

VASHON PARK DISTRICT BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

MEETING MINUTES

Ober Park, Evergreen Room, 11:00 am

DATE: Saturday, June 2, 2018

Commissioners attending: Bob McMahon, Scott Harvey, Karen Gardner, Abby Antonelis. Doug Ostrom was absent.

Staff attending: Elaine Ott-Rocheford.

| ISSUE | DISCUSSION AND OUTCOME | FOLLOW UP |
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| Call to order & agenda review | The meeting was called to order by Scott Harvey. | |
| Executive Director Job Offer | <p>Elaine: As I indicated in my email to you all on Thursday morning, I have a job offer. I have not accepted it yet. I will make my decision by 9:00 am Monday morning. My decision will be based on what transpires in this meeting today.</p> <p>We have all been aware of the wage issues we have been struggling with at the District. I am not going to rehash them all. I think you are all fully aware of what the issues are, except to say that it has come to what I would characterize as extremely troubling based on the last go-round of having lost two key staff members in the last 9 months, because they could no longer afford to live on this island. The recruitment process was deeply troubling, going through 4 iterations of job descriptions due to no responses, few responses, inadequate qualifications of candidates, a flat out refusal of the job offer due to the wages, and every single candidate stating that the wages were unacceptable.</p> <p>This is deeply troubling to me as I think about other staff members I know are actively looking for jobs, because they are unable to meet the challenges of rising rent on the island, rising property taxes, gas prices, etc. This is a very expensive place to live. I don't know that I can manage those transitions. I am deeply troubled by this. I think it is screaming to the forefront of being one of the most critical issues facing the safety and health of the District.</p> <p>Board response to these conversations has been varied. Three Board members, Abby, Karen, and Bob, have most definitely indicated concern. They have wanted to engage in the dialogue. One wonderful example of demonstrating their care and concern about this issue has been putting a goal in the draft strategic plan that would put a plan together for wages and benefits. I think that is remarkable. That is exactly what we need. We need a plan. We don't need to meet the objectives overnight. But we need a plan that is responsible; it is respectable to the needs of the employees; it is respectable to the financial needs of the District; but ultimately it gets people where they need to be.</p> <p>One Board member, Scott, has been resistant to that goal and has stated some objections along the way. And also</p> | |

Scott has made statements like, “Well, if you don’t like it, leave.” Wow! What a thing to say! At face value, Scott, that is so incredibly disrespectful. To say that to staff members who are struggling to pay their rent. But the reality to that statement – if that is a solution to this problem? Really? Wow! Staff members should leave? Then where are we? We don’t have a District! But there it is. Okay, there is no plan in place. And that gauntlet has been laid down.

Another comment that you made to one of my staff members on your way out the door several weeks ago from a Board meeting was, “Why don’t you go find another job. Bring that back to the table, and then we’ll have something to talk about.” We have a problem. That is not recognizing the problem. That is shirking the problem. That’s not a fair thing to say.

Since we don’t have a plan in place, we have only talked about putting a plan in place, I took your statement at face value. If the only way I can benefit myself, find the adequate rewards for the great work I have done, for the skills I have developed over the years, to be adequately compensated for the great contributions I have made to this District. If that is the only option I have, then I guess that is what I need to do.

And so that’s what I did. Several months ago, I started the process to look for another position. I didn’t want to do it. But you threw the gauntlet down. That’s where we were!

I will admit we have made some strides. And you, Scott, to give you credit, you have brought motions to the table in the past for increased wages. We are deeply grateful for that. The Board put PERS into place. We are deeply grateful for that! That was a very positive move. It has moved us in the right direction, but we’re not there yet. It hasn’t been enough. People are actively looking for jobs, and I am scared to death about the repercussions.

Then, all of a sudden, about three weeks ago, Bob and Karen stepped up. Out of the blue, they said, “We really do have a problem. We need to do something about this, and we need to do it now. Let’s get a plan in place.” There it is! Those were the magic words. Bingo! Yes, let’s get a plan in place! They commenced the planning committee, which is me, Bob, and Karen. We set the objectives for a plan. I went back to my desk, and for three full days until 7:30 in the evening, I scribbled out how that plan was going to work, relative to the objectives that we set. I demonstrated that we can meet our cash flow needs; we will have adequate reserves in the process; brought it back to Bob and Karen, and they said, “This is great. This works.” They didn’t know I was looking for a job. I want to be very clear about this. They did this of their own volition. And in my opinion, that showed awesome leadership. That’s how you address a problem – you recognize it for what it is, and you put a responsible plan in place.

