

**REGIONAL WASTEWATER RECLAMATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RWRAC) MEETING  
Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting**

**Thursday, August 27, 2020**

**8:00 a.m.**

**Members Present:** Steve Foley, Bill Katzel, Corin Marron, Matt Matthewson, Jean McLain, Armando Membrila, Scott Oldendorph, Asia Philbin, Mark Taylor, Ann Marie Wolf, Claire Zucker

**Members Absent:** John Lynch, Rob Kulakofsky

**Others Present:**

Mandy Armenta (FRMD), Marla Berry (RWRD), Julie Brixen (FRMD), Victoria Buchinger (PCAO), Michelle Campagne (FRMD), Isai Centeno (FRMD), Barbara Escobar (RWRD), Mike Gerstenberger (RWRD), Andrew Greenhill (Tucson Water), Michelle Hamilton (FRMD), Jody Hawkinson (Jacobs Engineering), Jackson Jenkins (RWRD), Yves Khawam (County Administration), Veronica Lopez (RWRD), Julie McWilliams (RWRD), Sarah Metz (FRMD), Mead Mier (PAG), Jeannette Montano (RWRD), Jeff Prevatt (RWRD), Xavier Rendon (FRMD), Jaime Rivera (RWRD), Erika Swan (RWRD), Mary Valencic (RWRD), Caroline Vargas (RWRD), Eric Wieduwilt (RWRD)

**A. Call to Order / Roll Call**

Corin Marron, Chair, Regional Wastewater Reclamation Advisory Committee (RWRAC), called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Erika Swan, Administrative Support Specialist Sr., Regional Wastewater Reclamation Department (RWRD) took roll call and a quorum was present.

**B. Pledge of Allegiance**

**C. Call to the Audience** - There were no comments from the audience. Jean McLain advised the Committee that this is her last meeting as she has cycled off the Citizens' Water Advisory Committee (CWAC). CWAC will be appointing a new member to serve as the CWAC representative.

**D. Safety Share** - Jackson Jenkins, Director, RWRD, reminded everyone to wear masks, continue to social distance, and to follow other safety protocols during the current COVID pandemic. Mr. Jenkins also reminded everyone of safety practices during the current heat advisory and monsoons.

**E. Approval of Minutes** - Meeting Minutes for February 27, 2020

**ACTION:** Mark Taylor made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from February 27, 2020. Bill Katzel seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**F. Discussion/Action**

**1. Director's Report**

- a. Nuresys Process** - RWRD has been working on the Nuresys process, which is a struvite recovery project at the Tres Rios Water Reclamation Facility (WRF). The department is working through a few issues before bringing the process into operations.

**b. Installation 2<sup>nd</sup> Schwing Pump**

The second and final Schwing Pump has been purchased and installed. This second pump along with the new Nuresys process, should allow RWRD to meet its target of producing biosolids at 20 percent cake.

Mark Taylor asked if there is any plan to return to disposing of biosolids on agricultural land. Mr. Jenkins explained the department has been evaluating PFAS levels at certain agricultural sites. Preliminary test results look promising that RWRD will be able to return to agricultural land application, but are waiting for the studies to be concluded.

**c. Staffing Challenges**

Every year, the department typically fills over 80 vacancies. In Fiscal Year 2020, 77 positions were filled. Of those, 43 were new hires and 34 were internal promotions. Some of the trade positions have been difficult to fill with qualified candidates.

**d. Billing Update**

**i. GIS Evaluation of Non-Billed Customers**

RWRD has been reviewing the sewer billing process and ways the process can be improved to ensure all sewer users are being billed appropriately. Staff has been working with GIS sewer maps and CCTV data, and have conducted extensive research and is developing methodology to ensure accurate billing.

**e. Mt. Lemmon Post Fire**

The Bighorn Fire traveled through the spray field of the Mt. Lemmon WRF. Fortunately, there was minimal damage and the facility is operating as normal.

**f. Reclaimed Water Rate – Wheeling/Environmental**

Pima County has been in negotiations with the City of Tucson (City) regarding reclaimed water charges. As a result of these discussions, the City has agreed to charge the County the Wheeling Rate instead of the Environmental Rate for reclaimed water. This change in rates will result in a savings for the department of approximately \$100,000 annually.

**g. Green Valley Recharge**

All of the WRF's earn recharge credits or underground storage credit through Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) for the effluent that is discharged. Recent changes now allow Aqua Nueva WRF and Tres Rios WRF to receive 95 percent credit, after deductions, which is an increase from the 50 percent credit in the past. Recharge facilities have been constructed at Avra Valley, Corona de Tucson, and Green Valley. Green Valley was the last WRF to receive ADWR approval and is now earning recharge credits. Mr. Jenkins recommended reviewing the Effluent Generation and Utilization Report for more details on how effluent is handled in the County.

**h. Sahuarita Region Update**

RWRD is evaluating the construction of a regional treatment facility in the Sahuarita area near Pima Mine Road and Old Nogales Highway. As part of the plan, several smaller facilities could be shut down – the Green Valley WRF and the Arivaca Junction facility. In addition, as the population grows east of the Town of Sahuarita, the Corona de Tucson WRF

could be shut down and the area served by the regional facility. There is also interest in the Town of Sahuarita being a participant or partner in the regional facility.

Recently RWRD acquired 50 acres of land from Freeport McMoRan Mining Company. In addition, the Department is working on an easement with Union Pacific Railroad. RWRD's expectation is to work with the other service providers in the area for partnership and completing the facility in the next five years.

