

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

July 15, 2020, 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 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, Claire Boyer

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Call to Order and Welcome

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

2. Public Comment – No public comments were offered.

3. Review and Discussion of General Best Practice Resource Documents available on the Council Webpage

Mr. Walthour reviewed the list of General Best Practice Resources documents available on the Council's webpage. He asked if there was any discussion or clarification needed on any of the documents. Hearing none, Mr. Walthour noted that the resource documents will be considered in more detail over the next several meetings as the committee continues its work.

4. Discussion and Action, as appropriate – Consideration of an Action Plan for Committee Work

Mr. Walthour noted that a general schedule for committees has been sent out. The committee will need to select meeting dates and make work assignments to complete its charge. Mr. Walthour added that members need to be aware of and avoid walking quorums. He recommended that members prepare information individually and then submit any materials to be discussed and shared during meetings to TWDB staff to include in meeting presentations. Materials should be submitted to TWDB staff by noon the day before the committee meets.

Mr. Walthour asked if the committee had any ideas on how to move forward with the committee action plan and if there was any additional discussion on the action plan and member roles. Kelley Holcomb (Region I) asked that the committee consider what dates it plans to meet in order to get things on the calendar. Mr. Walthour confirmed that the committee will discuss setting a schedule later in the meeting and added that he is aiming for the committee to hold several meetings that are a few hours long.

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

Mr. Walthour reviewed the Council problem and goal statements on the topic of general best practices for future planning.

Problem statement: Formal requirements may stymie the use of best practices. Formalized sharing of information between regional water planning groups (RWPG) is not always facilitated timely in the planning cycle by TWDB, including group processing of Chapter 8 recommendations. Funding may be inadequate to devote time and effort to reviewing best practices.

Goal statement: The regions will review processes for improvement in sharing and solving best practices among and between regions. A formalized process will occur early in the planning process so that best practices are shared between regional water planning groups.

Mr. Walthour noted that the problem and goal statements may be changed but are what the committee will work with moving forward. He asked if members had reviewed Chapter 8 recommendations and suggested Chapter 8 recommendations be reviewed prior to the next meeting.

The committee reviewed several brainstorming items discussed at the June 29, 2020 Council meeting including: Chairs' calls are scheduled to share information but cover so much that don't have opportunity to brainstorm and prior work sessions held by TWDB are no longer held or formally documented.

Mr. Walthour noted several issues with the simplified planning process. He explained that simplified planning was originally created for regions, like Region A, where population and demand projections don't change substantially every five years. He suggested that simplified planning requirements are not effective and recommended that the simplified planning process be revised or removed. Mr. Holcomb added that simplified planning sounded good, but he didn't see an application for it since supply and demand have to be very simple to pursue the simplified planning option.

Russell Schreiber (Region B) added that Region B considered simplified planning this cycle but chose not to pursue it. Ms. Backhouse (TWDB) confirmed that no regions pursued simplified planning this cycle. Mr. Walthour noted that Region A wanted to do simplified planning but decided not to after reading through all of the simplified planning requirements. Mr. Schreiber suggested that if regions aren't using simplified planning maybe it should be removed. Mr. Walthour proposed adding review of the simplified planning process as an issue for the committee to consider. Allison Strube (Region F) and Mr. Holcomb agreed. Ms. Strube ask how long the simplified planning option has been available. Ms. Backhouse noted that this is the first cycle that simplified planning through Senate Bill 1511 has been an option. Another simplified planning process was available prior to the current process. Ms. Strube added that Region F discussed simplified planning this cycle and reviewed the requirements, but the region did not pursue simplified planning. Mr. Walthour will review this topic more prior to the next meeting.

Mr. Walthour noted that at the June 29 meeting the Council discussed several issues with engagement. Mr. Walthour asked committee members to share their experiences with RWPG engagement. Mr. Holcomb shared that Region I has difficulties with RWPG member and public engagement. He often finds himself talking about things for the administrative record more so than engaging in discussions. Ms. Strube shared that Region F rarely has public comments offered at meetings. There are times that members engage in discussion of items, but primarily the consultants do most of the talking in the RWPG meetings.

