



MEMORANDUM

EUGENE WATER & ELECTRIC BOARD



TO: Commissioners Carlson, Barofsky, McRae, Schlossberg, and Brown

FROM: Rod Price, Assistant General Manager; Kelly Hoell, Climate Policy Analyst/Advisor

DATE: March 29, 2023 (April 4, 2023, Board Meeting)

SUBJECT: Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Board Policy - April Work Session Overview

OBJECTIVE: Information

Issue

This correspondence provides background for the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Board-level policy development for 2023. Based on staff experience and Commissioner feedback from the one-on-one interviews conducted in March, staff have drafted a working plan for the April 18th Board work session to create Board-level policy related to DEI.

Background

In support of 2023 Organizational Goal 2, Commissioners and staff wish to develop a guiding DEI Board-level Policy. EWEB's 2023 Goal 2 states: "**Workforce and Culture:** *Build and inspire a workforce and a workplace culture to fulfill ongoing business obligations and strategic initiatives in alignment with our organizational values by... working with the Board of Commissioners to develop and deploy policies that will weave **principles of DEI** (diversity, equity, and inclusion) and resiliency into our work.*"

In April, the Board will hold a work session to discuss information related to the development of a Board-level DEI policy. Several other work sessions (June, August, October) have been earmarked for additional time to complete the policy work as needed.

In several discussions on DEI policy since the February 2022 Board Work Session, Commissioners have expressed a desire to have an EWEB DEI policy that addresses both the EWEB employee work environment and how our work serves our customers and community. To further refine the Commissioner direction related to DEI policy development, we held one-on-one interviews with all the Commissioners in March 2023. This correspondence summarizes the themes heard from the Commissioners and ties these themes to staff's policy research to outline a plan for the April work session in support of the goal to complete a Board-level DEI policy.

Discussion

Commissioner Interview Themes

To better understand the Board's goals and desires on this topic, each Commissioner was interviewed for approximately one hour. A series of questions was used to stimulate conversation, leaving time for open dialogue. The responses to the questions and open dialogue varied, but there were several themes that all Commissioners agreed on, and some agreed to by a majority. These themes, organized by category including policy development process, policy content, and policy governance, are summarized here to help staff and Commissioners build on areas of shared interests.

Policy Development Process

Regarding the development of DEI policy, all Commissioners (except where noted) expressed interest in the following:

- a. Staff-Commissioner Collaboration – Commissioners and staff should work together on DEI policy development.
- b. Draft Language – Commissioners desire staff develop draft policy language to inspire discussion, review, and refinement.
- c. Commissioners respect the authority of the Board at-large and will support the majority outcome.
- d. Meeting Time – Commissioners agreed to spend some Board meeting time on DEI policy, with a majority comfortable with 2-4 meetings (some indicated more time).
- e. Meeting Structure – Some Commissioners indicated interest in exploring Work Session formats other than “Robert’s Rules”, potentially facilitated by either staff or an external third party to allow all Commissioners to participate.
- f. Best Practices – Commissioners seek to build on existing best practices and work done by other agencies so that EWEB won’t be starting its process from scratch.
- g. Consulting Support – Some Commissioners would like to utilize outside consulting support to develop a Board-level DEI Policy. Some Commissioners would support staff working with consulting services and bringing recommendations to the Board. Some Commissioners indicated a desire to better understand how leading consulting firms could work with organizations such as EWEB before making a commitment.

Policy Content

Although not all inclusive of the total policy content, Commissioners are generally aligned (except as noted) with the following content specifically mentioned during the interviews to be including in DEI policy:

- a. Internal/External – The scope of the policy should cover both internal (employee and workplace culture) and external (community and access to EWEB services) conditions and opportunities.
- b. Beyond Compliance – The policy should apply to conditions inclusive of and going beyond “protected classes” as defined by state and federal law, including socio-economic, differing perspectives, backgrounds, learning styles, experiences, etc.
- c. Income Inequality – Commissioners noted that income inequality is a challenge within EWEB’s service area. Understanding and addressing the impacts that come from income inequality on EWEB customers and community members should be within the scope of the policy.
- d. Decision-Making – Some Commissioners desire that the policy incorporate some level of DEI consideration into organizational decision making.

Policy Governance

All Commissioners, except as noted, articulated the following thoughts related to their role in DEI policy governance. In this section, the Commissioner thoughts are indicated in each bullet, followed by existing Board policies consistent with their stated interests:

- a. Routine Review & Continuous Improvement – Commissioners expressed desire for the policy to be a “living document” that could evolve and improve over time. This is consistent with the required periodic reviews stated in existing policy.
- b. Accountability – Commissioners viewed their role in DEI governance as relating to policy development, providing strategic direction, and directing the General Manager to ensure accountability and transparency. According to BL1, the General Manager is responsible for implementing policies and direction established by the Board, including a new DEI policy.
- c. Results – Commissioners described that the Board’s role should include identification and definition of goals, targets, or benchmarks as part of establishing a policy and in addition to the Board’s on-going roles of approval of Strategic Plans, Long-Term Financial Plans, Capital Improvement Plans, annual

budgets and goals. Oversight of specific initiatives and outcomes are included in BL5, as the Board has responsibility for establishing its priorities for the coming year and providing that direction to the General Manager.

In addition to governance that applies to all Board policies, some Commissioners articulated the following desires specific for DEI policy, including the following:

- a. Transparency and Progress: Reporting intervals and/or transparency requirements are generally covered within each policy.
- b. Resourcing: The Board should ensure that the organization has adequate resources to support DEI initiatives, including funding, staffing, and training. Policy will generally describe the desired outcomes, using existing policies and processes, such as annual budgets and goals to ensure resources.

April Work Session

The Board will be asked at the April work session to discuss perspectives and provide input, guidance, and direction on next steps in development of a diversity, equity, and inclusion policy at EWEB. Because each of the Commissioners has a different basic understanding of DEI and related policy and programs, staff recommends the Board build a common understanding of what a DEI policy is and why it is important to our mission.

Therefore, based on Commissioner interviews, staff proposes the following two goals for the April DEI Policy work session:

1. Build a common understanding of the primary goals of a DEI policy and how EWEB and our community would benefit from adopting such a policy.
2. Lay out and discuss a roadmap for 2023 of the steps required to develop a DEI policy and ensure shared understanding and commitment to how the milestones will be met.

In support of Board discussion to meet these two goals, staff will work offline with a local DEI consultant to develop and present:

- Common paths taken by other public agencies in this work.
- A list of consultants experienced in this type of work and ideas of what their scope of work would include to either support only the staff or to provide direct support for the Board.
- Reasons why a DEI policy is important to EWEB's core mission.
- Examples of policy content.
- Draft guidelines around the role of the Board in this policy.
- A draft policy goal or commitment statement.
- A draft schedule to meet the identified initial goal(s).

The information related to these items will be summarized in the April work session backgrounder.

Recommendation/Requested Board Action

Commissioner concurrence or input regarding the proposed goals and information as outlined in this correspondence is requested.