

General Best Practices for Future Planning Committee of the Interregional Planning Council Meeting Minutes

July 21, 2020, 1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

held via GoToWebinar Videoconference

Committee decisions bolded and italicized in document

Participation: Committee Members present 4 of 5: Steve Walthour (Region A), Allison Strube (Region F), Kelley Holcomb (Region I), and Tomas Rodriguez (Region M). Russell Schreiber (Region B) was absent.

Senators/Representatives/Other VIPs in Attendance: None

Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) Board Members and Staff: Sarah Backhouse, Elizabeth McCoy, Temple McKinnon, Matt Nelson, and Reem Zoun.

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Call to Order and Welcome

Committee Chair Steve Walthour (Region A) called the meeting to order. Sarah Backhouse (TWDB) determined that a quorum was present.

2. Public Comment – No public comments were offered.

3. Consider Minutes from the July 15, 2020 Committee Meeting

The committee considered the minutes of the July 15, 2020 meeting. Tomas Rodriguez (Region M) made a motion to approve the minutes. Allison Strube (Region F) seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved.

4. Discussion and Action, as appropriate – Action Plan for Committee Work and Status of Assignments

Mr. Walthour introduced the draft committee action plan and reviewed actions and assignments identified to date. Actions to be completed include: research on simplified planning by Mr. Walthour, research on membership engagement by Kelley Holcomb (Region I), review of Chapter 8 recommendations by the full Committee, provide steps for information dissemination to membership by Mr. Rodriguez, research on Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) drinking water rules in relation to planning by Russell Schreiber (Region B), and several items on report development by the Committee.

Mr. Walthour proposed that the committee use this meeting to provide updates on the status of assignments and discuss resources needed to complete their tasks. The committee set July 28, 2020, as the deadline to complete research into assigned topics.

5. Discussion and Action, as appropriate – General Best Practices for Future Planning

Mr. Walthour provided an update on his research into simplified planning. Mr. Walthour developed the following draft problem statement on the issue of simplified planning: The simplified planning process is not functional under Texas Water Code (TWC) Section 16.053. Regional water planning groups (RWPG) only receive official census data every ten years, and in some regions of Texas review of the census data, as well as updated groundwater and surface water availability information from the previous planning

cycle, shows that there are no significant changes to population, water availability, water supplies, or water demands in the regional water planning area. Requiring RWPGs to at a minimum update groundwater and surface water availabilities that have not significantly changed is a waste of volunteer RWPG members' time.

Mr. Walthour proposed that RWPG members' time and state financial resources could be redirected to solving other water planning issues through special studies or focused professional services in communication of the regional plans to the public. Mr. Walthour suggested this issue may require legislative action and outlined multiple potential solutions that could improve the simplified planning process, including:

- Amend language in TWC Section 16.053(i) to discontinue requirements to update groundwater and surface water availability values in the regional water plan if availability numbers have not changed significantly;
- Allow RWPGs to petition the TWDB for simplified planning, where the TWDB can determine if simplified planning would be most effective;
- Consider requiring development of regional water plans every 10 years instead of every five years. Although, this may not work for all regions; or,
- Strike simplified planning from the statute if it does not provide value.

Mr. Walthour requested that his write up on simplified planning issues be distributed to members prior to the next meeting.

Mr. Holcomb briefly presented challenges and potential solutions identified on the topic of RWPG member engagement. Mr. Walthour suggested the committee review Mr. Holcomb's write up on engagement and discuss the topic further at the next meeting.

The committee then discussed Chapter 8 policy recommendations. Mr. Walthour submitted a summary of Chapter 8 policy recommendations related to best practices from the 2016 Region A Regional Water Plan. Ms. Strube noted that the Region F Regional Water Plan recommends a 10 year planning cycle as well as recommendations on groundwater, weather modification, and coordination with TCEQ on water availability modeling. Mr. Holcomb shared that the Region I Regional Water Plan includes project specific recommendations. He offered to prepare a condensed list of Region I best practice recommendations prior to the next meeting.

Mr. Walthour asked all members to prepare a similar summary of best practice recommendations included in the regional water plans for their regions. This may help identify additional issues for the committee to address. Mr. Rodriguez added that the Region M Regional Water Plan contains ten pages of recommendations. The main recommendations focus on issues related to annual discharge from Mexico and plugging abandoned oil and gas wells. Mr. Rodriguez noted it may be difficult, but he will try to summarize recommendations prior to the next meeting.

