

As voted by the Board of Trustees and in accordance with the notice of the meeting, the monthly Workshop Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Portland Water District was held in the Nixon Training Center at the general offices of the District, 225 Douglass Street, Portland, Maine, and via Zoom, on Monday, March 11, 2024. In attendance from staff were S. Garrison, C. Crovo, D. Kane, S. Firmin, M. Koza, D. Katsiaficas, M. Demers, M. Clements, and C. Cote.

All Trustees were present except Trustee Siviski. President Lunt opened the workshop meeting at 6:41 p.m. President Lunt indicated they would take the agenda slightly out of order tonight.

4. Other Business

Chris Crovo provided an update to the Board regarding a leak on the 30" main on Spring Street in Westbrook that runs through the Stroudwater River. The leak is currently throttled down from 1500 gallons a minute to 300. Staff is exploring different options to address the leak which include: repair, slip-line existing pipe, directional bore new location, or install new main on Saco Street.

Operations will start removing services from the main next week and hope to be completed by early April, in anticipation of future work on the main.

1. PFAS Litigation

Corporate Counsel began her presentation by explaining the status of litigation on the water side. Litigation is pending in the federal court in South Carolina. The litigation is filed against 3M and Dupont, manufacturers of fire foam that contain PFAS chemicals. The judge has approved settlements in both of those cases. Water utilities are automatically included in the settlement unless they opted out of it by mid-December. PWD is part of the settlement. It is considered a class 2 claimant because it does not have PFAS contamination of its water sources that rise to the level under the federal regulations of being considered contamination. As a result, PWD can expect to be reimbursed for its costs of testing through the settlement, according to a formula administered by the settlement administrator. PWD must file its claim for reimbursement of these costs by mid-2026.

Mike Koza took over the presentation and explained that every water source must be tested. PWD submitted baseline testing samples for Steep Falls and Greater Portland on December 12, 2023. There was no PFAS detection in Steep Falls and the small amount that was reported in the Greater Portland samples are classified as "J" meaning they are below the standard that you could reliably detect.

Ms. Katsiaficas then resumed the legal presentation on the wastewater side. Those cases are not as far along in the legal process. PWD has been solicited by a law firm requesting to represent PWD's interests in obtaining damages for among other costs: the managing and disposing of biosolids, as well as potential costs for treating wastewater effluent.

Scott Firmin explained the costs and issues PWD is facing with respect to the PFAS in biosolids and the effluent issue.

A discussion followed, and a consensus of the Board was obtained as to whether it wanted to engage outside counsel to begin litigation on its behalf. The consensus was yes, litigation on behalf of PWD should begin. A legal services agreement will be forwarded to the Board for approval at its business meeting on March 25.

2. Biosolids Management Update

Scott Firmin, Director of Wastewater Services, presented on the management of biosolids generated at the District's wastewater treatment facilities. Biosolids generated in the treatment of wastewater must be routinely hauled from the treatment plant. Over the past five years, public, legislative, and regulatory challenges related to PFAS have made the ultimate management of biosolids more costly and challenging. While the current contract provides some stability, the District has completed a Biosolids Master Plan that recommends volume reduction through sludge drying. Emerging process technologies could someday provide further volume and PFAS reduction are promising but are not yet commercially developed or permissible. One challenge related to such a facility is the availability of land. PWD staff presented to the ecoMaine Board and there seems to be interest in further developing a concept to site a regional processing facility at the ecoMaine site. The General Engineering Services process will be used to engage Brown and Caldwell to continue the Master Planning efforts to produce a Request for Proposals to further the biosolids management facility concept.

3. Employee Engagement Survey Summary

Mary Demers, Director of Employee Services, provided an overview of the recent Employee Satisfaction Survey.

This is the first satisfaction survey done since the pandemic. A new research firm was hired to conduct the survey, Digital Research Inc. 72% or roughly 132 employees took part in the survey.

A large majority of PWD's employees – three out of four overall – would describe themselves as proud to work at the organization, including four out of ten who would strongly agree that they are proud to work at PWD.

Three out of ten PWD employees would agree that morale at the organization is high. At the same time, more than half would disagree that morale at the organization is high, with three out of ten strongly disagreeing.

The culture at PWD is broadly seen as welcoming of diversity. Three out of four employees overall would agree that people from different races or cultures or every gender are welcomed at PWD, with half strongly agreeing that is the case. Six out of ten would agree that PWD's work environment is friendly to people of every generation.

A clear majority of employees – at least seven out of ten – agree that their supervisor or their department management contributes to a positive work culture. Three out of ten overall agree the General Manager contributes to a positive work culture.

Employees have mixed views towards interdepartmental interactions. Just over four out of ten believe there is good teamwork across PWD's departments, and just under three out of ten would agree there is frequent communication throughout all levels of the organization.

Overall, a majority of employees would be likely to recommend PWD as a place to work, though only two out of ten would be highly likely to do so in 2023. Just as many say they would not recommend PWD. Compared to previous years, the share who would be highly likely to recommend PWD has declined.

The complete PowerPoint presentation is attached as part of the minutes.

The Trustees discussed at length with staff the results of this survey. Trustee Douglas requested the Board receive the complete survey that was provided to Employee Services.

President Lunt agreed with Trustee Douglas and said they would discuss the results in more detail at the April Workshop after the Board has had time to review the complete survey.

Before the meeting adjourned the Trustees discussed whether they would like to request a special election be held to fill the Cape Elizabeth/South Portland seat left vacant by Matthew Beck. It was determined to wait until the November election to fill the seat as Cape Elizabeth and South Portland are currently represented by Trustee Siviski.

5. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Submitted by,

Carrie E. Cote
Assistant Clerk