

# SSWAB Retreat Summary

Friday June 9, 2023

## Background

In 1990, the Thurston County Board of Commissioners (BoCC), created the Surface and Storm Water Advisory Board (SSWAB). In subsequent years, the resolution creating SSWAB has been amended as well as being re-authorized when deemed necessary (see Attachment A).

SSWAB's purpose includes: 1) providing public involvement and accountability within the boundary of the area in which the Thurston County (TC) collects rates and charges for the Surface and Storm Water Utility; 2) reviewing and providing recommendations to the BoCC and TC staff on the annual work program, rates, and policy proposals; and 3) carrying on regular communications with the public as well as other water resource concerned groups and agencies.

The nine-person advisory board appointed by the BoCC includes two appointments from each commissioner districts and three at-large appointments. SSWAB appointees serve with no compensation for a three year term, renewable by action from the BoCC. The Community Planning and Economic Development Department provides lead staff and administrative support. SSWAB meets, as a whole, on a bi-monthly basis for a total of six meetings per year. SSWAB members may also involve additional time for public events, sub-committee meetings, and special meetings (e.g., SSWAB Retreat). All SSWAB advisory board meetings are subject to the Open Public Meetings Act and held in accordance with TC's hybrid meeting policy. SSWAB meetings occur on the third Thursday of the month from 5:50 pm – 7:30 pm at 3000 Pacific Ave. SE, Olympia.

In November 2022, SSWAB representation briefly dropped to five members. Both the limited number of annual SSWAB and depleted ranks of serving members created some stress but with the support of staff, SSWAB was able to manage its duties and responsibilities. In 2022, through the concerted recruitment efforts by the BoCC, SSWAB members, and staff, three new members were appointed. Unfortunately, during this same time, SSWAB incurred one resignation bringing the number of serving members to eight with vacancy remaining (District 2). Of the eight serving members, only two have served for an extended period of time. Most current appointees have served one year or less.

With the addition of new SSWAB members, a new challenge was recognized. The scope of SSWAB work involves highly technical areas and a confusing array of federal, state, and county

regulations and laws. Over the years, it's not uncommon for SSWAB members to share that it took a full three-year term to just start to become informed enough to be effective. Compounding that challenge was that during the COVID pandemic, the lack of in-person meetings, slowed the learning curve of new members.

## **Retreat**

At their March 2023 meeting, SSWAB decided to hold a ¾-day retreat to flesh out a commonly agreed to work plan. A two person sub-committee was tasked to develop a plan for the retreat and present their proposal at the May 2023 SSWAB meeting.

At the May 2023 the sub-committee presented its proposal, which included an agenda (Attachment B), approach, and logistics for the retreat. After deliberations, SSWAB voted to adopt the sub-committee's approach for their retreat.

The time selected was Friday June 9, 2023 from 8:15 am to 2:30 pm. For ease of logistics and public access (including video conferencing), the retreat was held at the County's Atrium Building – 3000 Pacific Ave. SE in Olympia. The following TC staff provided support in planning and executing the retreat:

Larry Schaffner, Storm Water Coordinator

Nathan Ensley, Senior Water Resources Engineer

Cynthia Taylor, Education & Outreach Specialist II

Nicole Ross, Fiscal Administrative Assistant

Corey Bennett, Administrative Assistant I

Ms. Ross and Mr. Bennett were recorders for the meeting. Mr. Schaffner, Mr. Ensley, and Ms. Taylor were staff liaisons in their area of expertise, providing information as SSWAB engaged in the retreat process. In addition, reference materials, such as maps and other documents, further helped inform deliberations.

The meeting was called to order with six SSWAB members present (i.e., Wager, Hartley, Winters, Farrell, O'Brien, Nederhood). Two SSWAB members (i.e., Chaudhry, Vlad) were excused due to family matters.

Commissioner Chair Carolina Mejia joined the SSWAB at the retreat's onset. Each SSWAB member presented a short bio on themselves which provided an opportunity to share with Chair Mejia the depth and breadth of experiences each member brings with them in service to the County. Following the introductory remarks, the floor was given over to Chair Mejia. who

asked each SSWAB what specific thing, idea, or policy they wished to bring to the retreat. TC staff were also asked to make some remarks. Commission Mejia then spoke briefly about the retreat and extended her appreciation for the time and dedication of the SSWAB. Her comments were well received and very much appreciated.

