
STAFF REPORT

Strategic Plan Accomplishments

Recommended Action:

Staff will provide an annual report for information and discussion.

Discussion:

The Agency adopted a Strategic Plan for the period 2018 – 2022. The Plan was updated in late 2019. The Plan calls for a report to the Board each February of accomplishments during the past year related to the Strategic Plan. The previous annual report was February 25, 2021.

The past year was significantly affected, again, by the ongoing pandemic. However, staff has become adapted to our mode of operations. It is almost the new normal, but we have not given up hope for the old normal. One of the principle impacts of COVID has been on interactions between employees and interactions between staff and customers. We have continued to have our board, committee, and staff meetings primarily remotely. The office has remained closed to the public.

A number of goals identified in the Plan had already been addressed by the time of the management turnover in 2020. And despite COVID, significant accomplishments were reported in February of 2021. There is still work to be done to achieve the Plan's goals, some of which I have noted below. Overall, however, staff can happily report a number of meaningful accomplishments from February 2021 to the present.

Customer Service

- Customer requests for service or information are routinely acknowledged within 24 hours. The Agency is complying with all aspects of the Public Records Act with respect to other information requests.
- Business practices, including online billing and payment, are being continuously improved.
- Through our messaging system and social media, we are expeditiously notifying customers of improvement activities.
- While our meetings have been constrained by COVID, we conducted two hybrid public meetings and an open house event during the rate process. While considering a significant rate adjustment, the Agency received few comments that were highly antagonistic and a fairly low number of protests.
- Customer Service and Distribution are regularly meeting to coordinate and improve activities.
- From a call for essential water use only, during a treatment plant emergency, we learned important lessons about our capacity for emergency notifications of customers. More work is planned.

Fiscally Responsible

- During the rate study, the Board adopted a 5-year financial vision, a 5-year financial plan, and a 5-year program of rate adjustments to restore the Agency's financial health and begin addressing infrastructure needs.
- Adopted updated water capacity fees.
- Updated the Agency's Reserves Policy and incorporated the targets into the 5-year financial plan.
- Updated the Procurement Policy.
- Completed and reported all required financial reports on time, including audited financials, State Controller Report on financial transactions, employee compensation reports, and the report on use of restricted funds. Federal single audit is pending.
- Significantly improved the budget format for informational content and readability.
- Provided monthly financial reports to the Budget & Finance Committee using an improved format and a month-by-month cash flow projection for the Water and Wastewater funds to provide a more understandable comparison of actual financial information to the budget.
- Continued to use outside financial expertise through consultants cost effectively.
- Received a positive update from the Grand Jury.
- Received a clean audit report on Fiscal Year 20-21.
- Received a new Standard & Poor's rating that removed the negative outlook of the prior rating.
- Made progress toward implementing asset management in connection with CIP and preventive maintenance implementation and development of a Risk Management Program.
- Identified work remaining to be done in setting up and reporting reserve balances.

Employees

- Safety program continues to be improved.
 - Still need to reinstitute the staff Safety Committee, which will help with improved near miss reporting, updating the Safety Manual, and other safety efforts.
- Updated and promulgated the Illness and Injury Prevention Plan.
- Developed and promulgated a COVID Program document.
- Budgeted for four new positions to improve execution of preventive maintenance.
- Other existing vacancies have been prioritized in the mid-year budget review. (Proceeding cautiously due to reduced water sales.)
- Engaged engineering consultants to provide highly capable on-call support to a lean in-house Engineering team.
- Cross-training of personnel within disciplines is occurring in Treatment, Distribution, and Regulatory Compliance.
- Management and the Employees Association have a good working relationship.
- Intra-staff communication has improved.
 - Staff appreciation functions have been largely deferred due to pandemic constraints.
- Succession planning is on-going and becoming a higher priority.

Infrastructure

- Preventive maintenance is targeted for improvement with new positions. (Watching cash flow.) The staffing plan for PM was designed to help move the Agency toward a true Asset Management Program.
- The new Asset Management Analyst position was written to provide additional GIS support.
- Consultants were engaged to work with staff as a grants team. The team has produced an opportunities and prioritization tracking tool and initiated ten grant pursuits, including one through UMRWA.
- The IRWM project list was substantially updated.
- Annual evaluations of storage tanks was implemented on schedule for the third consecutive year.
- Existing tank rehabilitation and replacement occurred, as the Redwood Tanks and Pioneer Phase 2 projects were completed and the Pioneer Phase 3 project was initiated.
- Water Master Plan Study Priority 1A projects were incorporated into the rate study and staff is moving forward with implementation. These projects were prioritized based on regulatory compliance requirements and existing customer reliability.
- The Water Treatment Plant Capacity Study is following up on significant deficiencies identified by the Water Master Plan Study in order to direct and prioritize specific actions.
- The Wastewater Master Plan Study is nearing completion on schedule.
- Staff is continuing to work on canal improvements or replacement and improved water use efficiency to prepare for further impacts of climate change.
- The CAWP water right application was completed and a draft permit was issued by the State and is currently in process.
- The rate study and rate adjustment included planning for funding annual replacements of aging infrastructure. Implementation will be directed by the Asset Management Program as available funds build up.
- Staff is developing a 5-year CIP to correlate with the financial plan. Once complete and adopted, it can be extended to 10 years if desired.
- Operations is meeting regularly with area fire protection agencies. The Agency is supporting grant pursuits for fuel modification projects to reduce potential fire intensity. New ISO ratings were incorporated into the Water Master Plan Study.

Leadership

- Outreach activities were increased to support the rates process and the response to the deepening drought. This included numerous public meetings, remote and hybrid; press releases; guest editorials; social media posts; newsletters; radio appearances; and comments at public meetings of the County and cities.
- Rate process public comments were collected and tracked to insure responses, and included on the Agency's website.
- Follow on meetings have occurred to improve coordination of capital planning for the Agency and its wholesale customers.
- The Outreach & Legislation Committee is planning additional open house events.
- The AWA website has been substantially updated, including the addition of a Transparency button leading to key financial information and policies of interest to the public.
- The Agency has taken and communicated positions on a number of legislative bills, taking a focused approach and working with partners and associations where possible.

- Staff continues to participate in ACWA, is increasing involvement with CSDA and, as it revives itself, the Mountain Counties Water Resources Association. AWA continues to be represented on the MCWRA Board of Directors, as well as the ACWA Region 3 Board. Staff is becoming more engaged in the California Public Employers Labor Relations Association (CALPELRA).
- The Agency continues to be involved on the Boards of UMRWA, CAMRA, and ACGMA, and with many other regional groups.
- The Water Conservation Plan was updated in conjunction with the Urban Water Management Plan update.

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