So they stated, when we came back together, “Let’s make this happen. Let’s get a motion written, let’s take it to the next Board meeting, and let’s put it through.” And further to that, they said, “I think we should suspend the rules to illustrate to the staff that we are serious about this.” Great! This is what I have been looking for – a plan.” It was in that context – after the fact – after they made that commitment – that I shared with them I was one of four finalists for another position. And we all agreed it would not be appropriate to share that with the rest of the Board. This motion needs to be real and stand on its own merit without influencing any other Board member’s evaluation of this.

And I want to be clear, too, about this plan. It is not exceeding other like-sized park district’s average wages. It is

not even meeting those other wages. It is, by our estimation, about \$30,000 shy. But that's okay! It gets us in the ballpark. It gets us close. That is acceptable.

Another key point is that, as a responsible manager, I understand things happen. I understand there are levy failures. I understand the pro-rationing effects that may come from the Fire District levy lifts. I understand the potential effects from a hospital district. I understand that, when things happen, we have to make adjustments. A plan is merely a roadmap. A plan shows good faith. A plan demonstrates a commitment to making something happen. That's it – I'm just looking for a plan.

So, we came to the Board meeting. The motion was presented. Scott demonstrated his concerns and posed objections. But Bob put the motion through; Karen seconded it. So now we have a live and active motion on the table. They did not, however, suspend the rules. After the meeting, I asked what that was all about. Bob said he felt it was only right to give Scott time to do his own analysis and run the numbers. And you know what? I respect that. But because, at that point, there still was not a plan in place, I felt I needed to move forward in my own process. I don't know how people are going to vote. I didn't know if Scott would come up with something that would overturn this motion.

So here we are. I need to make a decision by Monday morning. We have an active motion on the table. My questions to the Board members are these:

Scott has done a lot of analysis. He has sent a lot of emails out. I, in turn, have responded in kind with my analysis of what he has put forth. Is there anything that Scott has raised that would cause you to want to rescind the motion?

Bob: If you are asking me that question, my answer is no.

Elaine: Anybody else?

Karen: While I appreciate very much all the work Scott has done, looking at it from his perspective, using facts and figures, I think the situation is serious enough that I would vote for the motion.

Bob: I understand what is driving Scott. Normally, it's the fiscal side of things – the money and the budget. But as I said when I put this motion together, I am as convinced now as I was convinced then, what is happening is going to happen due to what is happening on the island and the increased cost of living here; recognizing what was going on as you were trying to hire into the jobs that became open; that we weren't going to get there unless we made this move. For those reasons I am sticking with the motion. I don't want to change it.

Abby: I am going to vote for the motion.

Elaine: Then to aid me in my decision as to whether to accept this job offer, I ask that the vote be called.

Bob: So to be clear, this motion does not make you whole in one year. It's three years down the road.

Elaine: Absolutely, and I want to be clear about that. This is not about me. This is about my love for my job; my love for my staff; and my love for this District. My job offer is for \$115,000. The first step would get me to \$103k. I don't want you to match my offer! I just want a plan.

Karen: Of how to get there.

Elaine: Yes, of how to get there. That's all I want!

Bob: \$103k is at the end of the first year?

Elaine: it would start when we start the plan. The next paycheck would start that pay cycle.

Bob: The motion doesn't talk about who gets what. So it leaves it up to you to decide?

Elaine: Actually, I did provide an initial model, and I want to follow that as closely as I can. In retrospect, there would be a few changes. I want to devise a formula that looks at employment longevity, giving them a little higher bump. This is all relative to how far away people are from the like-sized District averages. It takes increments of the shortfalls. Ultimately, within three years we would be in the ballpark.

Scott: I correct you, it would be less than two.