Following the Commissioner Mejia's departure, the first order of business was the selection of three distinct breakout groups consisting of two SSWAB members and one TC staff member. The Chair made breakout group assignments as follows:

*Storm Water Planning/Programs*

- Jake Wager, SSWAB
- Nancy Winters, SSWAB
- Larry Schaffner, TC staff

*Public Outreach/Education*

- Phyllis Farrell, SSWAB
- Britt Nederhood, SSWAB
- Cynthia Taylor, TC staff

*Capital Projects/Facilities*

- David Hartley, SSWAB
- Ed O'Brien, SSWAB
- Nate Ensley, TC staff

Each breakout group had a designated station equipped with a flip chart and marking pens. While each breakout group had a theme, groups were not restricted to what topics or ideas they could deliberate on. Given the limited amount of time available to the SSWAB over the course of a year's worth of meetings, they sought to limit and prioritize the number of action items or initiatives that the SSWAB would take on.

Once the breakout assignments occurred, the work commenced with an open idea exchange. This exchange provided 45 minutes for members to wander from one station to another writing their individual ideas they wished the other breakout groups to consider during their discussions. Following this exercise, the members retreated to their assigned breakout group to discuss strategies, ideas, projects, and programs in the context of fulfilling SSWAB's mission. At the conclusion of the breakout sessions, the SSWAB convened as a whole and for the next hour each breakout group presented their findings. This phase engaged all members with questions or comments directed to the presenters. There was a good sharing of thoughts and ideas,

including staff who also engaged and provided timely information and the occasional correction. At 11:30 am, SSWAB adjourned for lunch. No action, beyond discussion, was taken.

At 12:30 pm, SSWAB reconvened. The remaining time involved sorting through the myriad of ideas and topics identified to create a viable path for the SSWAB going forward. The course over the next ninety minutes involved a great deal of back and forth discussion which resulted in SSWAB identifying eight goals receiving the widest support with other ideas listed as secondary. Each breakout group's primary goals and accompanying second tier are as follows:

#### *STORMWATER PLANNING*

1. Expand performance metrics and align with the County's municipal stormwater, e.g.,
  - Outreach
  - Business inspections
  - Outfalls without flow control
  - Illicit discharges – numbers and identification
  - Enforcement tracking
  - Monitoring stations, # with violations
  - SSWAB more informed?
2. Assess surface and stormwater program funding through rates and grants to fully support existing and expanded programs.
  - Evaluate budget (rate structure, credits) to meet County's storm and surface water goals
  - Compare Thurston County storm and surface water fees with other municipal permittees
3. Intensify SSWAB engagement in current Thurston County Comprehensive Plan process
  - Ensure integration if Thurston Climate Mitigation implementation that addresses surface and stormwater

#### *Additional Ideas*

- Address SSWAB governance issues
  - Increase number of meetings
  - Develop training packets for new members
  - Establish a mentor program for new members
  - Use standing committees
  - For meetings provide background information (e.g., SWMPP chapter, what SSWAB has done previously, state of county's current program)

- Promote a more robust storm and surface water program county-wide
- Review County's O&M practices for facilities and infrastructure to align with SW BMPs

#### *PUBLIC OUTREACH/EDUCATION*

1. Outreach to Partner Agencies and Constituencies
  - Ascertain coordination and monitoring efforts between regional partners (i.e., DOT, DOH, TRPC, ECY, PCP, and cities.)
  - Better response to commissioner district constituents
  - Package a traveling presentation for SSWAB members
  - Consider using a stronger "voice" to encourage constituent's behavior change (SPLASH, The Olympian, social media)
2. Increase Education for SSWAB Members
  - Receive presentations on Equity Index, South Sound Green, Stream Team, Monitoring Station Results, HABS Identification

#### *CAPITAL PROJECTS*

1. Assess and comment to the County concerning the Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) staff and financial resources with respect to county population, public health and safety needs, and aquatic resource protection needs.
2. Pursue opportunities to augment public outreach associated with Capital Improvement Projects to include public education on storm, surface water and aquatic resource protection issues.
3. Investigate the reasonableness of establishing an effectiveness monitoring program for Capital Improvement Projects.

#### *Additional Ideas*

- As a subset of #1 above, assess and comment to the County concerning the adequacy of the CIP resources to meet both: 1) the intent of the Stormwater Management Action Plan requirements of the County's municipal stormwater permit to apply increased effort to protect/restore the selected priority catchment, AND 2) the priority CIP needs countywide on a timely basis.
- Review and comment on the Comprehensive Stormwater Study's analysis of the stormwater utility rate fee reduction program

The moment of truth having arrived, a motion to adopt the goals was put forth. The motion was seconded and voted on. Adoption was unanimous. At approximately 2:10 pm, the SSWAB adjourned.

Attachment A resolution no. 15450

Attachment B retreat agenda

Attachment C minutes from retreat

Attachment D SSWAB July 20 action on retreat authorize its distribution to BoCC and other interested parties