



MEMORANDUM

EUGENE WATER & ELECTRIC BOARD

Rely on us.

TO: Commissioners Simpson, Brown, Helgeson, Manning and Mital
FROM: Lance Robertson, Public Affairs Manager, and
Erin Erben, Power Resources and Strategic Planning Manager
DATE: May 20, 2016
SUBJECT: Utility of the Future community engagement framework
OBJECTIVE: Inform Board about project timeline and scope

Issue

Commissioners provided management with feedback at the Jan. 5, Feb. 2 and March 15 Board meetings regarding a potential community engagement effort related to the EWEB's strategic initiatives and future direction, which initially grew out of the pricing reform discussion. The Board's guidance at the three previous sessions has assisted staff in creating the community engagement timeline and framework that is outlined in this memo.

Discussion

Previous feedback from Commissioners indicates a desire to sponsor a community conversation on a broader scope of issues than just pricing reform, to help convey the "why" behind EWEB's pricing actions, and to engage a wider audience of customers than the initial concept of a citizen advisory committee. Commissioners also expressed a desire to take more time to plan and execute a community engagement strategy. We know that asking the public to weigh in on a utility strategic plan process or document is unlikely to generate broad interest. However, introducing a new General Manager to our customers creates a bigger customer engagement opportunity.

With this in mind, Public Affairs and Power & Strategic Planning have created an outline of activities to engage the public on a number of strategic issues, as well as learn more about what topics resonate highest with our customers. A broad-to-narrow approach is planned that will help us focus tactics and resources as we move forward in a more dynamic way rather than being prescriptive from the start. The overarching objective is to gather credible information to assist the Board and management in making sound decisions about the utility's future by highlighting common community values and priorities, as well as identifying areas where there are more divergent opinions and tradeoffs in play.

Timing of the effort will be coordinated and sequenced with two other key initiatives that are equally important to the utility's future:

- Continued planning, communications and eventual construction of EWEB's alternate water source on the Willamette River.
- Launch of new and enhanced customer services that are enabled by EWEB's modernization program, specifically, advanced metering.

Both of these other efforts have significant customer-engagement components, so we will need to ensure that

we sequence and coordinate our efforts. Flexibility is also required to adjust to the needs and preferences of the incoming General Manager, as well as navigating around local and national elections and any other similar “visioning” initiatives under way with our public agency partners.

Public Affairs and Power & Strategic Planning have collaborated on a framework that has three main phases, which can be easily shifted and adjusted as needed, with the working theme of “Listen, Learn and Launch.” Below are brief descriptions of the process that has been developed.

Phase 1: Listen (approximately 5-6 months)

The initial phase of the effort will be focused on information sharing about major utility trends, as well as gathering feedback from community leaders and interested stakeholders on their priorities and interests related to our business. This phase has two main elements:

- General “meet and greet” sessions with the new General Manager.
- One-on-one “listening sessions” with key community leaders.

The hiring of a new General Manager presents an opportunity to further the public’s knowledge about the changes taking place in the electric utility industry, potential impacts to EWEB, and options the utility could take to address those changes. The initial phase of community engagement would leverage community interest in meeting the new GM in to gain a better understanding of how that person intends to lead EWEB into the future.

Meet-and-greet sessions also present two-way learning opportunities. Through speaking engagements, and meetings with industry peers and other community leaders, the GM will have the opportunity to solicit feedback about EWEB, its current or impending initiatives, and how the electric utility can best meet the challenges of a changing utility landscape while still meeting the needs of the community. At the same time, community members have the chance to develop a relationship with the new GM and learn more about his/her values, priorities and interests. Meet and greets will be fluid and personalized conversations, but we intend to have consistent questions/themes prepared in advance to help focus the feedback collected.

Simultaneously, EWEB will conduct one-on-one “listening sessions” with selected community members representing a variety of interests, including the business community, low-income advocates, elected leaders, government agencies, major customers, and others who are influential or knowledgeable in the community. The primary intent of these sessions is to assist EWEB in identifying issues, themes and opinions that will create a framework for a broader public engagement effort in 2017. Commissioners will be asked to suggest specific individuals for interviews to ensure a broad representation of customers.

The first task will be to develop interview questions for the listening sessions that tie into the major themes Commissioners have been discussing as part of your strategic planning workshops (resiliency, growth and retention, regional water provision, etc.). The goal is to obtain meaningful feedback about perceptions of where EWEB is heading, but also gain insight into where they think EWEB should be heading or focusing its efforts. Commissioners will be asked to assist in helping Public Affairs craft the questions we intend to ask during these listening sessions.

Public Affairs will consider hiring an outside consultant to help refine the questions, conduct the interviews and provide an impartial analysis of the feedback. The estimated cost is not expected to exceed \$25,000, as the bulk of the work will be performed in-house. For example, we do not anticipate a consultant would participate in the GM meet and greets; however, a staff person would be present to take notes. Customer comments from the GM sessions and individual “listening” interviews will be combined, analyzed and used to help drive the focus areas and tactics for Phase 2.

Phase 2: Learn (early 2017)

Starting in early 2017, focus will shift to involving a broader segment of the community in discussions about the issues, challenges and opportunities EWEB faces as it navigates into an uncertain future. Based on feedback obtained in Phase 1, and input from Commissioners, some of these efforts may include:

- One or more “open house” type events where customers at large will be invited to discuss their vision for the utility of the future with utility experts. These could take the form of panel discussions, with a subsequent opportunity for small group discussions, or a number of other formats suitable for general public engagement.
- An online survey or “crowdsourcing” opportunity to gather comments and ideas.
- Continued General Manager community engagement sessions.
- Issue-specific community learning workshops and/or “invite only” demographic-specific open houses. Using the broad to narrow framework, we may want to elicit more in-depth feedback on one or more topics, or may want to target a group of customers who have not been well-represented during the process so far. Commissioners would be asked to suggest individual customers for participation in any demographic-specific sessions.

The objective of Phase 2 is to use the community feedback and comments to help EWEB narrow in on a subset of issues that are relevant to the Board and our community. It is likely that one focus area will include the topic of pricing reform. No cost estimate or timeline has been developed for Phase 2. EWEB will consider continued use of a consultant to complement in-house staff time devoted to the effort.

Phase 3: Launch (mid-2017)

The third phase is focused on developing options or recommendations for further EWEB actions. There are numerous options for specific tactics that could be deployed, from surveys to committees. In keeping with the dynamic nature of the effort, specific tactics will be developed based on what we learn in Phases 1 and 2.

One key decision point will be whether to create a citizen advisory group to tackle specific focus areas that requires in-depth learning and on-going discussion to develop credible guidance for the Board and staff, such as pricing reform. Another option may include community meetings on specific topics such as EWEB role in community resiliency, economic development, etc. Staff will seek the guidance of Commissioners before adopting the appropriate engagement topics and strategies for Phase 3.

The goal of Phase 3 is to determine what remaining issues need to be addressed, and then determine how and when to engage the public. Ultimately, EWEB staff would prepare a report and plan of action for Board consideration and adoption that incorporates the community’s interests.

Recommendation and requested Board action

No specific board approval is being requested. However, we ask that you provide any comments you may have to us within the next few weeks about the general direction and goals of such a public engagement effort. A placeholder has been added to your July meeting agenda, should Commissioners need further discussion on this engagement framework.

Any specific questions can be directed to Lance Robertson and Erin Erben at lance.robertson@eweb.org and erin.erben@eweb.org, respectively.