The Open Meeting of the Pima County Merit System Commission was called to order by David Freund, Chair, at 11:00 a.m. Roll call. All persons in attendance were asked to state their names for the record.

**Item C. Approval of Minutes**

1. Open Meeting Minutes, July 22, 2019, Flaminio Appeal
2. Open Meeting Minutes, August 7, 2019, MSC Hearing
3. Open Meeting Minutes, August 19, 2019, MSC Hearing
4. Executive Session Minutes, July 22, 2019, Flaminio Appeal

**ACTION:** Paul Rubin made a motion to accept the Open Meeting minutes listed above as Item C. Mike Hellon seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**ACTION:** Paul Rubin made a motion to accept the Executive Session minutes listed above as Item C. Mike Hellon seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.
Item F. Appeal Hearing
Discussion and Action:

Brian Lopez v Pima County Department of Transportation
Suspension

Mr. Freund, Chair, read the opening statement into the record and asked if either party wished to invoke the Rule of Privilege. The Rule of Privilege was explained by Mr. Freund and was invoked by Jenn Blum, Pima County Attorney for the Respondent.

Mr. Corey, Attorney for the Commission, swore in the witnesses:
- Robert Lane, Division Manager, PCDOT;
- Jaime Rivera, Deputy Director for Conveyance; RWRD;
- John Felix, Public Works Crew Supervisor, PCDOT;
- Travis Haas, Equipment Operator II, PCDOT;
- Mark Saenz, Equipment Operator II, PCDOT;
- Brian Lopez, Appellant

The witnesses were sworn in and asked to leave the room until called. Mr. Lane, DPR, and Brian Lopez, Appellant remained in the room.

Jenn Blum, Deputy County Attorney, made an opening statement. Brian Lopez, Appellant, read an opening statement.

Mr. Freund asked all parties if they had any preliminary matters they wished to discuss, there were none.

Respondent's Exhibits 1-15 that were stipulated to, for admission into the record for this hearing are listed below.

1. Pima County Merit System Appeal Form dated August 19, 2019;
2. Pima County Merit System Rule 12.1.C – Disciplinary and Other Personnel Actions;
4. Pima County Administrative Procedure 30-11 – Vehicle Operation and Accident Reporting;
5. Notice of Suspension dated August 12, 2019, Bates Nos. 001-005;
9. Irvington Road Sewer Manhole Incident Memo, dated May 31, 2019, Bates Nos. 085-136;
10. Irvington Road Sewer Manhole Incident – Root Cause Analysis, dated June 12, 2019, Bates Nos. 190-209;
12. Vehicular Loss Form, dated April 1, 2015; Bates Nos. 493-497;

13. Arizona 811 Pamphlet, Bates Nos. 581-582;


15. Audio Recording of Appellants Pre-Action Meeting July 19, 2019;

16. Any exhibits by or from Appellant;

17. Any exhibits needed for rebuttal or foundation.

Appellant Exhibits A – E were submitted at this time.

A. Unfinished Manhole Cover minus metal support ring and covered with dirt;

B. Detail No. RWRD 212- Concrete Collar for Unpaved Areas (Plan Review);

C. Manhole after incident 8'x8' tapered concrete base with metal ring;

D. Tapered concrete base with metal ring no grading issue;

E. Cost Recovery Worksheet- SVC Request #62958, JO# 218041, 05/07/19, Project # RC1006.

**ACTION:** Mr. Freund ruled to admit both the Respondent’s and Appellant’s exhibits at this time.

**Respondent’s First Witness:** Mark Saenz, Equipment Operator II, previously sworn in by Mr. Corey, Counsel to the Commission provided testimony.

Ms. Blum began her questioning of Mr. Saenz by asking what his discipline had been due to the incident of May 7; Mr. Saenz stated he had been demoted from Crew Supervisor to Equipment Operator II.

Ms. Blum and Mr. Lopez, Sr. questioned Mr. Saenz as to the sequence of actions on May 7, 2019.

