



BOARD OF DIRECTORS SPECIAL MEETING (WORKSHOP) MINUTES

Tuesday, February 04, 2025 at 9:00 AM

66575 Second St, Desert Hot Springs, CA AND/OR Via Teleconference

CALL TO ORDER

President Sewell called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM

ROLL CALL

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: President Ivan Sewell, Vice President Robert Griffith, Director Russ Martin, Director Amber Duff, Director Ted Mayrhofen

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Brian Macy, Marion Champion, Kurt Kettenacker, Amanda Lucas, April Scott, Eric Weck, Oriana Hoffert, Dori Petee

PUBLIC INPUT

No public input

CLOSED SESSION

CONFERENCE WITH LEGAL COUNSEL REGARDING POTENTIAL INITIATION OF LITIGATION

Pursuant to Government Code Section 54956.9(d)(4). One potential case

CONFERENCE WITH LEGAL COUNSEL - ANTICIPATED LITIGATION

Pursuant to Government Code Section 54956.9(d)(2) and/or (3). One potential case.

REPORT ON ACTION TAKEN DURING CLOSED SESSION

The Board met in closed session on the items listed above, there was no reportable action.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

WATER THEFT

Assistant General Manager Marion Champion presented. The board had a discussion about water theft, covering everything from unauthorized fire hydrant use to meter tampering and theft by contractors or individuals. Right now, the district's fines are \$300 for a first offense and \$450 for a second, but staff explained that they usually give a warning before issuing fines. Compared to neighboring water agencies, our fines are on the lower end. A big challenge with enforcement is catching repeat offenders, getting timely police response, and figuring out who's responsible when theft happens.

There's also a push at the state level to crack down on fire hydrant tampering, especially by water haulers. ACWA is backing a bill to raise fines to \$2,500 for a first offense, \$5,000 for a second, and \$10,000 for a third—charged per incident, not per year. The board discussed whether fines should be adjusted, possibly with different penalties for contractors, homeowners, and unhoused individuals.

Another concern was making sure fines are high enough to be included in court-ordered restitution, so the district actually gets reimbursed. Hydrant theft was also a major issue, costing \$3,000 to \$5,000 each time one is stolen or damaged.

The board agreed that a public awareness campaign could help, reminding residents that water theft affects everyone and can even put fire safety at risk. Staff will look into the legal limits on fines, how to improve enforcement, and ways to work with law enforcement to make penalties more effective. They'll bring back recommendations at a future meeting.

POLICY CHANGES

Assistant General Manager Marion Champion presented. The board received an update on a few policies in the works, an AI Policy and an Objection Process for Water and Sewer Fees—are set to be discussed at this month's study session, while updates to procurement policies (like check signing and requests) should be ready by March.

The new objection process ties into Prop 218 and is meant to make things more transparent. It allows the public to formally challenge rate changes during the review period so concerns can be addressed upfront. To make this official, the board will need to adopt an ordinance.

The AI Policy is being implemented to ensure staff uses AI responsibly. It covers things like protecting confidential info, following legal guidelines, and ensuring AI is used as a tool—not replacing human decision-making. Staff will also get some training on best practices.

AFFILIATION LIST

Assistant General Manager Marion Champion presented. The board reviewed the Strategic Plan and how it aligns with various affiliations. A key focus was ensuring these affiliations bring value to the district and tie back to the agency's goals, such as building positive relationships with government and industry professionals, staying informed on legislation, and bringing back best practices.

A discussion followed about the importance of board members attending local events, even when not compensated, to stay engaged with the community. Some members expressed concerns about certain affiliations, questioning their relevance and whether they should remain on the list. Others emphasized the importance of networking and relationship-building, even if some events don't have immediate, tangible benefits.

The conversation also touched on restrictions placed last year on attending certain events outside the Coachella Valley. Some members felt this was limiting valuable opportunities, while others wanted to ensure travel expenses were justified.

The Board acknowledged the need for ongoing discussion.

COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

Assistant General Manager Marion Champion presented. The board discussed the topic of committee meetings and the need to ensure they meet regularly. The approved committees include the Executive, Engineering, Finance, Human Relations, and Public Affairs committees. The Public Affairs Committee meets most frequently, especially for customer disputes, while the Human Relations Committee typically meets at least once a year.

General Manager Macy and staff reviewed the schedule for the next few months and identified potential dates for committee meetings. Board members were asked to coordinate with their committee partners and provide staff with their availability within the next couple of weeks. Proper scheduling and preparation are required since these meetings are subject to the Brown Act.

GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

No comments.

DIRECTOR COMMENTS AND REQUESTS FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

1. General Comments
2. Requests for Future Agenda Items
3. Requests for Future Meetings

Director Martin appreciated the detailed information provided during the meeting and was glad to see in-depth discussions on water district matters. He encouraged everyone to keep up the good work.

Director Mayrhofen felt the meeting was productive despite disagreements and appreciated that everyone remained positive and respectful.

Director Duff appreciated the workshop and the valuable information shared. She also requested that policy updates include reviewing the technology provided to Board Members in collaboration with IT.

Vice President Griffith acknowledged past disagreements with Director Mayrhofen but emphasized mutual respect and appreciation for his input. He expressed gratitude for Director Mayrhofen's thoughtful contributions, even when they don't always see eye to eye, and appreciated their ability to maintain a positive relationship.

President Sewell emphasized the importance of open discussions, even if they are uncomfortable, and expressed appreciation for everyone's opinions and ideas. He acknowledged differing views on the Affiliates list but stressed that it is secondary to the board's main role, which involves attending multiple meetings each month. Sewell reassured members that their primary responsibility is the decisions made during these meetings and thanked them for their contributions, looking forward to future collaborations.

ADJOURN

With no further business, President Sewell adjourned the meeting at 10:45 AM

Respectfully submitted,



Dori Petee
Executive Assistant