

East Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District 2021-22 Hearing Minutes

Tuesday May 18, 2021

4:00 pm

District Office

5211 N Williams Avenue Portland, Oregon

Via Go-to-Meeting

Present:

TSCC: Chair David Barringer, Commissioner James Ofsink, Commissioner Mark Wubbold, Commissioner Margo Norton, Commissioner Harmony Quiroz, Executive Director Craig Gibons and Budget Analyst Tunie Betschart (all via virtual meeting using GoToMeeting)

Absent: None

East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District: Board Chair Michael Guebert, Executive Director Nancy Hamilton and Chief Financial Officer Dan Mitten

Chair David Barringer opened the public hearing and asked the Commissioners and staff to introduce themselves. He then asked if any Commissioners have business relationships with the district that could be perceived as a conflict of interest. There were none. He asked the district to introduce staff and any board members present, make brief introductory remarks about the budget. Then the commissioners would ask a few questions and discuss the budget. Following the questions, the commissioners will take testimony from the public.

After introductions were done, Ms. Hamilton gave a brief recap of the current budget, identifying the funds, their purposes, and significant numbers in the budget. She stated she would provide information on the budget during the question period. She hopes it reflects the tangible manifestation of walking their talk. They do important things with their dollars. Hopefully, the commissioners will see clearly that the mission of EMSWCD is to care for land and water and that this is reflected in the budget. She mentioned that they would be working on a Strategic Plan this next year, operationalizing their equity learnings, and launching a climate change initiative. They plan to translate the Strategic Plan from concept and budgetary allocations into action. She suggested moving to the TSCC questions.

Next, the commissioners began their questions.

TSCC Questions:

Chair Barringer asked the following questions:

Welcome, Nancy Hamilton, to your first TSCC hearing as the Executive Director of the district. Please tell us a bit of your background. What brings you to East Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District. What have you learned about the district in your first few months here?

[Ms. Hamilton said she has been with the district for six months but hasn't met all employees face-](#)

to-face or been in the office for any length of time due to the pandemic. So it is an odd time to take the helm of an organization. She gave background information, stating she had owned her own consulting agency, working with a variety of clients, providing marketing and communications expertise to sustainable energy efforts; she worked for Governor Kulongoski as a Senior Policy Advisor for economic development and workforce issues; she served as Chief of Staff to former Portland Mayor Tom Potter.

She said she joined EMSWCD to be a part of a team again. She wanted to be a part of the work they do. She has learned about plants and toxic, invasive weeds, and is becoming fascinated by the havoc weeds play in the ecosystem, the benefits of riparian restoration work on soil and water health, stormwater management, expanding urban tree canopies, and about property easements to name a few.

She said she has never had the opportunity to attend a TSCC Budget Hearing before but is looking forward to this being the first of many.

Commissioner Norton asked the following questions:

We would like to hear from the Board about the plans for next year. The budget message emphasizes DEI efforts and emerging work in climate change, and a new strategic planning effort. What is the Board's role in developing and carrying out this work? Has the Board set out expectations for this work?

Mr. Michael Guebert answered by saying last year, they had a lot of transition that was happening with the hiring process for the Executive Director. Four board seats were up for election. So there was enough uncertainty that no one was sure how the district would look.

He said as a board, they are committed to supporting the staff's work as they begin to operationalize more of the intensive internal equity learnings that have been underway for over six years. They are committed to continuing their equity literacy journey as a board and district. They are committed to engaging in a more strategic and intentional approach to the impacts of climate change here in the district and as a partner with others in the region who have the same commitment and sense of urgency. Drought, warming temperatures, fire, and food insecurities put the way of life in the Pacific Northwest at risk.

More can be done on mitigation, adaptation, resiliency, and education & outreach to be part of the solution here. As the new executive director, Nancy has stated this as a priority as the district moves into the next fiscal year. The Board looks forward to seeing how that work begins to unfold.

They are also preparing for a significant Strategic Planning process that will involve everyone on the staff, the Board, and many district partners, as they consider the fundamental questions of what a Soil & Water Conservation District is and does in 2021. How those questions are answered will impact priorities and work plans in the future. These are both challenging and exciting times to embark on this work, and the Board is happy to provide resources that the staff will need to do this work with focus and intention.

He concluded by saying, the Board plans to be fully engaged in all of these processes and looks forward to ultimately contributing to and approving the plans as they unfold. The EMSWCD Board's role is, as always, to be the guiding, governing body of the organization and good representatives of the taxpayers and stewards of their dollars. As Chair of the Board, he is very

anxious to see what this next year will bring and will be excited to meet next year with the results.

