have to deliver by January 31st to City Council and Orleans Parish delegation.

Tyler Antrup: In consideration of the fact that this is our last scheduled meeting, we should map out the remainder of the schedule. We should look to meet 2 to 3 more times in January. Maybe 9, 16, and 30. That way the 30th will hopefully just be the acceptance of the report.

Ramsey Green, Chair: Let's say by the end of this meeting we talk about our general take on our recommendations. We would come back on the 9th. Do we start drafting the narrative over the next 3 weeks?

Tyler Antrup: I'd like to get out a summary of the outreach feedback over the next week or two to see if that changes our course at all.

Cheryl Teamer: Should we tentatively hold the 31st in case we need it?

Elisa Speranza: I would say we hold 23 as well in case we need it

Tyler Antrup: In the interim I'll send out holds for everyone's calendar for those dates. You should all expect to receive the summary of the outreach meetings in the next week or two.

Presentation:

Eric Rothstein and Andy Reese - experts in stormwater utilities

Eric Rothstein:

We recognize that you have enormous challenges before you, but they are not necessarily unique. There are lessons to be drawn from other communities.

Looking at rapidly cleaning, repairing, and transforming the collection system.

It is important that you leverage existing organizational and administrative capacity.

What this Task Force decides is the start of a very long path.

Remaining options are: separate utility, SWB remaining, and public benefit corporation.

Discussion around public benefit corporation:

Providing a level of reporting on performance that is extraordinarily transparent.

Dr. Robichaux: Does the citizen have an avenue into the PBC where they feel like they're being heard?

Eric Rothstein: We will specifically address that, but it's important that you structure your own model that works for you and your community

Andy Reese:

I have worked in about 110 entities nationally and internationally.

There are certain principles that we use when we build entities and look at results, but out of the 3,000 stormwater utilities - no two are alike. So we have experience to draw from but will have to look at what works best for New Orleans.

Andy reviewed Charlotte-Mecklenburg system - hybrid approach. Two separate utilities with one public face. County runs the big system and city runs the collection system.

Discussion of Nashville system. Was primarily a streets program. Moved storm water out of public works and into metro water services. Water is water whether or not it has proximity to roadways. Currently run half by consultants. Drainage was taken away from streets but a good relationship was created with public works. These stormwater systems are not just functional, they're beautiful - Nashville and Atlanta have done this and it spurred economic development.

In Nashville: From the bottom of the catch basins, down - belongs to water. Street sweeping belongs to public works.

Ramsey Green, Chair: Who owns repairs to catch basins?

Andy Reese: There's a good amount of cost sharing

NEORS - Cleveland area (northeast Ohio) - only picks up the drainage at about 100 acres. The rest belongs to the community.

It's important to walk before you run. With incoming revenue comes a need to manage that incoming revenue.

Elisa Speranza: Something we may want to consider is a phased in approach so we don't overwhelm whatever we set up.

Setting up a five year plan that ends with a balanced budget in five years or writing increments into the ordinance are ways to handle changes

People complain for factual things, but it's mostly an emotional based complaint - a culture of honor is important.

Councilmember Banks: If streets are flooding, what did they do to fix it?

Andy Reese: They could get water out by creating flow paths because they had more slope.

Nashville - when they got a complaint would put door hangers within a two block radius asking if people had complaints so they could fix it while they were there.

Going after the worst first has been helpful and communicating with people that their streets might flood, but water will not get into their home

Eric Rothstein:

There's been an evolution in the way people are going about these institutional structures.

The most significant thing that is problematic about traditional contracting systems is that the public engagement component is part of the tasks of the project. Having community representatives at the table changes things a lot.

Cheryl Teamer: Can you give us an example? How do we ensure integrity in the process?

Eric Rothstein: Actual representatives that are part of community groups (green infrastructure groups, for instance) participate in the management of the overall project and contract delivery. Having community based members in the discussions changes things.

Ramsey Green, Chair: One nuance I want to suggest - on the community based model structure - you're referring to an infrastructure based. Something we talked about recently was a rate payer funded advocacy entity - where the rate payer pays for an entity that advocates for lower rates.