Elaine: It would be three Junes. Starting with this June; the next June is the next bucket; the final bucket is that following June. I want to be true to CPI. I used 3% on the high end for COL increases. I feel we need to follow the process as policy dictates.

Karen: For me, there is a deeper issue than just increasing the salaries at the Park District. There has to be a moral responsibility that we take care of the people who live on Vashon to the best of our ability. I don't have any control over the Fire District, but I can do my part to say this is important. We aren't putting the Park District at critical risk by doing this. I spent as much time looking at the numbers, not being a numbers person per se, and I know we have to be careful. We may not be able to designate \$100k to recreation programs, because we are paying our staff. But so be it.

Elaine: Again, I want to reiterate, it is responsible management to look at where we are every step of the way; meet community objectives; and make adjustments if necessary. We can and should to do that! This isn't hard and fast commitment. It just shows good faith.

Karen: I think if we vote on this, it is something we have made a commitment we will follow up. In 6 months, we can't change our minds. If we vote for it, it means to the very best of our ability it will happen.

Scott: Now, Elaine – question, here. So what if we don't vote on this today?

Elaine: I will have to accept this other position, because we will not have a plan in place.

Scott: Explain to me why that isn't blackmail?

Elaine: Oh, come on, Scott.

Scott: You're saying we have to commit to a \$248,000 annual commitment today, when this would be up for a vote on the 12th, when everybody will know about the meeting. I just want to understand where you're coming from.

Elaine: I take tremendous offence over you stating that this is blackmail. Give me a break! Nobody knew about this. *They* put this motion on the table on its own merit, given their *own* analysis, their *own* reasoning. This is called negotiating, I think is the classic way you would characterize it. A job offer is on the table, I want to talk about it. I'm telling you – *all* I want is a plan.

Scott: The motion on the table is not a plan. A plan is that, we will, over time, increase salaries as the budget permits. Let me go through the notes I have involved here. First thing, a small correction. I spoke with Doug twice yesterday. Your comment about having lost two key employees over salaries – Doug had an extensive conversation with Kelly. She was very adamant that basically she left for three reasons: her husband lost his job; it is much cheaper to live in Austin; and a distant consideration was her salary. And she has family there. So to say she left because of her salary is incorrect.

Elaine: She told me otherwise.

Abby: She told me that as well, when I spoke with her.

Scott: In any event, let's go over the facts real quickly, here. The three of you: when was the last time you read the Community Survey? Have you read the survey recently? – any of the three of you?

Karen: Sure.

Abby: Yes.

Scott: Okay, so, good! Then you'll know what I'm going to say here. So, Bob, since it's your motion, here, how many people took the survey?

Bob: I can't remember.

Scott: Okay, 940. Now...282 of them took time to write a written statement, here. Now, this last week I took the time to read it through twice. Those 282 statements – every one of them.

Now, interesting here is the fact that, of those, 8 brought up maintenance, even though maintenance was mentioned in here, but that was really important as far as maintenance is concerned. Ten of them were really concerned about taxes, even though they support the Park District, their taxes are too high. Now, 7 of them mentioned employees. Now, of the 7, three said they provide great service, 2 said they provided crummy service, and then there were 2 other statements here. One of them said, and I quote, "The Park District has an outstanding staff. They are competent, helpful, and positive and should be recognized for that." Now, I highly accept that recognition can be continued as far as compensation is concerned. And one person said, "Spend money on Park District staff." So, per the overall survey involved here, the people were four times more important as far as maintenance is concerned and five times more important as far as taxes are concerned. And, if we just skip the number of people who wrote here, let's focus on the 282 that actually wrote something here, less than 1%...less than 1% was concerned about the Park District staff; in other words, wages.

Elaine: We never asked that question.

Scott: No, no, you're right. They could write anything they wanted. There wasn't a question. They wrote about everything. They wrote about things I didn't even care about. They wrote about boardwalks! They wrote about a lot of things involved here.

Robin Miller: Scott, do you think we go out and tell the community how poorly we are paid? Do you think we would broadcast that? We don't want people to know that!

Scott: I'm sorry, I'm sorry...I have the floor.

Robin: Yes, you do.

