

## **REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

### **February 8, 2021**

---

The Regular Meeting of the Lehigh County Authority Board of Directors was called to order at 12:03 p.m. on Monday, February 8, 2021, Chairman Brian Nagle presiding. The meeting was held via video and audio advanced communication technology ("ACT"), using the Zoom internet application including telephone option, due to the COVID-19 pandemic emergency. Each Board member and other attendees of the meeting were able to hear each other attendee and be heard by each other attendee. The public could also participate in the meeting via ACT, using the Zoom internet application including telephone option. A Roll Call of Board members present was taken. Chairman Brian Nagle, Scott Bieber, Richard Bohner, Norma Cusick, Ted Lyons, Kevin Baker, Linda Rosenfeld, Jeff Morgan, and Amir Famili were present for the duration of the meeting.

Solicitor Michael Gaul of KingSpry was present along with Authority Staff, Liesel Gross, Ed Klein, John Parsons, Chris Moughan, Chuck Volk, Susan Sampson, Andrew Moore, Phil DePoe, Mark Bowen, Lisa Miller, and Todd Marion.

Chairman Nagle announced that the Board received their packets electronically and a hardcopy was not mailed out due to the snowstorm. He also noted that Liesel Gross sent an email to the Board further explaining the cash flows associated with the Customer Hardship Fund that was approved at the last meeting.

#### **REVIEW OF AGENDA**

Liesel Gross stated there are no changes to the published agenda. However, there will be an Executive Session after the regular meeting to discuss matters of personnel. Chairman Nagle announced there will also be a meeting of the Board's Strategic Planning Subcommittee after the Executive Session.

#### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

##### **January 25, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

Richard Bohner noted a grammatical error. On a motion by Richard Bohner, seconded by Norma Cusick, the Board approved the minutes of the January 25, 2021 Board meeting as corrected (7-0). Scott Bieber and Ted Lyons abstained.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None.

#### **ACTION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS**

##### **LCA 2020 Action Plan Status Update & Vision for 2021**

Liesel Gross gave a PowerPoint presentation to review the 2020 goals and vision for 2021. She explained that the goals for 2020 were set around the Effective Utility Management (EUM) framework that was established by the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the American Water Works Association (AWWA), and several other industry leader associations. The EUM framework establishes the ten attributes for an effectively managed utility. In 2017, the Authority completed an internal assessment, and four goal categories were outlined: 1) Product Quality, 2) Financial Viability, 3) Infrastructure Stability, and 4) Employee and Leadership

Development. These combined goals make up the “LCA 2020 Action Plan.” The list of 2020’s most critical goals were reviewed, highlighting the status of those goals and their level of progress. The settlement agreement with the City of Allentown and the Regional Sewer Capacity Plan were two important goals that were completed in 2020. Other goals on the list were either partially completed or not completed, primarily due to adjusting the Authority’s priorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. She highlighted other noteworthy events of 2020, including the completion of the Park Pump Station rehabilitation project, the connection of a new large customer to the system, operational emergencies and main breaks, response to Tropical Storm Isaias in August, and the COVID-19 pandemic emergency response.

Ms. Gross then reviewed five of the Authority’s top Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). In 2020, the KPIs were adjusted to match the criteria established by the AWWA utility benchmarking program, where applicable. The KPIs review included Preventive Maintenance, Financial Performance, Compliance, Employee Statistics, and Safety. She highlighted various drivers for performance in each KPI area.

Ms. Gross then reviewed the goals established for 2021. An organizational goal has been established for this year to update the Authority’s strategic plan. The next steps in the strategic planning effort include convening the Board subcommittee today, the selection of a consultant, conceptual plan development, and development of an implementation plan with sufficient detail to be included in the 2022 budget process. Other internal organizational initiatives for 2021 include providing more support, guidelines and training for managers, employee re-engagement, and a process improvement program.

Scott Bieber asked for examples of a large and small process improvement that the staff might undertake. Liesel Gross stated that an example of a large process improvement would be to redevelop the method used to generate sewer bills for the municipal signatories. The current process includes collection of data from many different entities, and processing the billing documents through the use of very old spreadsheets that are linked together and require manual data entry. An example of a small process improvement that was recently completed includes the development of an electronic system for recording customer service inquiries, replacing a paper-based system.

Ms. Gross also reviewed the highlights of the top 15 departmental goals for 2021. Scott Bieber asked for an example of corrective maintenance and a description of projects that would fall into the corrective maintenance category. Chris Moughan explained that any work that is not scheduled is tracked as corrective maintenance, as well as work that required more than 90 minutes of time to complete. Some additional Board discussion followed.