Mr. Saenz stated he had been contacted by Brian Lopez between 10:00 and 10:30 am and Brian indicated there had been an accident. He immediately went out and assessed the area. He and Brian realized the manhole cover was not on the manhole and were not sure if Brian had run over it with the grader and it was covered by the windrow. (Windrow, the dirt left on the side after the grader has passed)

Mr. Saenz stated they (he and Brian) searched the surrounding area looking for the manhole cover only to find a ring several yards to the side of the road covered with dirt and rust indicating it had been there for quite some time. This meant the ring was not on the manhole to hold the cover in place so they looked into the manhole to see if they could find the cover, they splashed a little water into the hole to remove some of the debris to get a better look and indicated they could not see anything. He then called several numbers to report the incident to RWRD but was unable to reach anyone.

Mr. Hellon questioned if he had called in a Blue Stake request the day before. Mr. Saenz said no, because they were “lifting” the road as opposed to cutting it. If they would have been cutting or digging into the road then a Blue Stake Ticket would have been in order to make sure there were no utilities that would be disrupted with the digging.
Mr. Saenz said he then decided to go back to the Mission Road Facility and bring back several barricades and another manhole cover because they did not want to leave a hole in the middle of the road for safety reasons. After placing the barricades and the replacement cover Mr. Saenz then left the scene because he was due to start his vacation that day and instructed Brian and Travis Haas, PCDOT Equipment Operator II (who was working with Brian at the time running the water truck in front of the grader for dust control) to continue working and wait at the scene for RWRD to respond.

A week later, after returning from his vacation, he found out that there had been a major backup and had become a complete overnight process to clear it up. He stated after they had placed the temporary cover on the manhole they noticed some leakage, but thought it was from the water they splashed in there earlier for a better view.

There was extensive discussion relating to the missing manhole cover and ring, and the events of the day.

Mr. Lopez, Sr. questioned Mr. Saenz if the ring was not there would the cover fall in. Mr. Saenz stated the cover would absolutely fall in because the ring was not in place to hold it, and continued his testimony regarding: Appellants Exhibit B Detail No. RWRD 212-Concrete Collar for Unpaved Areas (Plan Review)

Mr. Freund excused the witness and Mr. Corey explained the invocation of the Rule.

Respondent’s Second Witness: Jaime Rivera, Deputy Director for Conveyance, RWRD, previously sworn in by Mr. Corey, Counsel for the Commission, provided testimony regarding the investigation conducted by the RWRD and DOT. Ms. Blum asked Mr. Rivera for clarification regarding Exhibit 9, page 88 Collateral Damage Report. Mr. Rivera explained the cost breakdown of the $38,000 repairs.

Ms. Blum questioned if the call had come in to RWRD sooner the cost would have been much less. Mr. Rivera stated yes, there would not have been as much water in the manhole and the initial attempt by RWRD would have been successful. The Job Order Contractor (JOC), was called in and had to use the vacuum truck to clear out the water in the manhole and found the manhole cover and debris stuck in the piping causing the overflow. The JOC would not have been there until 1:00 am, when the overflow was stopped and the water restored, therefore reducing the cost.

There was continued discussion regarding Respondent’s Exhibit 10, Irvington Road Sewer Manhole Incident – Root Cause Analysis, dated June 12, 2019, Bates Nos. 190-209; the phone call investigations done by RWRD and DOT. Mr. Rivera continued his testimony and stated no calls to RWRD from Mr. Saenz were found. A call was transferred via Tucson Water from a Constituent approximately 4:00 pm, stating there was water flowing down the wash. But no calls from Mr. Saenz to RWRD or Blue Stake were found.

The Commission questioned the witness further regarding his investigation into the phone calls and how the phone system works. The witness continued his testimony.

Mr. Freund excused the witness and Mr. Corey explained the invocation of the Rule.

At 12:50 pm the Commission took a break and reconvened at 1:05 pm, all members were present.

Upon return, Ms. Blum indicated that one of the Appellants witnesses, John Felix, would not be available for testimony the following day and asked if he could be called out of order.