Mr. Schreiber concurred that Region B has had a similar experience with engagement. He added that RWPG members have a variety of occupations. Some members are farmers or retired irrigation district

managers that do not deal with the planning process on a day to day basis. It can be difficult to get members engaged in the whole concept of the regional water planning process. RWPG members may not understand the technical details of how the plan is developed. Mr. Schreiber added that he was not aware until recently that the TWDB has a guide for new members on the TWDB website. Ms. Strube noted she was not aware of the new member guide. Mr. Schreiber added that having members better informed and educated on the whole process is needed. Mr. Walthour noted difficulties he has had onboarding new members and educating them on the regional water planning process. He suggested all members could benefit from a training or orientation on the process at the beginning of each planning cycle. Mr. Walthour asked if engagement was a topic the committee should add to their list to review. Mr. Holcomb agreed it should be reviewed, but added he is not sure the problem is solvable. Region I has tried many things to get RWPG members and the public engaged. When things are going well, it can be difficult to get people engaged. Mr. Walthour asked for a volunteer for writing a few bullet points on the topic of engagement for the next meeting. Mr. Holcomb volunteered to take on this topic.

Mr. Schreiber suggested that part of the problem may be a lack of understanding of what consultants are presenting. Members who don't deal with water supply every day may not be familiar with planning terminology and the specifics of the planning process, yet they are being asked for their input on water supply.

Ms. Strube agreed. She added that what is applicable to private industry, such as oil and gas, is not necessarily applicable to municipal systems since they operate very differently. Representatives have different expertise, and it can create challenges when working with a diverse group. What is applicable to water planning in one industry may not work for another.

Mr. Schreiber suggested requiring members to review the RWPG New Member Overview guide similar to Texas Open Meetings Act training requirements. Mr. Walthour suggested having an orientation on planning rules and guidelines with reminders on available TWDB resources at the start of each planning cycle.

Mr. Walthour asked if member's RWPGs use committees. Region F does not use committees. Region B uses committees on occasion when a topic comes up that requires it. Region I has standing committees for finance, bylaws, and technical work. Any item on the agenda for full RWPG meetings first is reviewed by the appropriate committee. Committees often meet immediately prior to full RWPG meetings but are not well attended. Mr. Walthour noted that local representatives regularly attend Region A meetings since they are located in Amarillo. Mr. Holcomb was assigned to review engagement before the next committee meeting.

At the June 29 Council meeting, Melanie Barnes (Region O) proposed that funds saved from simplified planning could be used to fund special studies. Mr. Walthour asked if there were any funds available for special studies. Ms. Backhouse clarified that there was not funding allocated for special studies this cycle. In the future, it isn't guaranteed that TWDB will be given additional funding from the legislature to fund special studies. Funds may need to be reallocated from other tasks to special studies. Mr. Holcomb noted support for funding special studies. He added that the special studies funded in the third round of planning created a lot of interest and engaged members. Mr. Walthour asked if the committee wanted put continuation of special studies on a list for further consideration. Mr. Holcomb noted that it would be a good topic to discuss.

Approved 7/21/20

Tomas Rodriguez (Region M) agreed it could be good to discuss for future planning cycles. He also offered that Region M has good participation at its meetings and has annual training for members.

Mr. Walthour asked if anyone wanted to look into special studies before the next meeting. Mr. Schreiber noted that he wasn't sure if Region B had conducted special studies in the past. He suggested that before funding special studies TWDB should increase funding for general plan development. He added that every region is different, and the committee should keep that in mind and offer best practice recommendations that apply to everyone. Mr. Rodriguez asked for clarification on what is meant when referring to special studies. Mr. Walthour reminded members that the discussion started with a proposal from Ms. Barnes on using funds saved from simplified planning to fund special studies. Mr. Walthour proposed putting this topic on the back burner. The committee will revisit the issue if there is time. Members agreed.

At the June 29 Council meeting, Suzanne Scott (Region L) suggested that as a best practice that the Council could be a sounding board for prioritization of Chapter 8 policy recommendations. Mr. Holcomb noted that policy recommendations are a good thing, but recommendations need to be vetted to ensure what is proposed will achieve the goal. He added that this is a worthy component of the Council process. He hoped that the Council could lay the framework for those that come after to solve the problem and noted that Chapter 8 also contains legislative recommendations and it would be good to discuss the Council's role. Mr. Walthour suggested the committee discuss Chapter 8 policy recommendations and requested members review the Chapter 8 policy recommendations for their region before the next meeting. Mr. Holcomb asked for clarification if they should be reviewing the 2017 State Water Plan policy recommendations, the regional water plan recommendations, or the Initially Prepared Plan (IPP) recommendations.