Scott: Thank you. Okay, so, Elaine, you and Jason do a fantastic job as managers. You are one of the best grant writers around. If you're not, you must be among the top two or three involved here. You do a really good job. However, as far as the staff wages and everything else involved here is concerned, I believe you have been deficient as far as managing your staff. In the fact that, over the past three years, we have increased their compensation by 17%, which is double the rate of inflation. Now, in that situation here, when your staff has come to you, or Jason, I'm not hearing, based on what you're conveying to us, that you haven't said to them, "Wow, I'm really sorry that you're not making enough money here, but the Park District Board is doing all they can."

Elaine: Oh, I say that all the time.

Robin: Yes, she does, because I complain a lot and she has said to me, "Robin, trust me, I have spoken with them about this, and my hands are tied. This is what they want."

Scott: Then I stand corrected. Again, getting back to here, we have commitments. And the main thing here, too, is you talk about the staff involved here. No, we have a commitment to the community. The staff is important, but we

have a commitment to the taxpayers. And the taxpayers have said they want recreational programs. And the taxpayers say they want deferred maintenance taken care of. And again, in that regard, we are going forward to work things out as far as what's happening here. Now, I have even said in an email to all of you involved here, "Hey, I'm all about increasing wages by double the inflation rate or more at the proper time during the year here." And again, I might even agree at the proper time, which would be at the end of the year, to increase it for the full \$50,000 in the first year of the plan involved here. But again, to put something out there like this and to pull it back here, is basically what we're talking about here, it is VES all over again.

Unrecognizable female voice: Oh, come on!

Scott: When VES started out, this District had a significant amount of cash. This District was bringing in a lot of money. It was at \$1.3 million. And actually, their plan, if things continued, according to things here, they could have pulled it off. In 2010, prices had been falling for 2 years. They should have seen it. They should have known they were going to lose money, but they went right ahead, and it was a train wreck. Right now, at this point, I might approve the \$50,000 increase at the proper time. I might even approve the following \$50,000 at the right time. But to set ourselves up to failure as far as a possible income issue is concerned, to not see this coming... And again, it wasn't a coincidence they put in the 5% escalation clause at the Fire District. I just want to see what they're going to do. And that's the whole point! We should wait to see what they are going to do, to see how much we have to go forward as far as what's happening here. I have talked to other people involved here as far as the Hospital District is involved here, which I thought was kind of a joke, actually. The doctors at the Health Center are talking to patients about the importance of a hospital district. So again, they will be ahead of us. So, again, we are talking about putting things out here, that we don't know where things are. If you give somebody something, it is really hard to take it away. As far as wages are involved here, if we want to get wages out there, it probably should be voted on at the proper time. And by the way, I looked at the Strategic Plan, here, it says September – have a plan for wages by September. We're in June. So again, by their own plan, I'm having a hard time seeing what's going on here. I have no idea about what is going on on this island, here. I have no idea how much maintenance workers make at the school district. I know that it's a much, much tinier thing here, but I know that there were 21 applicants that applied for the Executive Director job at the Senior Center that makes \$48,000 a year at 32 hours a week.

Elaine: It is not a like model.

Scott: It's very small, it's very small. I need more information. I do know I saw a Facebook thing this week that Sawbones is hiring -- \$13 - \$15 an hour. Two openings! They're out there! I don't know what the going situation is out there, but I do know we have a limited amount of money. And I do know that I have done the numbers involved here. And as far as taking offence, I was deeply offended by popping up this thing here with totally wrong numbers the first go-round. Oh, the cost was going to be zero dollars to the Park District. It went out to everybody. Then, when it rolls back to me on the night of the meeting, it's \$108,000. And when I finally pressed the numbers, at the end of the day, it's \$248,000 per year. And why that's worse than VES, that's \$248,000 per year forever. We don't pay off any bonds here. This is what we do forever. So again, if we have the money, let's talk about it here. We don't know at the end of 2022, we're going to get \$1,533k. Maybe we will. Maybe we won't.

Karen: Could I just...

Scott: No, let me finish. I waited for everybody else, thank you very much.

Karen: Go ahead.