Mr. Freund stated he had no objection and the witness could be called after the next witness.
Respondent's Third Witness: Craig Bonn, Public Works Crew Supervisor, RWRD was sworn in by Mr. Corey, Attorney for the Commission and advised of the Rule.

Ms. Blum began by questioning Mr. Bonn regarding his job title on the day of the incident. Mr. Bonn stated at the time he was a PCDOT Equipment Operator II and has since then been promoted to Public Works Crew Supervisor with RWRD. Ms. Blum continued questioning Mr. Bonn regarding his knowledge of the Blue Stake procedures. Mr. Bonn explained his procedure for calling in Blue Stake Tickets and continued his testimony.

Mr. Freund excused the witness and Mr. Corey explained the invocation of the Rule.

Respondent's Fourth Witness: Robert Lane, Division Manager, Maintenance and Operations, PCDOT, previously sworn in by Mr. Corey, was called to testify.

Ms. Blum questioned him as to his role in the incident. Mr. Lane stated he was asked by his supervisor, Ana Olivares, Director, PCDOT, about the incident, he indicated to her he did not know anything at that time, but would ask Gilbert Carrillo, Public Works Supervisor, what he knew. Mr. Carrillo informed him RWRD was on site.

Mr. Lane then wrote an e-mail to Ms. Olivares explaining the events of the day and that PCDOT had followed procedures and Mr. Carrillo had stated RWRD was on site. Exhibit 9, Irvington Road Sewer Manhole Incident Memo, dated May 31, 2019, Bates Nos. 085-136.

A few weeks later DOT was contacted by RWRD and were informed that DOT was at fault for the incident, since procedures were not followed. Exhibit 10, Irvington Road Sewer Manhole Incident–Root Cause Analysis, dated June 12, 2019, Bates Nos. 190-209.

Mr. Lane again questioned Mr. Saenz, who informed him the manhole had been run over by the grader. He also said he had called in a Blue Stake Ticket and that he had also called Mr. Carrillo and RWRD about the incident. Mr. Carrillo was not questioned at the time because he was on vacation.

Mr. Lane then wrote another memo to Ms. Olivares with the events of the day provided to him by Mr. Saenz stating a Blue Stake Ticket had been ordered and Mr. Carrillo was on site. Upon further investigation by RWRD it was discovered that Mr. Saenz had not made any calls to RWRD and had not pulled a Blue Stake Ticket. RWRD did receive a call and the assumption was it was from Mr. Saenz and it proved to be incorrect, that call came from Joe Soto, Public Works Supervisor, asking if they had received a call from DOT regarding the incident.

DOT then received a response memo from RWRD Exhibit 10, Irvington Road Sewer Manhole Incident–Root Cause Analysis dated May 3, 2019, Bates Nos. 190, memo from Jaime Rivera, regarding the phone investigations. As a result a meeting was called, June 17 with everyone involved in an attempt to clear up the confusion.

Joe Soto, Gilbert Carrillo, Mark Saenz, Travis Haas, and Mr. Lane were present and called Brian Lopez on the phone. During the meeting they found out the tire did not run over the manhole cover and had not fallen in the hole but had been “shoved” in and out of place with the grader blade by Brian Lopez in an attempt to put it back into place. They also discovered no one had spoken to anyone from RWRD until the next day when RWRD found out DOT was doing ground disturbing work the day before.
Mr. Lane reviewed Respondent’s Exhibit 11, Phone Records, dated May 6, 2019 through May 13, 2019, Bates Nos. 217-218; and asked for the cell phone logs from Mr. Saenz County cell phone to see if there were any calls made to RWRD. It was discovered there were no calls from Mr. Saenz on May 7.

Ms. Blum questioned Mr. Lane regarding Exhibit 13, Arizona811 Pamphlet, Bates Nos. 581-582, and Exhibit 4 Pima County Admin Procedure 30-11- Vehicle Operation and Accident Reporting; Exhibit 7, Driver Authorization Acknowledgement, dated October 17, 2017, Bates Nos. 014; Mr. Lane continued his testimony.