Ms. Backhouse noted that Chapter 2 of the 2017 State Water Plan includes policy recommendations that were carried forward from the 2016 regional water plans regarding unique stream segments and unique reservoir sites. The state water plan also included a policy recommendation on the desired future condition adoption schedule. Ms. Backhouse suggested the 2016 regional water plans or 2021 IPPs may have more detail on RWPG recommendations. She added that TWDB staff are currently compiling Chapter 8 recommendations from the 2021 IPPs and are trying to pull that together by the end of July. The compiled recommendations will be provided to the Council for consideration.

Mr. Walthour noted some concerns about waiting to until the end of July to start reviewing Chapter 8. Members will begin reviewing Chapter 8 recommendations for their regions before the next meeting. Mr. Schreiber noted that it would be beneficial to review the compiled Chapter 8 recommendations when it is available. Mr. Rodriguez asked what they are specifically looking for when reviewing Chapter 8. Mr. Walthour noted you may find problems or solutions in Chapter 8.

Mr. Walthour asked if the Council being a sounding board for Chapter 8 policy recommendations should be a recommendation of the committee. Mr. Schreiber suggested the RWPGs are already doing this. Mr. Holcomb offered an idea that the Council should have a document that ties together all of the other regional water plan Chapter 8 recommendations. The committee will review this topic again at the next meeting after reviewing Chapter 8 recommendations.

At the June 29 meeting, the Council discussed how to encourage new ideas in planning. Mr. Walthour asked if this falls under engagement. Members agreed.

At the June 29 meeting, Ms. Scott suggested the work session on best practices that produced the best practices matrix was productive. Chair's conference calls focus on the planning process and not best practices. Mr. Holcomb agreed with that statement. Mr. Walthour suggested a best practice that before or during the planning process a work session on best practices be held. Mr. Holcomb supported the idea in concept. Mr. Walthour asked if there was a formalized process to address best practice in the planning process. Ms. Backhouse noted that the TWDB has held a few work sessions with RWPG chairs. One work session in 2016 focused on RWPG operations and another work session in 2017 focused on how to implement legislation. There isn't currently a structure or schedule for having regular work sessions. Ms. Backhouse offered that meeting earlier in the cycle to discuss best practices may be beneficial since the planning schedule is lighter and items can be added to guidance or requirements if needed. TWDB conducts a survey at the end of the cycle asking for RWPG member feedback on the planning process and TWDB support. At the end of the fourth cycle, TWDB implemented several enhancements based on survey feedback. This included a new educational website and materials.

Mr. Walthour asked if there would be value in a RWPG level workshop for members to discuss best practices to improve the planning process. Mr. Holcomb noted that it sounds like a good idea but may create more bureaucracy. Mr. Schreiber agreed and added that RWPG members are taxed enough, and this could create an additional burden on members, who may not know enough about the process to offer ideas for improvement. He added that planning groups often rely on consultants to see what is most efficient.

Mr. Walthour proposed a survey on what could be done better and asking for respondents to identify the successes of this planning cycle. This could help identify things that really worked well. Mr. Holcomb agreed and added one thing that could be improved is how to get information out to RWPG members and the public. He suggested there has to be better ways to get information out. RWPGs could look into email blasts, survey monkey, or other tools. Mr. Schreiber agreed. Mr. Holcomb added if RWPGs are asked to improve engagement this will require more funds for administration. Mr. Holcomb and Mr. Walthour outlined how entities in Region I and Region A cover administrative costs.

Mr. Walthour asked if holding virtual meetings could be a way to improve engagement. Ms. Strube did not believe this would improve engagement in Region F. It works for logistics, but it may lose some engagement from people who don't like the virtual format. Mr. Holcomb noted he saw both sides. He offered an idea that RWPG meetings be broadcast video and audio to reach a broader audience that may not show up to in person RWPG meetings. Ms. Backhouse reminded the committee that under the current Open Meetings Act teleconference and video conference is not allowable for RWPGs. Mr. Holcomb suggested this could be a recommendation the Council makes to the legislature to revise the Open Meetings Act.

Mr. Walthour reviewed the topics discussed thus far: engagement, simplified planning process, money for special studies, and framework for Chapter 8 policy recommendations.