Scott: Another thing, what I was suspecting as far as what is happening here, is going back to the situation with, “Well, maybe we won’t spend as much on recreation programs.” Top of the list! This plan, based upon the numbers Elaine has done here, and my analysis, it shows a decreasing reserve and by 2022 we’re going to use a TAN again. We’re going to be short.

Abby: Are you going off the sheet that shows \$400,000 in recreation programming?

Scott: Yes, that’s the correct one. I addressed that. I’m not saying we shouldn’t do this. I’m saying it’s irresponsible to commit to people, just like it was irresponsible to commit to VES that far out here. Okay, you can say as much as you want now.

Karen: Thank you. I would not say we are irresponsible. I would say we have looked at the numbers again and again and again. And yes, some things have changed as we discovered issues here and there. But I’m pretty happy with what we have now. Would you agree? I appreciate what you have to say – very much so – but I do not believe we are going to go the VES direction, because we are paying people more. If we don’t pay people more – if we don’t have anybody to DO the work at the Park District – to me, that’s not a valid argument. We are always going to disagree.

Abby: I want to say something. I asked Elaine to send me the total amount she has gotten in grants. It is 1.18 million dollars. I think that should be noted. I would not be comfortable leveraging that against finding a new Executive Director. In finding a new Executive Director, you have admitted yourself she is one of the best grant writers who could have the job. I think that would be detrimental to the Park District to lose somebody who can bring in that much money. And also, I think it would be massively irresponsible to throw \$100,000 at recreation programming. Based on the work I have been doing and the recreation committee, I think it needs to be way smaller baby steps. The groups we are targeting don’t know exactly what they want. It’s not going to be set in stone. It needs to be pilot programs for them. They know they want some things, but they don’t know how it’s going to work because of all the difficulty that comes along with having children with disabilities, or being disabled, or being a senior. There are things that go into it that would be irresponsible to just throw \$100,000 at recreation programs.

Karen: I agree.

Bob: You don’t have anything in there that would account for the cost of losing key people in the organization – the cost of building the staff back up. The potential cost in grants is an example. There is a tremendous amount of money there that would mitigate the costs you are pointing out and may even overwhelm the total. I know, from some experience and a certain amount of reading and education, that turnover costs a tremendous amount of money to an organization.

Scott: Well, okay. Now, several things. First thing, the Park District will survive here. The people we have are very good, and it would be a shame to lose any of them. But I look at the Park District 5 years ago. Elaine, who had never run a park district, had a handful of key employees, Jason being an outstanding maintenance manager. We had no systems. We had no procedures. It was really not much of a program. AND, we were way, way deep as far as funds are concerned here. We were totally upside down. We almost had to lay off everybody, because we had no money. Today, we are in better shape as far as finances are concerned here, and we have paid our employees more. We have given them substantial raises. But nobody is irreplaceable. Things happen, you get things out here. I’m here for the future of the Park District. Very simply, the only way this Park District really gets its house in order is with a bond. If three years from now, we go to them and say, “Oh, we haven’t done any deferred maintenance, but

I don't think this is going to play on this island. The taxpayers will eat the District alive if we try to pass the bond. Then we'll be in trouble for a long, long time.

Bob: We have accomplished items on the deferred maintenance list, so to say we haven't simply is not true.

Scott: Well, actually, yes, we did do something at the pool primarily because we wouldn't be able to open it if we hadn't. So that was on an emergency basis here. If you look at the list of \$1.9 million, and in particular, if we go to them and say, "By the way, we had all this increase including 10% across the board, which we'll have next year when the levy passes, we have all this extra money, and what did we do in just those periods?" In 2018, 2019, 2020, what did we do? If we pass this motion, we will have done nothing, because there is no money there.

Bob: Scott, I appreciate what you're doing, and I know your heart is in the right place; however, I think it is time to call the question.

Captain Joe: Will the chair accept some commentary from the public?

Scott: Absolutely.