Mr. Lane was questioned about his participation in the disciplinary decision, Exhibit 5 Notice of Suspension dated August 12, 2019, Bates Nos. 001-005 he stated the Discipline was based on the severity of the incident, Brian Lopez being the operator, and the negligence of the rules at the time, as well as the cost and found it was appropriate to suspend him for 10 hours (one day) even if Brian had no prior discipline. Other employees were also disciplined due to the incident.

Mr. Freund excused the witness and Mr. Corey reminded him of the invocation of the Rule.

At 2:18 pm, the Commission took a break and reconvened at 2:30 pm, all members present.

Appellants First Witness - John Felix, Public Works Crew Supervisor, PCDOT; previously sworn in by Mr. Corey, Attorney for the Commission, was taken out of order and provided testimony.

Mr. Lopez, Sr. questioned Mr. Felix regarding his knowledge of Blue Stake Procedures. Mr. Felix stated he has requested over 150 different Blue Stakes since July 1. As the Crew Supervisor, he gives the Operators a packet with the ticket, a map of the sub-division they are going to be grading, the name of the road and the actual Blue Stake Ticket number. He knows from experience whom to call if there is an issue with the utilities. Mr. Felix continued his testimony regarding Blue Stake procedures.

Ms. Blum had no questions for the witness.

Mr. Freund excused the witness and Mr. Corey reminded him of the invocation of the Rule.

Respondent’s Fifth Witness- Ana Olivares, Director, PCDOT, was sworn in by Barry Corey, Attorney for the Commission, and was advised of the invocation of the Rule.

Ms. Blum questioned Ms. Olivares about her involvement of the incident. Ms. Olivares stated she did not become aware of the situation until she received an e-mail from RWRD almost a month after the incident. RWRD had to do a major clean-up and were concerned about the liability if someone had come across the effluent water coming from the manhole and the RWRD report was very harsh on the issue. At that time she had Mr. Lane begin the DOT investigation to be able to respond to RWRD and her supervisors.

At the conclusion of Mr. Lanes’ first investigation Ms. Olivares responded. Exhibit 9 Irvington Road Sewer Manhole Incident Memo, dated May 31, 2019, Bates Nos. 085-136.

RWRD replied and informed DOT that the series of events she had in her memo were incorrect. At that time DOT started a more in depth investigation of their own reviewing phone logs and GPS system and came up with different findings. She then called RWRD and apologized for the misinformation they had received.
Ms. Blum questioned Ms. Olivares about her disciplinary decisions. Ms. Olivares testified she reviewed all the information received and made the determination to suspend Brian for one day, considering the RWRD equipment damaged and the hazardous material left flowing down the wash. This was a really bad issue, and being such an egregious error the entire team was disciplined; Brian Lopez, received a one day suspension; Travis Haas, received a Letter of Counseling; Mr. Saenz was demoted from Crew Supervisor to Equipment Operator II; Gilbert Carrillo, Public Works Supervisor, was to receive two days (20 hr) suspension, but retired before the discipline was implemented.

She explained most work projects are team activity, and with this incident, the team was responsible when everything began to fall apart. When something goes right, everyone gets credit, when things go wrong everyone is disciplined. She felt the level of the discipline was appropriate for the level of the incident.

Mr. Hellon questioned if she would have gotten the correct story at the beginning would her decision have been different?

Ms. Olivares stated it might have. The concern was the amount of waste going out that was left behind unattended causing a serious health hazard.

Mr. Hellon questioned the division of the responsibility between DOT and RWRD. Ms. Olivares stated usually if there is an issue with a utility, the utility is contacted, they come out fix the issue and it is their responsibility. That is not what happened here, DOT attempted to fix the issue on their own instead of calling RWRD, therefore DOT was responsible because procedure was not followed.

Mr. Freund excused the witness and Mr. Corey reminded her of the invocation of the rule.

