

Comments from MPWMD Board Members
Improve Visibility of MPWMD and Its Accomplishments
March 31, 2011 Board Goal Setting Session

Summary: Not complete consensus that there is a need to focus on public outreach. No agreement on the option to hire a staff person or a consultant. Concerns expressed about the cost to retain a professional to conduct public outreach, and that the public may be critical of this as a self-aggrandizing effort by the District.

Record of Comments

1. A full or part-time staff person, or consultant is needed to plan and conduct the public outreach program. Must decide which staff person the public outreach professional will report to. There is a need to reduce the time needed to develop and approve public information materials for distribution. At this time the District cannot respond to new issues without Board review. Communication to the public must be quick, accurate and reflect the consensus of the Board.
2. Prefer option of hiring a staff person to conduct public outreach program. Important that the District's message be distilled down to simple statements. Committee members and staff are too close to the issues. Cost is a concern.
3. Public information professional could help the District overcome the stigma from the past. Important to use the past achievements of the District (water projects developed but not approved by voters) to create a foundation for positive forward momentum.
4. Concerned that negative perception of the District cannot be changed. Urged caution due to public perception that public outreach is a move to increase the District's self-importance. Do not allow electioneering or election politics to influence a public outreach program. This may not be the appropriate time to hire a public outreach professional.
5. There will always be 40% of the population that support you, 40% that do not and 20% that are undecided. Don't dwell on the past but move forward with informing the public about what the District does now. Focus on responding to questions from the public with facts prepared by a professional communicator. The Board could agree on a protocol and specific scenarios for responding to issues that arise, while maintaining a separation from the politics.
6. Support the concept, but not interested in jeopardizing existing employees in order to fund a new position. Cost is a concern. Proposed job description is a good, comprehensive.
7. The 2011-2012 budget is not yet developed, and questions exist about funding for the coming year. However, a plan should be developed and goals agreed upon so that when funds are available the Board can take action. This is not "puffery," but a means to advise the public about the District's projects including Water Project 1.
8. The District Engineer plans to retire and the position will not be filled, which would make funds available for a new staff person.