I heard in the introduction that this would be the year of moving concepts into action. You mentioned that the Board is hoping to see action. Is that the Board's expectation? Are we going to see action on climate change, equity, and a completed plan this year?

Mr. Michael Guebert said they are further along on the equity action plan, and he expects it will be fully implemented this year. However, the climate change initiative is in the early stages of what the implementation will look like is not wholly known.

Ms. Hamilton added that she was excited to hone in on the core, earth-based issues. They are hoping to tuck in the climate work as a part of the entire organization, rather than a separate thing, similar to how they plan to do the DEI. The goal is not to have a DEI in a box on the shelf but to become part of who the district is and how they approach everything. She has the same goal for climate work. She has studied the Strategic Plans of their partners to identify commonalities with what they are doing. She is hoping to find similar core strategies and goals. By doing this, they can and leverage their combined capacity and complement the efforts of others. The staff is excited to get going on this too. She stated it is her goal by the end of the fiscal year to have work plans that will inform the next fiscal year.

Commissioner Wubbold asked the following question:

You have added a data analyst position to next year's budget. How does the work of that position fit into these priorities?

Ms. Hamilton replied, saying they have not filled this position yet. However, they are developing the job description and talking to staff about the data deliverables that have been on hold for quite a while. This limited-term position is envisioned as someone who can:

- Work on a range of GIS-related data sets
- Formalize the work the district does with those data sets
- Provide strategic planning data support
- Help with demographic and related efforts for the Equity Team, climate change efforts, and other projects

They are looking for someone who can help with the data around the demographic work. The district will be rethinking who they reach out to, how they receive information, what they care about, and what the soil & water conservation district is all about in 2021 moving forward. Many of these efforts have been discussed and planned for years. Others are emerging now. This is an opportunity to begin putting the work forward into those plans.

Commissioner Quiroz asked the following questions:

You have touched on several different aspects of climate change. We are interested in the plan for the climate change initiative, but we want to know how it can be identified in the budget? Are you developing performance measures? Where can the public see the results of the climate change investments?

Ms. Hamilton responded by saying it is hard to say within the district how much the district has improved water or the water temperature and its impact on the environment. No one agrees on

the numbers for soil sequestration. This may change in the future, but currently, there is no set of numbers everyone agrees upon. She said she would be looking for ways climate change is integrated into their work as a district. She concluded by stating she would be looking to district staff to help determine this.

Commissioner Ofsink asked the following questions:

How has the pandemic affected the work of the district? What projects and activities were you able to continue or complete, and which ones were paused? Were there any surprises about projects you could do that you did not think the district could do when we met last year?

Ms. Hamilton described how the organization's teams are structured, with Finance and Operations, Rural Lands, Urban Lands, and Conservation Legacy. She said each of the teams felt the impact differently. For example, the Finance and Operations Division was able to work very effectively from home, getting all necessary work completed. However, in Rural Lands Organization, some details needed to be worked through to complete their jobs.

The Rural Lands team had a pause in some planned activities, and some were canceled. There were details to work through, such as travel from site to site but work picked back up. There was a reduction in staff hours due to childcare demands. The district was able to prioritize work and without any major setbacks to the long-term goals.

Urban Lands program work had to transition to virtual workshops with in-person workshops and demonstrations canceled last year, but there was an increase in participation due to the internet participation. The intention is to keep a hybrid model in place in the future. The Annual Native Plant Sale was canceled. The district is reevaluating the way to reinstate the sale. So there may be some changes coming.

The Grant program had some significant disruptions as not all grantees could carry out projects as anticipated, affecting their ability to spend the grant funds. This resulted in how the district carried out the partners in the Conservation grants program for 2021. They chose to continue support for the regular grantees that met specific criteria on a non-competitive basis. Staff is reevaluating the Grants Program as a whole, and those findings will help inform the Strategic Planning work.

Headwaters Farm operations were affected by the pandemic, particularly by the closing of restaurants and farmers' markets. However, they could adjust quickly due to the increased demand for locally grown fresh produce.

She went on to say that staff and programs were impacted due to employees dealing with childcare responsibilities. But, all-in-all, the district was able to keep everything moving forward as they navigated all the changes inherent in this pandemic.