At this time the Respondent rested.

**Appellants Second Witness** - Travis Haas, Equipment Operator II, DOT; previously sworn in by Mr. Barry Corey, Attorney for the Commission, provided testimony.

Mr. Lopez, Sr. questioned Mr. Haas regarding the events of the day. Mr. Haas gave his version of the events. He and Brian were working at the location together that day, Brian was running the grader and he was ahead of him with the water truck for dust control, when he noticed the grader had stopped. He got off and went to see what was the hold up, that’s when he and Brian noticed the manhole cover was off the manhole, they attempted to replace it back on the manhole, using the grader blade to move the cover because it was too heavy to attempt to move by hand, but it seemed something wasn’t normal they did not see any concrete around the manhole. A few moments later Brian was back at the manhole and the cover had fallen in. Mr. Haas continued his testimony indicating there was water flowing but was clear with no odors or debris.

Mr. Lopez Sr. questioned him regarding **Appellants Exhibit D** Tapered concrete base with metal ring no grading issue, if this was the same manhole in question. Mr. Haas stated he was not sure.

Mr. Haas was questioned by the Commission and continued his testimony regarding the issues of the day.

Ms. Blum questioned Mr. Haas as to what his job title was the day of the incident, he stated he was an Equipment Operator I and had since been promoted to Equipment Operator II.

Mr. Freund excused the witness and Mr. Corey reminded him of the invocation of the Rule.
Appellant's Third Witness - Brian Lopez, Equipment Operator II, DOT, (Appellant)

Brian Lopez previously sworn in by Mr. Corey, Attorney for the Commission provided testimony.

Mr. Lopez Sr. questioned Brian regarding the events of the day. Brian stated when they (he and Travis Haas) got to the site there were no Blue Stake markers in the area. When they began working Brian realized he had hit a hard surface during his grading and found it to be a manhole cover. He then described the procedure of replacing the manhole cover in various situations. There is a process used to replace covers after they have been disturbed by the grader, the lid is very heavy so they use the edge of the blade to slide it back onto the hole and explained the procedure.

Mr. Freund questioned if the cover had stayed in place after replacing it. Brian said yes, it stayed in place after multiple passes with the grader, but after finishing grading the road he looked back to check his work and saw a hole there and didn't understand what happened all he could think of was the lid had fallen in and all he saw was a hole where the cover should have been.

Mr. Freund questioned him about the previous testimonies stating there was debris in the hole.

Brian said he assumed it was the dirt that would have been on the top of the cover as it fell in.

He called his supervisor, Mr. Saenz, who came out within 20-30 minutes and took charge, assessing the area. That was when they realized there was no ring on the manhole. After searching the area they found the ring at the side of the road about 50 yards away extremely rusted indicating it had been there a very long time.

Mr. Saenz at that time went back to the Mission Road Facility and returned with barricades and another cover. They placed the cover on and placed the barricades around the hole. Mr. Saenz at that time took pictures of the hole, the barricades and the surrounding area and made several calls. Brian was not sure whom the calls were made to, but overheard Mr. Saenz telling someone what had happened.

Mr. Freund asked about when they realized the water was coming out of the hole and at what point was the decision made to place a temporary cover. Brian said Mr. Saenz had made that decision as a safety precaution soon after that they realized the water was coming out. They thought the water was the water they had flushed the hole with to get a better view.

Throughout the course of the day, they continued working the east side of the road, as instructed by their supervisor, to not sit doing nothing. During the rest of the day, they checked periodically if anyone was out there. He was under the impression they might still be mobilizing and were not there yet. He indicated he contacted Mark later in the afternoon before they went back to the shop and told him no one had come out yet and what did would he like them to do. Mark told them to go ahead and come back in.

Mr. Freund asked if there was water flowing when they left and if anyone made another call to RWRD. Brian stated he did not feel he should question his supervisor's actions and followed instructions to go home. The flow was very minor and no waste or debris was flowing. If he had seen effluent water he would have called 911, "sewage is a big deal", and he thought it was just reclaimed water flowing through the pipes and not sewage.