**i. Water SELC**

The Southeast Employment and Logistic Center (SELC) located near the Pima County Fairgrounds is enticing to some larger industrial commercial entities that want to move their business to that area. Recently RWRD connected the sewer pipeline from the fairgrounds to the Southeast Interceptor near I-10, increasing capacity which allows for much more growth in the area.

The Department of Transportation is also working on road improvements in the area to enhance further economic development. The last piece to encourage development is providing water in the area. Since this location is in unincorporated Pima County, the County is evaluating becoming the water provider in the area.

**j. Pandemic Update**

Mr. Jenkins provided an overview of the impact of COVID-19 to the department since the February meeting. To date, the department has had 12 employees that have tested positive, fortunately 11 out of the 12 have recovered and are back to work. The last employee that tested positive is still recovering.

During the Governor's Stay-at-Home orders in April and part of May, RWRD operated as if it were a long, holiday weekend. Essential jobs were performed and staffing was held at what was required to run the treatment plants and a reduced crew managing the conveyance system and some field inspections. The Department has returned to normal staffing and business as usual.

There are still many challenges in dealing with the pandemic and running the Department. The County has developed and is following procedures to keep its employees and the community safe. Some employees have been impacted by school closures and the upcoming influenza season could affect staffing levels.

Jeff Prevatt, Deputy Director, RWRD, discussed the grant received from the University of Arizona to study bio-aerosols contributions for COVID-19. The study looked at utility maintenance staff exposure at high risk locations. COVID-19 was not detected at any of the sites that were tested, and our utility workers are well protected with their existing personal protective equipment.

RWRD has been conducting regular sewage surveillance or wastewater based epidemiology. The department has been studying certain virus particles such as polio and other pathogens that have been making a resurrection over the last few years. COVID-19 was detected in sewage in February, there was a peak of the virus in the samples through the summer months, and it is now declining. Last week's sampling was the first week where there was no detection of any appreciable increase in volume and was the first time

there was no positive confirmation. Mr. Prevatt felt this is a sign that the virus could be dying down in the community and the Health Department records can corroborate the findings.

Matt Matthewson asked Mr. Jenkins whether the department implemented the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) during the pandemic. Mr. Jenkins confirmed the COOP was put into place during the pandemic and utilized many of its protocols.

**2. FY 2021 Budget and Performance Statistics Presentation**

Mr. Jenkins presented the Fiscal Year 2020/21 Budget and Performance Statistics. Mr. Jenkins discussed the financial key performances in Personnel Services, Operations and Maintenance, Capital Improvement Projects, and Sewer User Fees. Mr. Jenkins noted the reduction in the number of employees from 495 in Fiscal Year 2014 to the current 418. Mr. Jenkins attributed the reduction in staff to improvements through automation, cross training, operational efficiencies and County consolidations.

Mr. Taylor asked whether COVID-19 would impact spending on this year's \$45 million CIP Budget. Mr. Jenkins stated that despite some delays in getting equipment and parts from suppliers, the CIP budget should spend at least 95 percent this year.

**3. CIP Subcommittee Report**

There were no updates to report.

**4. Financial Sub-Committee Report**

There were no updates to report.

**5. Fiscal Year 2019/20 – Year End Report**

Mandy Armenta, Admin Support Services Manager, Finance and Risk Management Department (FRMD), stated the Fiscal Year-End 2020 Operations and Maintenance (O&M) expense budget was \$160.3 million, which includes depreciation and debt service. At the close of Period 14, there is a projected savings in the budget of \$3.6 million. Total revenue was budgeted at \$182.4 million and is projected to come in at \$188.9 million. RWRD revenues will be over budget by \$6.5 million.

**6. Fiscal Year 2020/21 Expense and Revenue Summary**

Ms. Armenta stated the projections and forecasts are not complete for Fiscal Year 2021, as it is too early in the year to identify possible variances. The budget was approved at \$161.1 million for O&M Expenses and \$186.3 million for revenue. The department's operational budget was reduced from last year from \$83.4 million to \$82.5 million. The reduction was primarily in the personnel services area with the reduction of full time equivalent positions.

**7. Citizens' Water Advisory Committee (CWAC) Report – Meeting Report and Tucson Water Activities**

CWAC has not held a meeting since March. The next meeting is scheduled for September 2, 2020 and a discussion will be held on replacing Ms. McLain on the RWRAC. Ms. McLain will be presented with a plaque thanking her for her years of service. Tim Thomure is on a temporary assignment as Director of the City of Tucson Parks and Recreation Department. John Kmiec and Sylvia Amparano are co-running Tucson Water.

**8. Appointment Nominating Committee**

Armando Membrila volunteered to serve as the Chair of the nominating committee. Scott Oldendorph volunteered to assist.

**9. RWRAC Annual Draft Report**

Mr. Matthewson stated he had a few minor edits to the report and will forward to RWRD staff for correcting.

**ACTION:** Matt Matthewson made a motion to approve the RWRAC Annual Report, subject to minor changes. Scott Oldendorph seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**10. 2020 Work Plan Modifications**

The Committee requested the following be included on the September meeting agenda:

- Treatment Division Update (to include micro-plastics analysis in wastewater, COVID tracing research with the University of Arizona, and technology updates.)
- Conveyance Division Update
- Election of Officers

**G. Future Agenda Items**

- An update on the Sahuarita Region plans, including visuals on the plans in that region.
- COVID tracing and wastewater, to be included in the Treatment Division Update next month.
- Discussions of sewer user rate history and forecast, which is generally discussed with the 5-Year Financial Plan presented by FRMD.
- Breakdown of COVID related costs to the department.

**H. Call to the Audience** - There were no comments from the audience.

**I. Adjournment**

**ACTION:** Mark Taylor made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Claire Zucker seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:37 a.m.