ORANGE WATER AND SEWER AUTHORITY

A public, non-profit agency providing water, sewer and reclaimed water services to the Carrboro-Chapel Hill community.

MEMORANDUM

TO: **Community Engagement Committee**
Ruchir Vora, Chair
Terri Buckner
Quinton Harper
Robert Morgan

FROM: Ed Kerwin

DATE: December 4, 2015

SUBEJCT: **December 7, 2015 Community Engagement Committee Meeting at 5:30 PM in the OWASA Boardroom**

The purpose of the December 7th Community Engagement Committee meeting is to review the staff proposed process to establish key expectations for OWASA's community engagement work.

Thank you very much.

Ed Kerwin
Executive Director

Attachment

c: Board of Directors

Draft Process to Establish the Key Expectations for OWASA's Community Engagement Work

Purpose

To propose a process for the Board of Directors and staff to work together to establish the key expectations for OWASA's community engagement work.

Staff seeks the Community Engagement Committee's feedback and guidance at its December 7, 2015 meeting regarding our proposal. This is scheduled for discussion at the Board's January 28, 2016 meeting.

Background

As a community-owned utility, community engagement is essential to most everything we do. It is a key theme of our Strategic Plan, which includes three goals:

- *Engage stakeholders to understand their perceptions and expectations so that we make well-informed decisions about our services and so that we maintain their trust.*
- *Empower stakeholders with information so they use water wisely and protect water quality through proper use of our wastewater system.*
- *Provide stakeholders with timely information about projects, programs, and policies that are important to them and offer them meaningful opportunities to give their feedback so that we can continue to improve.*

We currently use a variety of communication and engagement methods with customers and stakeholders in the course of providing our services. Consistent with our continuous improvement culture and desire to be a leader in all aspects of our business, it is important that the Board establish the key expectations (objectives) for our overall community engagement work, and that we establish, fund, and implement a plan to meet those objectives.

As an interim step in this process, the Board accepted the staff proposed *Guide for Preparing a Community Engagement Plan* for use on specific projects and initiatives (Attachment). Community Engagement Plans have been approved for the Energy Management Plan (January 22, 2015) and the Long-Range Water Supply Plan (February 12, 2015).

We now need to develop a more comprehensive community engagement plan. The Board concurred that staff would work with the Community Engagement Committee to develop a proposed approach to developing the plan.

Staff Proposed Process

To systematically determine the actions and initiatives desired to meet the three community engagement goals, we believe these questions need to be answered.

1) What are the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based) objectives for each of these goals?

2) Which current communication and engagement activities and methods effectively support our goals and objectives and should be continued?

3) Which current communication and engagement activities and methods are ineffective and should be improved or discontinued?

4) What gaps in our current communication and engagement activities and methods need to be filled to allow OWASA to successfully meet our goals and objectives?

5) What communication and engagement activities and methods should be considered to fill these gaps?

6) What resources are needed to successfully implement and sustain our communication and engagement plan?

Proposed Next Steps

If the Community Engagement Committee and the Board of Directors agree, staff will proceed to prepare the information needed to answer these six questions. We estimate it will take three or four months to prepare (depending on workload and other priorities). Once complete, we suggest that it be reviewed with the Community Engagement Committee prior to discussion at a Board Work Session.

As we develop our plan, we will consider and incorporate the results of our 2015 Customer Satisfaction Survey, and information available regarding the effectiveness of community engagement strategies used by other public and private sector organizations.

ATTACHMENT

GUIDE FOR PREPARING A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

1. ***Purpose*** of the proposed policy/plan/initiative

2. Outcomes/objectives

   a. ***Define key messages***, information to be communicated, level of engagement desired, etc.
   b. ***Inform the relevant stakeholder group(s)*** about what is proposed, how they would be affected, costs and benefits, what would change, etc.
   c. ***Seek stakeholders' feedback and questions*** so that we can better understand their perspectives and expectations.
   d. ***Engage in dialogue*** by receiving stakeholders' comments, responding to questions and providing additional information as needed.
   e. ***Show that we listened to stakeholders' comments.***
   f. ***Encourage action by customers*** when applicable to the proposed policy, plan, initiative, etc.

3. ***Identify the stakeholder groups*** we want to inform and engage

   The engagement may include all accountholders, all system users including people who are not OWASA accountholders, or specific categories of customers/citizens.

4. Set forth our core messages

   These messages should concisely explain the key benefits or needs we want to meet.

5. ***Identify the key information stakeholders should have*** throughout the various stages of the engagement process

   a. ***What is proposed*** and why, including alternatives under consideration
   b. ***Who would be affected*** and how
   c. ***Costs and benefits***/advantages and disadvantages
   d. ***Return on community investment*** if applicable
   e. ***Timetable*** for public comment opportunities, decisions and potential implementation
   f. ***How to get more information***
   g. ***Board actions***
   h. ***Other*** as needed

6. ***Identify practical and cost-effective communication/engagement methods*** that are appropriate considering the level of impact and importance of the policy issue, plan, initiative, etc.

   a. The ***information process*** will include an appropriate mix of methods, which may include some or all of the following: electronic or paper mailing(s) to stakeholders,

news releases, outreach presentations to interested community groups including elected officials, paid advertising, social media, website information, announcements/presentations in televised Board meetings and community meeting(s).

b. The ***engagement/dialogue process*** will include opportunities to comment/ask questions in meeting(s) of the Board of Directors, to participate in less formal meetings for open discussion, outreach presentations and informal surveys. Formal surveys designed to achieve a representative sample of stakeholders' views may be done for high priority initiatives. It is important that OWASA take the message to stakeholders rather than expecting them to come to OWASA.
c. ***The level of resources and activity*** for a given engagement plan will depend on the expected level of community interest and the costs, benefits and impacts of the proposed initiative. For example, a proposal that would affect rates would normally involve a high level of information/engagement.

7. ***Provide a timetable*** for the information/engagement process

    a. The timetable will ***normally allow at least two to four weeks*** for the information process before the engagement/feedback opportunities.
    b. Some timetables ***may include multiple phases.***

8. ***Plan to measure effectiveness*** of the engagement

    a. Will include seeking ***stakeholders' feedback on quality and timeliness of information and engagement opportunities.***
    b. Will normally include ***measurable objectives such as the number of outreach presentations,*** level of stakeholder participation in community meetings, etc.
    c. ***Formal surveys*** may be done to evaluate high priority engagements.

9. ***Board engagement and staff communications:***

    a. What specific ways will the Board be involved in the community engagement activities?
    b. On what frequency and by what method(s) will staff keep the Board updated about the initiative?
    c. On what frequency and by what method(s) will the Board provide staff feedback regarding the effectiveness of the community engagement work for the initiative?