Mr. Lopez Sr. questioned Brian if he had called law enforcement at that time. Brian stated no, because he did not see the need being there was no damage other than the blocked manhole and no sewage seeping.
Mr. Rubin questioned if he saw Gilbert Carrillo out there that day, Brian stated no because he knew Mr. Carrillo was on vacation that day and the following month and did not recall ever seeing or speaking to him.

Ms. Blum questioned Brian as to whether Mark Saenz had stayed on site that day. Moreover, how much water was flowing at the time.

Brian stated there were only about 30-40 gallons flowing when they left and they assumed it was the water they had sprayed into the hole to get a closer look to see what was stuck in there.

Ms. Blum continued to question Brian about the events of the day.

**ACTION:** Mr. Freund at this time motioned to adjourn the hearing for the day and reconvene tomorrow (Friday 10-11) at 9:00 a.m. Mr. Rubin seconded the motion and the hearing was adjourned for the day.

**DAY 2 OCTOBER 11, 2019**

The Open Meeting of the Pima County Merit System Commission reconvened on October 11, 2019, and was called to order by David Freund, Chair, at 9:00 a.m. Roll call was taken and all returning Commissioners were present. All persons in attendance were asked to state their names for the record.

Mr. Barry Corey Counsel for the Commission/Council
Jennifer Blum Deputy County Attorney for the Respondent
Laureen Pew Paralegal, Pima County Attorney's Office
Nathan Dunn Paralegal, Pima County Attorney’s Office
Aurora Hernandez Recording Secretary, Human Resources
Robert Lane Department Representative for PC DOT
Brian Lopez Appellant
Mr. Richard Lopez, Sr. Appellant Representative
Mrs. Sue Lopez Appellant Representative

Ms. Blum continued her questioning of Brian Lopez from the previous day.

**Exhibit 15, Audio recording of Appellants Pre-action Hearing of July 19, 2019,** was played and Ms. Blum questioned Brian in regards to his use of the two-way radios used to communicate with Mark Saenz. Brian stated he used the two-way while inside the grader as opposed to the telephone outside the grader. Ms. Blum was attempting to establish the communication between Brian and Mr. Haas getting permission from their Supervisor, Mark Saenz to leave the job site that day.

Ms. Blum, Deputy County Attorney for the Respondent rested.

Mr. Lopez, Sr. continued to question Brian regarding the pictures in Appellants Exhibits A – *Unfinished Manhole Cover minus metal support ring and covered with dirt; Exhibit C Manhole after incident 8’x8’ tapered concrete base with metal ring; and Exhibit D, Tapered concrete vase with metal ring no grading issue.* Brian stated he and Mr. Lopez Sr. took the pictures of the manhole in question. He explained his views of the pictures.

The Commission continued their questioning recapping the previous testimonies, Brian continued his testimony.
Mr. Lopez, Sr. Representative for the Appellant rested.

Ms. Blum, Deputy County Attorney made a closing argument. Brian Lopez, the Appellant, read a closing statement. Ms. Blum provided rebuttal.

Mr. Freund stated that this was the time for the Commission to deliberate and asked for discussion.

Mr. Freund, Mr. Hellon and Mr. Rubin each explained their thought process in making their decision and discussion ensued.

**ACTION:** Mr. Hellon moved that, based on the testimony presented and evidence submitted, the Commission vote that the Appeal of Brian Lopez be sustained, and that his suspension without pay be revoked for the reason that the appointing authority failed to establish that there was just cause for the Suspension without pay, and that he be awarded back pay, but that the Appellant should receive a Verbal Counseling.

**ACTION:** Mr. Freund seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously by a roll call vote.

**ACTION:** Mr. Freund motioned to adjourn the Open Meeting, Mr. Rubin seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 10:03 a.m.

The digital recording of the official proceedings and the minutes were prepared by the Recording Secretary.

Minutes approved on December 2, 2019.