Eric Rothstein: That's not an uncommon thing and it part of what I think we have in mind here. There's issues around rates, but there's also issues around prioritization of projects.

Andy Reese: It kind of serves as a watchdog group

Elisa Speranza: In the time we have left, I'd like to talk about a phased implementation. Maybe we can set forth a vision for the future and look at what we can do in the interim to overlay what needs to get done over what we have already.

It's important to discuss the short-term and the long-run, but we need to address immediate needs. We can't get to the long run unless we take care of what needs to be done, early.

Discussion around major network system and collection system.

The SWB has to be hand in glove with whatever system you're creating.

The system you have isn't working, so you do need to create something new.

It could be under the SWB and maybe a sort of task force within the SWB. There are important things that need to be a part of that.

Providing adequate funding and dedicated resources is important. It could live within SWB.

Ghassan Korban: Every component of the system is in bad shape. To fix one part of the system and have a dedicated fee for it - what do I do with the rest of the system when all of the pieces work together?

Keep the millage, add the stormwater user fee, and start with a lower fee.

One coordinated organization - large system funded by current millage. Other section funded by Stormwater fee that is focused on the immediate needs

Characteristics of institutional structures that perform well: smaller board size, board members that are qualified and responsive, they are representative of the community.

With a new director, we need to consider what works best with the current system

Ramsey Green, Chair: I've been considering why we are sitting here - August 5th flood, broken brand, and technical issues.

Presenter: The process is critical of standing this up. It's important to consider how we will pay for it, how it will work, and how we roll it out.

Presenter: Rather than a master plan, fix the projects while you're developing the plan. It builds public trust and there's not enough time

Dr. Robichaux: You missed technical oversight. The Louisiana auditor was to recommend a board of advisory engineers to the SWB. Have those been successful elsewhere?

Presenter: Out of Detroit - they have a very involved customer outreach program. Whatever oversight is happening, it needs to not become a bogging down of project delivery.

Having some kind of new entity that divides the new day is important.

Public comment:

Lloyd Lazard

I want to address three things. Our environment is a little different than the places the presentation was based on. From a master plan, in terms of an internal plan on how people want to govern - that can be put in immediately. We have a new mayor, new director, new task force. All our entities are working separately but collectively on solving a problem. I'm going to stand in front of you and talk about maritime law. We are surrounded by water. I am working with UNO to create a museum of maritime history. No one owns the river. You are only dealing with one aspect of the river. We have never looked at the holistic aspect of how to use water. The people that appoint people to SWB do not pay a water bill and they should start paying a water bill.

Elisa Speranza: The folks that screen the candidates are themselves exempt from paying drainage fees.

Tanya James:

Executive director of Central City Renaissance Alliance. Our work was really impactful. We got to understand that everyday citizens do care about water. We are excited that everyone is looking at new ideas and concepts. We should look at the system and who the experts are on the ground. There is an infrastructure for community collaboration. How do we come up with solutions around living with water instead of just managing the water? What's important is good stewardship. I welcome partnerships, but I am concerned that the experts on the ground are not recognized and brought to the table. Not just on dialogue but on decision making.

Nathan Lott:

Water collaborative. I want to lift up the potential to create some sort of systems and benefit fund. Specifically looking at retrofitting properties for low income folks. The community adaptation program could possibly be scaled city-wide with funding. In the final report I would urge you to include different outcomes that need to be taken by various levels of government.

Allison DeJong:

Senior water manager at propeller. Discussion around fixed vehicle contracting on a task-order basis. If you're focusing on equity in procurement in contracting as well it can be a challenging way to do project delivery. Important that small businesses are involved in the beginning.

Ramsey Green, Chair: Tyler and I went to the Water wise gulf south event last night. It's all about bringing water management to people's homes. Nathan - if you have thoughts we can email out the report ahead of time and those who haven't been able to come down can submit comment.

Dana Eness:

Front yard initiative – Urban Conservancy. We replace people's pavement with something more permeable. We have collected data on the over 50 homes that have been completed. To what extent are we stimulating the green sector with job creation? We track that metric in terms of how much each project costs. We are seeing a 4 to 1 match by homeowners in terms of what they're putting into it.

Poco Sloss moves to adjourn, Cheryl Teamer seconded, adjourned.