

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

**July 28, 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 5 of 5:** Steve Walthour (Region A), Russell Schreiber (Region B), Allison Strube (Region F), Kelley Holcomb (Region I), and Tomas Rodriguez (Region M).

**Senators/Representatives/Other VIPs in Attendance:** None

**Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) Board Members and Staff:** Sarah Backhouse, Elizabeth McCoy, and Bryan McMath.

### **AGENDA ITEMS**

#### **1. Call to Order and Welcome**

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

#### **2. Public Comment – No public comments were offered.**

#### **3. Consider Minutes from the July 21, 2020 Committee Meeting**

The committee considered the minutes of the July 21, 2020 meeting. The minutes were unanimously approved.

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

Mr. Walthour proposed moving consideration of agenda item 4 later in the meeting. Members agreed. Mr. Walthour presented a draft write up on the topic of simplified planning. Mr. Walthour asked Kelley Holcomb (Region I) if the format of the draft write up was an acceptable way for the committee to layout issues and recommendations. Mr. Holcomb agreed with the proposed format.

Mr. Walthour reviewed simplified planning problems, goals, and recommendations. He noted that from a groundwater management area perspective there are often things that don't change much from year to year. He proposed that every fifth year of the regional water planning process funds be spent on special studies. Mr. Holcomb observed that changing the planning period to every 10 years could create issues with engagement in the planning process for regions that have less activity. He added that in the five-year cycle there seems to be two periods. In the first three years things are in auto pilot mode, and the last few years are busy with data review and completion of the regional water plans. Mr. Holcomb wondered if the proposed changes to the planning cycle might exacerbate this process. Mr. Walthour noted that recommendations to change the 5-year planning cycle to a 10-year cycle was included in several of the 2021 Initially Prepared Plans (IPP).

Mr. Walthour offered that recommendations on simplified planning would likely require legislative action, for example striking the language on simplified planning, or allowing the TWDB to make the decision on whether RWPGs can implement simplified planning.

Approved 8/6/20

Mr. Walthour reviewed a problem and goal statement on the topic of communication with RWPGs and members and presented the following recommendation addressed to the TWDB. Mr. Walthour noted he read through the Best Practices Guide and agreed with Mr. Rodriguez that a lot of problems would go away if everyone read and followed the document. Mr. Walthour noted that the TWDB is providing a lot of material that is not seen by RWPGs. The TWDB should invest in professional assistance to utilize electronic media platforms.

Tomas Rodriguez (Region M) noted that TWDB staff does a good job of getting information out to the RWPGs. He offered a correction to a statement from the previous meeting, Region M hosts member orientation training once per planning cycle not annually. Mr. Rodriguez added that TWDB should keep offering orientation training. For Region M, TWDB staff has done a good job providing information, and the region's administrator has done a good job passing information on to RWPG members.

Russell Schreiber (Region B) agreed with Mr. Rodriguez. Mr. Schreiber added that he didn't receive any orientation or training when he joined the Region B RWPG 12 years ago. He added that if he had known the Best Management Practices Guide and New Member Guide were available, he would have included this information in packets for new members and linked to these documents on the RWPG website. He offered that making these documents more available to people make it more likely for them to review and understand the process. Mr. Holcomb added that you can't make individuals read the information or participate. People seem to be afraid to ask questions. He proposed a recommendation that TWDB develop an educational protocol for all RWPGs to go through in the first years of the planning cycle. Mr. Schreiber agreed with the recommendation. Mr. Walthour noted that TWDB staff don't need to work harder. Information is available it is just not being received and absorbed by the RWPGs.

On the topic of improving the regional water planning process, Mr. Walthour noted that something is needed to get all RWPG members more engaged. He added that there are parts of the regional water planning process that could be streamlined.

Mr. Walthour then proposed that it could be beneficial for RWPGs to have the ability to hold remote or virtual meetings. This could allow more members of the public to participate and provide comment via electronic media. He recommends adding this as an item for the committee to review.

