

Portland Utility Board Communication Subcommittee

February 22, 12:00pm – 2:00pm
Lovejoy Room, City Hall

PUB Members: Ana Brophy, ex officio
Allan Warman
Colleen Johnson
Dan Peterson
Robert Martineau
Ted Labbe
Van Le, ex officio

Staff: Dawn Uchiyama (Deputy Director, Bureau of Environmental Services)
Gabe Solmer (Communications Director, Water)
Megan Callahan (Public Affairs Manager, Bureau of Environmental Services)
Edward Campbell (Resource Protection Manager, Portland Water Bureau)
Liam Frost (Management Analyst, Portland Water Bureau)
Aaron Abrams (Community Outreach and Involvement Program Manager,
Bureau of Environmental Services)

Melissa Merrell (Principal Analyst, City Budget Office)

Public: Carol Cushman, League of Women Voters

I. **Call to Order**

Allan called the meeting to order. He reminded everyone that the meeting was of citizen volunteers tasked to advise City Council on items related to the Water Bureau and the Bureau of Environmental Services. He gave an overview of the agenda.

II. **Public Comment**

Carol Cushman, League of Women Voters, recapped the history of the beginning of PUB. She brought this to Communications Subcommittee because part of the issue with the letter was communications. She said there was no criticism of staff in the letter she submitted to the PUB. She said the Blue-Ribbon Commission wanted to make PUB a stronger board than previous ones. The letter was to remind PUB of the strengths it has and to remind it not to slip back into mistakes of older board. The League wants PUB to be seen as a strong independent body and for it to use PUB its strengths.

III. **Communications Overview**

Bureau of Environmental Services

Megan Callahan, Public Affairs Manager, and Aaron Abrams, Community Outreach and Involvement Program Manager, from Bureau of Environmental Services provided an [overview](#) of the work of BES's Communications group. Megan told PUB there are three groups: Communications, Clean River Rewards, and Public Involvement (shows on slide 3). These groups provide education programs, manage internal and external communications, and do public outreach for capital projects. Megan reports to Dawn and is part of the Office of the Director.

The presentation will focus mostly on external communications but the groups also do a lot of internal work for strategic planning process and implementation, CIP PREP, and the Portland Building. It also publishes a bureau-wide monthly newsletter.

Megan then talked about the external focus work on Clean Rivers Education which provides free programs and tours for K-12 students and helps ensure compliance with the education and outreach components of the MS4 permit.

Colleen asked if the bureau had a technical writer. Megan said her group does provide some editing services, but most writing happens in the work groups. Communications will help with editing and make it pretty. Communications also plays an advisory role on audience identification.

Megan then talked about the Public Information Officer Diane Dulken and reminded PUB members that Taffy Spencer, a Senior Community Outreach and Information Representative with the group had given presentations on the focus group work of BES last summer. The group also has a graphic designer, Karen Martinek. This group helps with concept planning, design, video, web, and social media. Megan showed samples of bill inserts and the newsletter *River Views*. Megan talked about slide 7 which shows data on outreach activities.

The newsletter goes to all residents in the city – both single-family residences and multifamily residences. BES also sends messages with bill inserts. They issue news releases, some of which are regulatorily required and also send information targeted to specific capital projects such as traffic alerts and texts. Finally, they work proactively to get news stories.

BES is using Facebook for storytelling, twitter for alerts, and Nextdoor for green streets stewards recruitment.

Megan showed a sample of media coverage from 2017 (slide 9). The group responds to media inquiries and proactively works with media to get stories out. Some examples are the Clean River Campaign. They found that connection to river resonates with the public from DHM focus groups. They used media outreach to promote testing and clean-up work.

Aaron then talked about the work of the Public Involvement Group which at any given time is working on 80 to 90 capital projects. In the design phase, this group advises engineers and designers about on the ground issues. They work with stakeholders, residents, and business to give input on design process for example like the location and design of stormwater facilities. They are working to tailor to neighborhood needs. This group functions as the face of the bureau in the field and provide general problem-solving assistance. Aaron said the capital program consists generally of two kinds of projects: sewer construction and stormwater and

watershed projects. The group is looking for opportunities to improve outreach to communities including limited English or other groups.

Aaron talked about some joint projects with PBOT – street work and stormwater management – for Capital Highway and Errol Heights, Neighborhood to the River, capacity projects like Greenstreets, enhancement projects, rebuilding culverts, and some culvert replacements with bridges.

Outreach for capital projects includes many mailings, project fliers, project webpages that provide updates, events, tabling, and posts on Nextdoor targeting information.