### **Suburban Division – Fixed Base Meter Reading Stations – Design Phase**

Chuck Volk gave an overview of the project to install the Fixed Base Meter Reading Stations necessary to implement the Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system in the Suburban Division. Mr. Volk explained he is seeking approval of the design phase of the project that involves design and permit approval of eight towers to be erected at various locations throughout the service area. The towers are needed to transmit meter reading data back to the Authority main office, which will eliminate the need for Authority personnel to drive around and collect the meter data each month. Amy Kunkel described the consultant selection process and the recommendation of award to Maser Consulting. While not the lowest cost proposal, Maser Consulting was chosen because of their extensive background in equipment and tower installations and cellular site projects. Chuck Volk added that the Authority’s meter equipment provider, Sensus, has already performed

propagation studies for the Authority to determine the location and height of antenna structures and the signal coverage of the eight sites to be further explored in the design phase. Some of the recommended tower sites are owned by the Authority, and others will require additional exploration regarding easements, township permits and height limitations.

Scott Bieber asked how tall the towers are proposed to be. Amy Kunkel explained tower heights will vary from 45 feet to 105 feet depending on location. Mr. Bieber also asked if there will be Authority personnel attending the municipal meetings along with the consultant. Amy Kunkel replied that there will be Authority personnel, engineers, and a solicitor present and noted that Maser Consulting was chosen because of their experience with the process of permitting and installation of telecommunications towers for other utilities. Solicitor Gaul noted that each municipality will have their own zoning rules and regulations regarding the towers.

Kevin Baker asked if the cost of the project had any offsetting cost reductions or other benefits that could be quantified. Chuck Volk stated that a detailed cost-benefit analysis was not completed but explained that having an automated process to collect meter readings would result in reduced staff time associated with meter reading. In addition, other benefits of the system would be available to streamline customer service and billing functions. Richard Bohner commented that the cost of obtaining individual meter readings when a customer moves in or out of the service area should also be considered as an efficiency of this system, as employees would not be driving out to obtain a single meter reading each time.. Liesel Gross noted that the Authority processes approximately 150 final bills every month.

Jeff Morgan asked if the Authority could rent space on its towers to other entities who need similar capabilities, which could be an additional source of revenue for the Authority. Amy Kunkel noted that leasing of tower space is a common practice and the Authority could explore this as part of this project. In addition, she noted Sensus has indicated that the towers could possibly be used to read water meters for neighboring utilities and municipalities, which could result in some cost-sharing benefit.

Amir Famili commented that this is a productivity project and part of the proposal should show the equal balance of benefit to investment. He said it would be difficult to vote on a project like this without knowing the productivity value for the project. Chairman Nagle suggested each project presented to the Board should have some form of cost analysis included in it, although most of the Authority's projects are required due to aging infrastructure or regulatory requirements. Chairman Nagle also asked for further explanation regarding the reason for selection of Maser Consulting, who was not the lowest bidder. Chuck Volk explained that Maser Consulting is the most qualified for this work because they have worked on a significant number of similar projects and have dedicated staff with experience in seeking the necessary permit approvals.

Amir Famili suggested that along with providing a cost-benefit analysis, the Authority should investigate whether other towers can be rented prior to starting the design of towers. Liesel Gross commented that a complete cost-benefit analysis cannot be completed without more accurate cost information. The work in the design phase would provide the Authority with a more defined review of the tower locations, options for rental fees or revenue, and cost for construction.

Chairman Nagle noted that the Board has questions that need more time to be answered and suggested that they table this project until further information can be provided and a cost benefit analysis is completed. Jeff Morgan commented that the majority of projects approved by the Board are regulatory driven and a cost-benefit analysis is not necessary, but in this case the Authority

should have additional information available to provide the analysis. Scott Bieber stated that he has no problem with approving Maser Consulting for this project.

The Board tabled this project until further information regarding cost-benefit analysis is provided.

### **MONTHLY PROJECT UPDATES / INFORMATION ITEMS**

Liesel Gross gave an overview of the items listed for the February 22, 2021 meeting, noting that the agenda will be full.

Scott Bieber asked if the feasibility study is still expected this month regarding the Trexlertown Wastewater storage facility project. Phil DePoe reported that HDR will provide the report soon with more information to follow.

### **STAFF COMMENTS**

Liesel Gross informed the Board that she will be attending the Lehigh County Commissioners' General Services Committee meeting on Wednesday, February 10, 2021 to provide an update on the Authority's achievements in 2020. The meeting will be held virtually via Zoom if anyone wishes to attend.

### **SOLICITOR'S COMMENTS**

None.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS / OTHER COMMENTS**

Jennifer McKenna, City of Allentown Office of Compliance, complemented the Board and Staff regarding the presentation of the 2020 Action Plan and the measures related to the Authority's maintenance program. She asked if the equipment and material costs can be added to the maintenance measurement in the future. Liesel Gross stated that the Authority's system already captures equipment and materials costs, but the measure presented is based on personnel hours dedicated to corrective and preventive maintenance so that it is aligned with the AWWA's standard format for utility performance benchmarking. Mark Bowen explained that the hours, equipment, materials, and all vehicles in the various categories are captured in the Authority's maintenance management system. Ms. McKenna followed up asking if this information is part of the Capital Plan decision-making process. Chris Moughan noted that maintenance spending for each asset group is available for purposes of further analysis.

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Chairman Nagle announced that an Executive Session will be held after the regular meeting to discuss matters of personnel.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 1:30 p.m.

---

Richard Bohner

Secretary