Mr. Schreiber suggested the committee review and discuss the Best Management Practices Guide for Political Subdivisions on the TWDB website and see if there is anything else to add. Mr. Walthour recommended members read the document before the next meeting. He added that there is a lot of information readily available to RWPGs if you know about it. Maybe a best practice recommendation could be the Best Management Practices Guide for Political Subdivisions and RWPG New Member Overview be included in an orientation packet and provided to new members.

Mr. Walthour noted that often the nature of government is to write more legislation or rules whenever a problem arises. He added that his district is going through a process called lean, developed by Toyota, which involves reviewing the current state of a process, mapping the process out, and developing a wish list on how you wish it would work. More often than not what is found after going through the lean process is that rules don't need to be changed, but rather how things are done need to be changed. Mr. Walthour recommended as a best practice that the TWDB could adopt some sort of lean program to review the current state of regional water planning. He asked if the TWDB already does this. Ms. Backhouse explained that the TWDB makes process improvements as it can based on RWPG feedback and available resources. Mr. Walthour will put together some additional information on this for the next meeting.

Ms. Backhouse provided additional information for the committee's consideration. When TWDB sends out new educational materials, it is sent out to all of the RWPG political subdivisions, chairs, and consultants. In the past there has been feedback that RWPG members are more likely to read emails or materials sent from local sponsors. The thought is that political subdivisions would then forward information from TWDB out to RWPG members. Additionally, at the beginning of the planning cycle, TWDB offers an optional Regional Water Planning 101 presentation, however not all RWPGs want this presentation. It was suggested that recorded webinars may be a better option for these trainings so members can view the presentations at their convenience.

Mr. Walthour suggested this information falls under engagement and added that it appears that TWDB is creating a lot of material that isn't getting out to membership. Mr. Schreiber agreed. Mr. Rodriguez noted that Region M has a process for sending information from TWDB out to RWPG members. Mr. Walthour requested Mr. Rodriguez prepare a write up of the Region M best practices on dissemination of information to RWPG membership to review at the next meeting.

Mr. Schreiber proposed the committee potential review any TCEQ regulations that affect or impact the regional water planning process. One example is the 0.6 gallons per minute per connection requirement of the Drinking Water rules, which dictates some demands put into the regional water plan for wholesale water providers (WWP). Sometimes a WWP has a contractual amount with a customer, but the customer doesn't really use the 0.6 gallons per minute per connection. He added that this may not fall under the best practices committee. Mr. Rodriguez added that TCEQ regulations have to be met in planning. Mr. Schreiber suggested this could be a general recommendation for the legislature or TCEQ to review their current rules and any effects on regional water planning. Mr. Holcomb noted this came up in the third planning cycle. It is his understanding that the 0.6 gallons per minute per connection is not supposed to be a factor in planning. Mr. Schreiber agreed to write something up about this issue before the next meeting. Mr. Holcomb asked Ms. Backhouse if she could ask TWDB staff the raw water supply rule in Chapter 290 of the Administrative Code. Ms. Backhouse confirmed staff will look into this.

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

Mr. Walthour reviewed charges for committee recommendations. Recommendations should be aligned with specific charges from the legislature and guidance from Chairman Larson, be specific and actionable, delineate which entity the recommendation is directed to (TWDB, legislature, RWPGs), and describe the resulting benefit. There was no additional discussion on recommendations.

7. Discussion of Next Steps

Approved 7/21/20

The committee discussed a schedule for future committee meeting dates. The following dates and times were tentatively reserved for committee meetings:

- Tuesday, July 21, 1:30-3:30pm
- Tuesday, July 28, 1:30-3:30pm
- Thursday, August 6, 1:30-3:30pm
- Thursday, August 20, 1:30-3:30pm
- Thursday, August 27, 1:30-3:30pm
- Thursday, September 10, 1:30-3:30pm
- Thursday, September 17, 1:30-3:30pm

The committee discussed background materials for members to review before the next meeting. Members will review the Best Management Practices Guide for Political Subdivisions, RWPG New Member Orientation Guide, and Chapter 8 policy recommendations. Members should provide any materials to be presented at the next meeting to TWDB staff by noon on June 20.

8. Discussion of Agenda for Future Meetings

The next committee meeting is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. on July 21, 2020. The agenda for the meeting will include consider approval of minutes, status of assignments, consider committee reports and recommendations, and discuss next steps. The agenda has already been posted on the TWDB website and with the Secretary of State and will be sent out to members following the meeting.

9. Public Comment – No public comments were offered.

10. Adjourn – Mr. Walthour adjourned the meeting at approximately 3:20 p.m.