Commissioner Quiroz asked the following questions:

How will you complete the unfinished work from this year, and how does the pandemic change things moving forward?

Ms. Hamilton said it is just an ever-changing playing field. There were a few projects at Headwaters Farm that were put on hold. Those will be accomplished in the next fiscal year. But, for the most part, the lessons learned this year would inform the strategic planning work. This will

be evident when TSCC returns next year.

Commissioner Wubbold asked the following questions:

Did the wildfires last year impact the work the district did? What are your plans for this year? Are you planning to do any future fire prevention work in the next year?

Ms. Hamilton said some contracted labor crews were canceled last year due to air quality issues. There could be similar problems this year if predictions are correct. The heavy smoke affected the power generated by the new solar system at Headwaters Farm.

The district has helped mitigate the effects of wildfires by eliminating the weeds that climb trees and act as a ladder for destructive fires. This work will continue.

The Rural Lands team is participating in an advisory group working with Multnomah County to update their Community Wildfire Protection Plan with an eye to the future. The plan includes discussing wildfire fuel reduction, communication, and lessons learned from both fires last year.

Chair Barringer asked this follow-up question:

Will this change the types of plants sold at the Annual Plant Sale?

Ms. Hamilton explained that most plants they sell are used in urban areas, and wildfires happen in more rural settings.

Commissioner Ofsink asked the following questions:

There was an East Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District logo in a slide presentation at the Corbett Water District. On what projects are your two districts collaborating? Mount Hood Community College is also a TSCC member, and your budget message refers to more funding for a multi-year demonstration project with the college. How that project is progressing?

Ms. Hamilton explained that timber companies own the land beside the waterways that feed the district's water supply. The same state riparian buffer requirements do not apply if the district is not in a salmon-sensitive water supply. The timber company plantings have impacted the sediment that is developing in the water district. It is a huge problem. She hopes to help by investigating the feasibility of a better buffer system for the district, similar to the EMSWCD's stream program that would help provide a mitigation to the sediment issues they are experiencing. She said it is a more significant issue than EMSWCD can solve but wants to lend a hand in any way they can. Including notifying the state of the problems this is causing. Possibly there needs to be a change in regulations.

She said Mt. Hood Community College was identified as the single largest source of untreated stormwater runoff within the City of Gresham. They have been partnering with various other entities working to keep untreated stormwater runoff from going where it should not be going and get it to go places where it should and hold it back. More work is planned and budgeted in FY22.

She added information on a project they are doing with the Native American Youth Association on property that borders a creek. The hope is to make the land healthier in partnership with NAYA and also helping to create access for native people to get back to their ancestors' ceremonies.

Commissioner Norton asked the follow-up question:

Do the soil and water districts state-wide gather together to assist districts such as Corbett Water district and the timber companies?

Ms. Hamilton said there are folks at the state level who advocate for the conservation districts on matters of concern to the public. In Oregon, eleven small water districts have similar problems. There has been some conversation about informing the state of the need to revisit the regulations around these issues. This conversation is just beginning.

Chair Barringer asked the following questions:

Uncertainties have permeated every district's planning for the last year. What are your district's uncertainties? Has any been resolved since you started the budget process months ago? Do you anticipate any changes to the budget on adoption?

Ms. Hamilton said they do not anticipate changes to their budget at adoption. There is a large contingency if something comes up, and they need to deal with it.

The district is still waiting for clarification and guidance on protocols for how and when they might reopen the physical office. They have budgeted dollars in anticipation of needing to do something, but these are educated guesses at this time without knowing specifics yet. She stated she is grateful to the Board for providing the kind of resources needed to do the work projected for the next fiscal year.

Chair Barringer said this was the end of the formal questions. He asked if anyone had signed up to speak or any questions or comments on the 2021-22 budget. There were none.

Chair Barringer closed the public hearing and opened a meeting of the TSCC to consider the 2021-22 budget for the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District. He asked Mr. Gibons to give a brief description of the budget review process.

Mr. Gibons said the budget was completed on time and in balance according to Oregon Local Budget Law. He suggested the Commission certify the budget with no recommendations or objections.

Commissioner Quiroz moved to certify that the Commission has no objections or recommendations concerning East Multnomah Soil and Water District's Budget as presented by staff. Commissioner Ofsink seconded the motion, which passed with a unanimous vote.

There being no other business, Chair Barringer closed the meeting.

**Approved By Commission
June 8, 2021**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. Barringer', written over a faint rectangular stamp.