Allison Strube (Region F) agreed that member engagement is an issue and added that getting feedback from all members not just RWPG chairs would be beneficial. Mr. Holcomb added that improving the regional water planning process has been a struggle since the third planning cycle. He suggested the regional water planning process has become very prescribed and added that the topic of how to bring in new ideas is a fundamental problem that needs to be solved.

Mr. Walthour proposed that engagement is the number one problem in planning. Mr. Schreiber agreed. Mr. Walthour added that the RWPG consultants who make presentations and members who understand the topic being discussed, not the whole RWPG, are the ones who are most engaged.

Mr. Schreiber noted that Region B has public comment opportunities at every meeting but receives no public comments. When the IPP is provided to the public for comment, the public is generally unaware of the IPP unless it includes a controversial project, for example Lake Ringgold in Region B. It seems the public doesn't know about the regional water planning process unless it is in their backyard, and then the public becomes engaged. He added that he is not sure how to solve this problem. People expect

water planners and providers to develop a plan to meet their needs. The public doesn't view planning as their problem.

Mr. Schreiber agreed with Mr. Holcomb that he doesn't know how to get the RWPGs and public more involved in the process. Mr. Holcomb added that the special studies funded in previous cycles brought in new ideas and people. There was increased interest and discussion around the studies. He added that in Region I special studies increased attendance and participation.

Mr. Schreiber proposed that adding an economic development representative to the regional water planning process may increase engagement. Mr. Walthour added that RWPGs need to be as transparent as possible and suggested that regional water planning is about local economies and the future. Mr. Schreiber suggested sending RWPG meeting invitations to economic development representatives could be beneficial. Mr. Walthour noted that Region A has a problem filling membership positions and there may be persons not even aware of the planning process that would be perfect for the position.

Mr. Walthour introduced the topic of engagement. He proposed having the option for video conference RWPG meetings could improve engagement. He also noted that several IPP Chapter 8 recommendations requested TCEQ participation at RWPG meetings to streamline the process. Mr. Holcomb reviewed his write up on engagement. The document summarizes the committee's discussion on the topic. Mr. Holcomb added that he liked the idea of increasing economic development involvement. This could help RWPGs think outside the box.

The committee then reviewed 2021 IPP Chapter 8 recommendations on best practices for Regions A, B, F, I, and M. The following recommendations were discussed:

- TCEQ should be made an ex-officio member of the RWPGs. This could also help address recommendations that TWDB and TCEQ coordination on water availability modelling for planning. It was noted that it could be beneficial for other agencies, such as the Railroad Commission, to be made ex-officio members of certain regions.
- Continued funding by the State of the regional water planning process on a five-year cycle
- Flexibility in determining water plan consistency
- Standardized process for regional water plan development. Mr. Holcomb suggested that if the state is going to spend millions of dollars on regional water planning, the process should be done in a way that where possible planning data could be rolled up into the state and federal water permitting process.

Mr. Rodriguez noted that Region M has included several Chapter 8 recommendations for how the state can assist the region, including a request for more involvement from the International Boundary Water Commission to protect water rights in the region. He noted that the regional water plans can help municipalities develop their own water plans. Mr. Walthour noted that Region M recommendations requested TCEQ should work with Region M. Mr. Rodriguez discussed problems Region M has with the conversion of water rights. He noted that Region M has a TCEQ member that attends RWPG meetings.

Mr. Walthour asked members to prepare summaries of any policy recommendations they would like to discuss at the next meeting. Mr. Walthour will prepare information on adding TCEQ as an ex-officio member. Mr. Schreiber added that a common Chapter 8 recommendation was a request for additional funding to reimburse RWPG administrators. Some planning groups struggle to find administrative agencies because the work is unfunded. Mr. Holcomb agreed that administrative funding is an issue in

Approved 8/6/20

Region I as well. Mr. Schreiber will prepare a write up on this topic for the next meeting. Mr. Walthour suggested that local funds collected for administration could be better spent on special studies.