Mr. Rodriguez presented Region M's communication process with RWPG members. He explained that Region M established water users fees to fund the administrative costs for the RWPG. One month before a scheduled meeting, LRGVDC staff, the Region M chair and vice-chair, RWPG consultant, and TWDB staff have a call to discuss the agenda for the meeting. LRGVDC staff then publish the agenda and host the RWPG meeting. Meetings are held in Weslaco, Texas, which is approximately 165 miles from Laredo and 295 miles from Eagle Pass.

Regarding TWDB communications, when the Region M chair receives information from TWDB, Bureau of Reclamation, TCEQ, or other state agencies, the chair forwards the information to the LRGVDC administrator who then forwards the information to Region M members. Region M also holds orientation for new members once a year. Annual orientations are broken into two sessions and benefit both new and old RWPG members. Mr. Rodriguez added these processes have worked well for Region M.

Mr. Holcomb noted Region I has similar issues with RWPG travel and access. This seems to be a common issue across the state. Travel for RWPG activities is time consuming since regions cover large geographic areas. He added that this can influence RWPG engagement. Mr. Holcomb asked how this can be addressed to improve or enhance RWPG member and general public engagement. Ms. Strube offered that people are becoming more accustomed to virtual meetings. Virtual RWPG meetings could help address issues with travel and improve engagement in the future although there may be some resistance to this idea from existing members.

Mr. Walthour observed that it has been interesting to hear from RWPG chairs on the Council that there are multiple RWPGs that are unaware of available TWDB information. He added that TWDB is trying their best to get information out to planning groups, but it appears that a lot of information that is sent out to RWPG chairs and political subdivisions may not be disseminated out to the RWPG members. Mr. Walthour offered a recommendation that TWDB should invest in professional media consultants to assist TWDB staff in developing the suite of digital platforms that can effectively deliver better messages to more RWPG members and the public.

Mr. Holcomb agreed with the recommendation and added that TWDB generates a lot of data, and it's can be a lot of information to consume. It is easy for this information to get lost in daily flood of emails and communication. He added that more communication is not necessarily better or effective and hiring someone to provide expertise on communication would be helpful. Ms. Strube also agreed and added that people may be inclined to watch a 3-4 minute video over reading a ten page document. Utilizing different platforms and ways to present the information in trainings or new member orientations could improve engagement. Mr. Rodriguez agreed that presenting messages in 3-5 minutes helps keep viewers' attention. He added that there may be limits to how some information from TWDB can be summarized.

Mr. Walthour explained that the TWDB needs professional support to improve how they disseminate information. Mr. Holcomb added that for the last 18 months Region I has focused on trying new ways to present information. The region has made a point to provide information to members earlier to review. This extra effort has not had a noticeable impact on engagement. Region I continues to have limited engagement and discussion from members at meetings. Mr. Holcomb is not sure how to get past this issue. Mr. Walthour noted that what has really struck him is that RWPG chairs on the Council aren't aware of the resources that are available. Part of the issue seems to be that people aren't paying attention to the information that is being sent out. He added that this is something that can be worked on.

Mr. Walthour asked if there was an update on Mr. Schreiber's review of TCEQ requirements. Mr. Schreiber was unable to attend the meeting but had provided an update on his work to TWDB to share with the committee. Ms. Backhouse noted that Mr. Schreiber researched the planning rules related to wholesale contracts. He found that wholesale demands in regional planning are based on contractual amounts. He suggested that there may be an issue with how TCEQ interprets the drinking water rules.

The Region B consultants do not believe the TCEQ understands why or how the minimal flow rate in the drinking water rules affects the planning process. He suggested this issue does not need to be addressed in the committee report because the rule may be appropriate, but the application of the rule may need to be reconsidered by the TCEQ. Ms. Backhouse added that the RWPG contract guidance includes a statement that says retail distribution connection pressurization and the distribution system daily peaking capacity regulatory rules are not applicable to the regional water supply planning process since retail system level capacity is not a condition relevant to annual supply at the water user group level. If there are consultants that have concerns with this, TWDB can follow up with them.

Mr. Rodriguez added that TCEQ has strict rules that must be met. Mr. Holcomb described his experience working with TCEQ, TWDB, and the Army Corp of Engineers on permitting for Lake Columbia. He noted that at the time agency representatives were adamant that the 0.6 gallons per minute raw water rule was a peak demand factor and not a planning or federal permitting issue. He has not seen any interested in connecting the dots between agencies and processes. Mr. Walthour suggested this topic falls into the category of misunderstanding how different agencies and groups apply to the regional water planning cycle. Maybe this is something that could be addressed in a frequently asked questions document. Mr. Rodriguez agreed with Mr. Holcomb and added that the Best Management Practices Guide for RWPG Political Subdivisions is a good resource for the topics the committee is discussing.