Aaron then walked through the life cycle of a capital project and the related outreach work:

- 1) Predesign – one on one communication with property owners and businesses to get access to property – permits of entry.
- 2) Design – intensity of work – mailings, fliers, emails, web, social, association presentations, impact specific groups, working with PBOT or other agencies. Workshops at different stages of design – can be large scale changes based on feedback. Then there is more outreach. Tabling. More input and questions. 90% presentation of final workshop.
- 3) Construction – shift from public info and gathering feedback to more customer service team – know it's a hassle and want to disrupt as little as possible. Lots of calls and emails. They function as advocates for public - working with construction teams to minimize disruption.
- 4) Post construction – final punch list – managing repairs to grass or curbs. Notify neighborhood that work is complete – and complete post construction survey.

Aaron highlighted recent the PBOT partnership to combine big work projects but also Expo Center – Lake Oswego (Tryon Creek), and downtown council. They formed great partnerships from last summer's work which is a foundation for more work to come. The office works closely with the Noise Board to address any night work. They will be doing a workshop this summer on community engagement with culturally specific communities to train them on the work that BES does and ways they can help support work.

Aaron also pointed out that Cheryl Kuck from the Public Information office was honored y the Daily Journal of Commerce with a Women of Vision Award.

Finally, Aaron talked about how BES collaborates with other city bureaus, particularly Parks, Water, and PBOT. They cross use social media platforms with Water, do joint neighborhood coalition meetings, and collaborate on bill inserts.

Portland Water Bureau

Edward Campbell, Acting Communications Director, Portland Water Bureau, is temporarily filling this role and talked about his background in media.

He told PUB members that compared to BES, PWB has fewer centralized staff and some programs have heavy communications work integrated into the program work. He gave the

example of the Water Quality staff who handle water line and the Consumer Confidence Report – those activities are not part of the core group within the administrative group.

Edward provided an overview of the office which has a Communications Manager, a Public Information Officer, 2 senior Community and Information Outreach Representatives, 2 Community and Information Outreach Representatives, a part time Community and Information Outreach Representatives, and a graphic designer.

The group does similar work to BES – central strategic planning and thinking but also responding to requests and getting messages out through different media outlets. They provide graphic design support bureau-wide spot and do direct outreach as well.

Edward provided highlights on outreach activities for things like cryptosporidium detections, filtration, the new compliance agreement, Lead and Copper issues, the Eagle Creek Fire, and the record number of main breaks last year.

Similar to BES, PWB uses Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Nextdoor. Nextdoor is a good tool for targeting things with geographic locales like presentations at fix-it fairs. PWB has also had success getting the message out about their Preparedness campaign including video clips at local theaters.

Edward talked about some of the difference with BES, for example, PWB has few big capital projects but has the same sort of process for those large ones. PWB has many more smaller projects that are short in duration with not much lead time. Those require a different flavor and approach. PWB has to adapt and respond to projects that come up and happen quickly.

He then talked about things like emergency main repairs which can be media intensive with the bureau trying to get information to the community about how long it will affect them. The group also does outreach with more planning and lead time like outreach to communities for the low-income assistance program to meet with different communities or scheduled projects like the fish ladder and outreach to kids in schools.

PWB is working to maintain and improve an outreach toolbox with best practices and lessons learned. They also monitor internally with engineering and communications for projects that might need outreach and helping to scope projects to highlight issues that might impact neighbors. The group works to mitigate impacts and works with crews when onsite to address public insight or questions. PWB has contracted outreach services for Washington Park and other similar large projects to do more outreach, and adapt as projects are ongoing.

Edward pointed to the success of underrepresented communities helping to develop the low-income expansion and that involvement has informed policy proposal concepts. The relationships built through that process will help during implementation. He also talked about Explore Washington Park – which helps educate the public about parking difficulties due to Washington Park work and projects in the Columbia corridor with the Columbia Slough Council with the groundwater program. Finally, he talked about PWB's participation in the Regional Water Provides Consortium and the work to coordinate the region.

Member Discussion and Questions

Dan asked about the inquiries that come in to the bureaus and whether there has been response or documented follow-up?

Aaron responded that they maintain a communications logs for every project and provide response notes. Every other week there is a processes meeting and there are project meetings once a month. There are discussions at those meetings about how to better address issues that arise and continuous improvement opportunities. For example, they receive many complaints from CIPP lining. They are working to improve their messaging and also doing research and testing to collect information to better address those types of concerns. Whenever they notice a cluster of complaints, they work to address it and improve messaging.

Edward mentioned comments that come through the Water Line - if trends appear they can send folks out to do research on water quality.

Ted said that traditionally the Public Information Officer (PIO) will respond to a media requests, but that it seems like sometimes reporters are doing work without checking in. He asked, if the bureau sees an article, do they reach out to reporters to educate them? He said that the media landscape has changed a lot in the last few years, there are new reporters. It's important to try to connect and give the basics of who the bureaus are and what they do. Megan said the PIOs does that. Sometimes the PIO sees a story and reaches out to make corrections. Sometimes responses are printed. The question is what is the risk, and the cycle is so quick. Is it better to continue the story or not.