On the topic of the Best Management Practices Guide for Political Subdivisions, Mr. Walthour agreed with Mr. Rodriguez that if people read the document, it would solve many problems. Mr. Walthour offered to prepare a best practice recommendation for RWPGs on use of the Best Management Practices Guide and New Member Guide.

Mr. Walthour introduced the topic of TCEQ distribution system requirements in relation to planning. Mr. Schreiber proposed removing the topic from the committee's list. Members briefly discussed the topic and agreed.

On the topic of Region M best practices on communication, Mr. Walthour noted the Region M procedure looks like it came out of the Best Management Practices Guide. Mr. Rodriguez agreed that Region M has followed the Best Management Practices Guide process, and it has worked well. Region M has obtained funds from water rights holders in the region to pay for administrative staff to disseminate information to RWPG members.

Mr. Walthour asked members if he could prepare a recommendation on use of video conferencing to improve transparency and engagement. Members agreed.

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

Mr. Walthour will provide a report on behalf of the committee to the full Council at July 29, 2020 Council meeting. Members discussed the committee report. The committee report will provide a general update of the committee's work, including discussion topics and potential recommendations developed to date and a timeline for development of the committee's report. Mr. Walthour posed a question on whether the committee's problem and goal statement needs updating and will task the Council if the committee is on track. The committee then considered agenda item 4.

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

Mr. Walthour reviewed the committee action plan and member assignments. He requested members prepare write ups of assigned topics following the Council report format. At next meeting the committee will discuss recommendations and provide TWDB supporting documents for staff to prepare a draft committee report.

Mr. Holcomb asked if recommendations for TCEQ as an ex officio member should also potentially include recommendations for other agency representatives. Sarah Backhouse (TWDB) noted that planning groups have the ability to add voting and non-voting members that are not currently outlined in statute as long as minimum requirements are met. She offered to provide the committee information on how many RWPGs have TCEQ as a non-voting member. Ms. Backhouse added that if the Council recommends TCEQ be added as a standard non-voting member for all RWPGs this could potentially be done as an agency rule changes in coordination with TCEQ. It is also in statute which voting and non-voting members all RWPGs are required to have represented.

Mr. Holcomb agreed that knowing which regions have TCEQ and other agencies as non-voting members would be helpful. He noted that some legislative and agency coordination would be required on this

issue. This could be a recommendation directed to the legislature. Mr. Walthour asked if there is anything that prohibits RWPGs from having a Railroad Commission representative attend meetings and provide information. Ms. Backhouse clarified that she is not aware of anything that prohibits this. It was noted that if agency participation is outlined in rule or statute, agency representatives are more likely to consistently attend meetings. The committee agreed to discuss this topic further.

The committee discussed the timeline for developing its report. Members will have write ups on assigned topics prepared for discussion at the August 6 meeting. TWDB support staff will then prepare a draft committee report for committee review at the August 20 meeting. The committee will finalize its report at the meeting on September 10 and then submit the report to the Council. Ms. Strube agreed to the schedule and offered to work with TWDB as needed on report preparation.

Mr. Walthour noted that the August 20 committee meeting may be a long meeting. Members asked for clarification on the format for their write ups. Mr. Walthour clarified that write ups should follow the Council report format and include a narrative, not just bullet points. Ms. Backhouse agreed to send out the committee problem and goal statements for members to reference when preparing their write ups.

**7. Discussion of Next Steps**

The next committee meeting is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. on August 6, 2020. Mr. Walthour asked members to be prepared to wordsmith draft recommendations. Members were requested to provide their assignment documents to TWDB early so members will have time to review the documents prior to the meeting. Ms. Backhouse asked member to reach out to TWDB if they need any background materials.

Mr. Rodriguez asked for confirmation on his assignments. Mr. Walthour requested that Mr. Rodriguez prepare a recommendation on use of the Best Management Practices Guide and New RWPG Member Guide. It was confirmed that GoToWebinar information will be sent out prior to the next meeting.

**8. Discussion of Agenda for Future Meetings**

The agenda for August 6, 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 3:15 p.m.