Mr. Walthour proposed adding improving the regional water planning process to the committee's list of topics to review. He noted brainstorming for process improvements has primarily been done by TWDB staff and the 16 RWPG chairs. He suggested that this does not adequately allow development of a value-type stream that would make the process more efficient. He added that there are over 300 RWPG members that are only engaged when they are provided documents to review or attend meetings. Mr. Walthour suggested TWDB leadership should incorporate a set of management practices to improve efficiency and effectiveness by eliminating waste in the regional water planning process. The core principle is to reduce and eliminate non-value added activities and waste by engaging the RWPG membership. The value of such a program would potentially lower costs and improve productivity of the RWPG membership. Mr. Walthour added that Chairs' conference calls don't provide adequate opportunity to share best practices, and there is no formal process to document best practices. Regional water planning is a bottom up process, but it takes leadership to implement program changes if changes are needed. Mr. Walthour asked if this could be added to the committee's list. Mr. Holcomb agreed that this is key and asked that Mr. Walthour's notes on the topic be shared. Members agreed the topic be added to the committee's list.

6. Consideration and Action, as appropriate – Committee reports and recommendations to the Interregional Planning Council regarding General Best Practices for Future Planning

Mr. Walthour reviewed the outline for Interregional Planning Council report to the TWDB. He asked members to keep the outline in mind when preparing information for the next meeting. The committee's section of the report will cover the following: review of existing practices and conditions, problem statement, goal statement, and recommendations, including to whom recommendations are directed.

Ms. Backhouse noted that committees have been asked to consider how TWDB support staff can help with report development. Mr. Walthour proposed the committee will prepare documents for the TWDB staff to compile into the committee's report. Mr. Holcomb added that TWDB and Council chair Suzanne Scott are reviewing the process for compiling committee reports into a cohesive document for the Council's report. Mr. Holcomb suggested that assigning one principal writer from each committee would

be a good process. Ms. Strube added that TWDB support to compile the committee report would be helpful.

Mr. Holcomb noted that TWDB is going to tie the Council report together into one voice after the September 30 Council meeting. Temple McKinnon (TWDB) confirmed that TWDB will review the Council report and provide final uniformity and polishing. Ms. McKinnon asked the committee to provide guidance to TWDB support staff on expectations for document production. Mr. Walthour recommended the committee follow the outline when preparing the documents that will then be compiled into the committee report. He requested that TWDB staff compile committee documents into an acceptable format for the committee report. No objections were noted to this approach.

Mr. Rodriguez recommended that the committee review the Best Management Practices Guide for RWPG Political Subdivisions when making recommendations to see if the recommendation is already covered in the document. Mr. Rodriguez noted that he doesn't have many objections to the current regional water planning process.

Mr. Walthour reminded the committee of the Deliberations by Discussion Topics document that provides a list of best practices discussed by the Council. Mr. Walthour recommended the committee review the list and see how the committee's recommendations may address these issues.

7. Discussion of Next Steps

The next committee meeting is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. on July 28, 2020. Mr. Walthour asked members to submit any materials they prepare for the meeting to TWDB staff to disseminate. Mr. Walthour noted he will review the Best Management Practices Guide for RWPG Political Subdivisions and be prepared for discussion of the document at next meeting.

Ms. Backhouse noted that TWDB is compiling 2021 Initially Prepared Plan Chapter 8 policy recommendations and asked if the committee would like to be provided what is currently prepared for the regions committee members are representing. Ms. Strube confirmed this would be helpful. Mr. Rodriguez asked for confirmation that members should review the most recent recommendations for their regions. Mr. Walthour confirmed that members should review recommendations from the 2021 Initially Prepared Plans. Mr. Walthour asked if a member could work directly with TWDB staff? Ms. McKinnon confirm this was allowable as long as there is no collaboration between members outside of meetings.

8. Discussion of Agenda for Future Meetings

The agenda for July 28, 2020 meeting will include consider approval of minutes, status of assignments, consider committee reports and recommendations, and discuss next steps.

9. Public Comment – No public comments were offered.

10. Adjourn – Mr. Walthour adjourned the meeting at approximately 2:50 p.m.