Captain Joe: I had two things, but now I have added a third. Robin and Susan and I are the only people that are here. None of you were here when we went through this VES business. Elaine was not here. The first thing is, don't get yourselves into the same kind of acerbic exchanges back and forth that were characteristic of that time. It was a terrible and bitter time. We got through it, and a lot of that has to do with how the Board behaved, and a lot of it has to do with how the Executive Director has done it. But it was such a bad time, that we almost lost the Vashon Park District. It was almost driven into bankruptcy. I will do everything I can to bring all of you back to a level of behavior and constancy that we never want to see in here again. Secondly, I have a lot of experience in command leadership. The first thing I learned at 23 was that any organization has to accomplish the mission, and any organization has to take care of the people given to it to accomplish that mission. Those two principles are mutually inclusive, and they have to happen at the same time. That means that organization has to do both of those things, and a balance has to take place. I am asking you to take care of that balance. Part of the mission is to take care of the facilities that you have acquired. In that piece, in taking care of the people, you have to take care of what we all own. Third, what you're talking about in this resolution, calls for a large change to the budget which was approved at the beginning at the year. My urging is that, when it comes time to call the question as Bob has done, I urge that there be more opportunity for the public to weigh in on this big change to the budget. I'm not making recommendations – it's up for you to decide – it's why we elected you. I feel strongly that a major change to the budget requires public input, and if the public chooses not to exercise that option, that's up to them. I appreciate the chair allowing me to make those comments.

Karen: A couple things. I would probably take umbrage at the first thing you said if I understand it correctly. We don't have a board that is similar to the outrageous board you reference. We get along pretty well together. We have issues we discuss, but we have always had respect.

Captain Joe: That's not what I said.

Karen: Then I misunderstood that. The second thing is that, everybody is welcome to attend these meetings and give their opinions about things. Nobody does. I talk to other Board members, and it's the same thing. What would you have us do? We have done what we can. Here's what's going to be talked about at the meeting. We have some issues about raises. If you take a look at all the Park District money that's being paid for employees, we are at the bottom of the list. That's not okay. Yes, I care about what the community has to say, but we also have our own sense of responsibility. We were elected to use our best judgment.

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| | <p>Abby: To Karen’s point, I think this is defensible. If anybody has a problem with this after it passes, I have no problem defending my vote. I appreciate what you say – to have the public involved – but Karen’s right. There is only so much we can do beforehand. These meetings are public. Everyone has the chance to know what’s going on. If they choose to be outraged, that is their choice.</p> <p>Captain Joe: So Karen, you asked what would I have you do? What I would have you do is to put out a meeting notice for the next meeting that says this is what you are going to vote on.</p> <p>Karen: I disagree. I think we are going to vote today, because we have a motion.</p> <p>Susan Riemer: I am spending my weekend writing about this. And also the school board. They are having a big meeting on Monday, because a lot of folks at the school district are very upset about low wages. They have their meeting Monday. I feel that from my perch, at my desk, I have been watching this happen as the island has grown more and more expensive and people are getting priced out. Some people have watched it, and others have looked away. But I feel this collision that is happening over these few days is a collision that will happen all over this island, whether it’s for profit businesses, or non-profits or government entities. I don’t mean to pontificate, but we have been headed here for a long time, and there are no signs of it getting better. I have a question – I haven’t seen all the numbers. The differences you are talking about – would they be enough to make a difference to an employee?</p> <p>Elaine: Absolutely. They would.</p> <p>Robin: And it would be a pleasure to see a step toward what other people get paid other places. I work 5 jobs to make a reasonable living. I have worked here since 2001, so you can’t say I don’t love this place. But I have to compensate for how I am paid so poorly.</p> <p>Scott: I’m calling for the vote. You called the question. I am the chair. You called the question. I am accepting that you called the question. Did you call the question, Bob?</p> <p>Bob: I called the question.</p> <p>Barbara McMahon: So, I just got cut off. I just want to be clear about what just happened here.</p> <p>Scott: As the chair, I cut you off.</p> <p>Barbara: You’re cutting the public off?</p> <p>Scott: That is correct.</p> <p>Barbara: (to Susan Riemer) You might want to make a note of that.</p> <p>Scott: All in favor of the motion? All opposed? Passed Passed 3 – 1 (Abby, Karen, Bob in favor; Scott opposed).</p> | <p>Motion to approve the wage increase plan as presented. Passed 3 - 1</p> | |
| <p>Adjourn</p> | <p>Abby: I move we adjourn. Karen: Second. Adjourned 12:50 p.m.</p> | | |