Edward said that PWB is investing more in direct communications. He talked about the Eagle Creek fire from last summer and how the communication with incident command and the media wasn't smooth. They tried to message with media but were not effective. The group adjusted and focused daily messages to key stakeholders. PWB has a responsibility to stakeholders and making sure they have factual info. Daily direct updates provided best information. In that case, communicating directly to stakeholders was best given the challenges with media and the changing media market. Social media allows that for direct communication.

Colleen pointed out that BES has 13 folks and PWB has six or seven. There are about 20 people. Could there be any efficiencies in combining to serve both bureaus?

Edward said he has worked with the bureau several years. One of the things he's learned is that the missions of PWB and BES are very different and there is not much overlap. His group – Resource Protection – is focused in Bull Run and not in the city. They work with external partnership like the Forest Service. There is some overlap with groundwater but it's small. For many of BES's projects like Superfund, PWB isn't a player at all. Right now, the bureaus roll up under a single commissioner but if there were to be separate, joint offices wouldn't work.

Megan also said the missions are very different. Water is lucky because their core product is water which easily resonates with the public. Sewage less easy to connect and engage around. Communication needs are different enough and the individual teams provide nimbleness.

There was a discussion about the information provided on the bill. A few years ago it was changed to better describe the distinction between the bureaus and allows customer to understand that there are two bureaus and with different needs. She said it's tough to overcome the legacy of the water bill.

Rob said that in the billing area economies of scale makes sense. The Water Bureau has the ability to shut off water which motivates bill paying. He said he rarely meets someone that doesn't know it's for two services.

Ana said much of the outreach work is integrated into program work. Edward mentioned the toolbox is to support project and project outreach for programs that don't have integrated communications people working for them.

There was discussion about the Industrial Hygienists that had been mentioned in relation to the complaints about the relining work of BES pipes.

There was also a question about whether communications logs happen in PWB and Edward said he wanted to check into it.

A member asked if BES had anything like water line - one number to call for pressure complaints, reporting, or dumping? Megan said there are two numbers, one for sewer problems back-up and one for reporting spills. BES maintains a log of calls and resolution.

Ted said the one thing that is common to both bureaus is that both are required to do some communication by regulations. He talked about the water efficiency staff who work to reduce water use which by nature includes interaction with community.

Van said that there's a difference between front facing staff and communications. She also said there is a difference in the communication activities depending on the size of the project. Small main repairs or replacements would be handles internally with PWB's Communications Group. Large projects like Washington park are coordinated by consultants. The Engineering team doesn't produce communications materials.

Allan asked roughly what percent is proactive communications and what is reactive. Edward said that he would do some research. There may be some planned proactive but there may also be a mix of reactive. Could be different staff approach or makeup. In Aaron's groups the same people are doing both types of work. This applies to the PIO as well – there's some reactive and some proactive.

Rob asked about the contracts and the public involvement consultants provide door to door outreach. They are the boots on the ground. Aaron said for example, with the Old Town project last year, they needed to get in all the basements for bypass. He also talked about the contract work with DHM for the focus groups last year. Sometimes that hire consultants to help with messaging. They also periodically hire consultants such as videographer.

Different from how Water Bureau uses consultant – seems like major projects consult those major projects but run through communications office.

Rob asked about having engaged inspectors versus receiving complaint calls. He said having good inspectors are key who can help spot potential issues.

IV. Board Discussion: Board responses to Public Comment

Van said that the communication committee was a good place to discuss a potential generic response when external bodies contact the board. A solution could be a template letter and a procedure to make incoming letters available to the board at the next available meeting. This would solve the timeliness issue. Input would come to board at timing best decided by chairs.

She said it's important for the board to have a reputation of being welcoming.

The board asked if there was a spot where people can send email. Melissa said she is working with BTS to add the ability for the public to submit comments via the website. They can currently email comments to her. There was discussion of whether the board would want a direct email distribution list.

V. Board Discussion: Milestone Dashboard

Dan recapped the discussion from the workgroup that met in December and requested Melissa create a strawman for the board to consider.

Van asked about the audience. Its main intent is for board members but would be available publicly.

The tracker isn't intended to track everything and the board will need to choose what is added or what is not added.

There was a sense that the tracker should be inclusive of projects that have a long horizon and for which it would help the board to have a monthly visual reminder.

Rob noted that they had the Communications directors in the room and asked for their opinion. Megan said she thought the board was having a good discussion and asking the right questions. About what form and what purpose. She thought it would be good for the board to continue discussing what is included and how far out the time horizon is. She also suggested adding a key.

The board talked about how the product would be different if moved to the website for a public audience.

Dan thought that if it were to be shown to the community it should include information about how the projects are good for the public or what the purpose is. How does it benefit the community?

The members agreed that this should be a discussion item in April or May to hash out the what, why, and who questions.

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Ted said if it were to be tool for the public instead of the board is should include metrics or outcomes but there are already some of those tools available.

The meeting adjourned at 1:45 PM.