

## Highlights from the Tuesday, January 14, 2020 PUB-Council work session

Below are highlights, not notes, from the PUB-Council work session. I focused on the input from the Commissioners and the Mayor, highlighting things that may be of relevance to PUB as you think about your priorities for the budget; priorities for next year's work plan; and more generally the role PUB plays in the City and how you might work to increase your impact.

Note: Commissioner Hardesty had some content-related questions regarding the low-income assistance program and ARC. These were more properly for the bureaus. I followed up with the bureaus to ensure they had her questions and were able to respond.

### **Commissioner Hardesty asked what the biggest challenge is in translating bureau-ese to things community can relate to.**

Mia answered, acknowledging that financial concerns are an issue for communities she is connected to and that taking the time to explain how the capital improvement projects are addressing things that community values, e.g., reliable access to water, water quality, is important.

### **Mayor Wheeler said it sounds like there is general alignment between the bureaus and PUB and asked if there were any specific areas where things weren't aligned.**

Dory commented that the turn-around time for requested deliverables can be an issue.

Mayor Wheeler said this is something they hear from commissions and boards; noting that folks for whom this is a day-job can speed ahead, forgetting that the City's boards and commissions are volunteers.

Commissioner Hardesty added in a later comment that she heard the issue of PUB being asked to make decisions with not enough information or time. She invited the PUB to respectfully push back when more time or information is needed. She closed by saying - Don't let our emergency become your emergency.

### **Commissioner Hardesty asked how Council could support the PUB's work**

Several PUB members spoke.

#### **Dory said the board requests deeper engagement and a response when the board provides written feedback.**

**Commissioner Hardesty** shared that if PUB writes her office, they will write you back. If PUB sees a meeting where her attendance will add value, let her know as early as possible and she will see if she can make it, though no promises.

**Mayor Wheeler** shared that he has limited bandwidth and needs to prioritize his time. He said that he didn't need to respond to each issue. He trusts the PUB and the Commissioners' staff to move things forward. He asked the board to think long and hard about where the board does need his engagement. He said if the board does need his focused attention, advice, or connection between now and when the new Commissioner comes on board to ask.

**Commissioner Fritz** shared that she visits advisory bodies once or twice, then she lets them operate independently. She mentioned that staff attendance at meetings is an appropriate way for Council members to show interest and to ensure that Commissioners know what is going on. She also noted

that when a Commissioner shows up, it can shift the focus. She also agreed with the PUB request of providing written response to PUB's written communications.

Mayor Wheeler thanked Commissioner Fritz for the great advice.

**Karen W said that it would help with deliberations if she knew how PUB's work fits into larger City initiatives. For example, if a seismic resiliency or emergency preparedness project comes to the PUB, knowing how it fits into City-wide work and strategic initiative would be helpful.**

Later in the conversation Commissioner shared that she agreed there is a backlog of infrastructure issues and that she hopes in next year they will be developing a City-wide integrated infrastructure upgrade approach.

**Mia S suggested more in-depth onboarding/training for new board members.**

All three Council members acknowledged the general need for better onboarding of commissions and boards across the city. Fritz added that better onboarding for staff would also be helpful.

Mayor Wheeler noted that she added the time spent on onboarding, especially for boards tackling complex issues, pays itself back and then some.

**Heidi asked the Council if PUB had identified the right priorities and if anything was missing.**

Commissioner Hardesty said she felt PUB has the right priorities. She shared that the question is how much PUB can get done, given such little time.

Mayor Wheeler identified three areas of importance:

- **Accountability/credibility in the overall governance process** - Mayor Wheeler shared that as an independent advisory body providing community oversight the PUB brings credibility. He indicated that PUB has a role to play as a watchdog, holding Council and bureaus accountable. He said they rely on PUB to give Council an independent and unvarnished view of things. While 99.9% of the public won't be aware of the details of the conversations PUB is having, knowing PUB is having those conversations is extremely important.
- **Emergency preparedness and resiliency** - Mayor Wheeler said it is great to have outside objective eyes on these issues. What is the right amount of investment and in what infrastructure?
- **Continued focus on the rate impact of significant infrastructure work** - The Mayor shared that members of the public would likely identify keeping rates low as the most important thing. From his housing work he knows that the cost of housing is only one piece of the overall affordability issue. PUB's independent work around rate setting and thinking about what the City is asking rate payers to bear is important input. Is an investment justified in terms of the potential impact to rates?

**Dory asked about Council's larger vision for advisory bodies. In the event, that PUB's immediate input was not needed, what else could PUB offer?**

Commissioner Hardesty said I like you're thinking. She said resiliency after the big hit. Water is one of the resources we're going to have to figure out how to get to people. We know low-income communities will be hit hardest and have the least resiliency to come back from a disaster so how do we make sure our planning incorporates this? Acknowledging PUB's time constraints Commissioner

Hardesty said it would be interesting to have PUB work in conjunction with PBEM to plan for how we could restore water quickly and efficiently.

Commissioner Wheeler responded that to achieve renewable energy goals of 2035, the private utilities are going to have to invest heavily in new technologies while being aware of rates. There is an opportunity for sharing, learning, and collaboration. How might what you've recommended more generally apply to private sector utilities?

Commissioner Hardesty closed by noting that she hopes the City is evolving in ways that involve understanding that people are making a choice to volunteer their community expertise and that the City puts together advisory bodies in ways that values their other commitments and remove barriers, e.g., by providing childcare, stipends, transportation, food, etc. that allow more people to more fully participate. She hopes these practices will become more uniform across bureaus.