

**Lower Minnesota River Watershed District
Board of Manager's Personnel Committee
10:00 a.m., Thursday, October 3, 2024
Small meeting room - Savage Public Library
103090 Alabama Avenue South, Savage, MN
Approved February 3, 2024**

In attendance: In-person: Manager Theresa Kuplic; and Linda Loomis, LMRWD Administrator. Virtually: Manager Lauren Salvato; President Joseph Barisonzi; Della Schall Young, Young Environmental, LMRWD Education & Outreach Consultant; Jen Dullum, Board Conservationist, BWSR; Ashley Gallagher, Director, Dakota SWCD; Joe Barten, Program Management Supervisor, Dakota SWCD;

This meeting was called to discuss the request for qualifications for a government relations consultant, options for replacing the administrator and the education and outreach work plan.

There was discussion about how committee meeting minutes should be managed. Administrator Loomis explained the minutes should be approved by the Board committee before they go to the full Board. President Barisonzi did not want to wait for a committee to meet and approve the minutes before the full Board receives them. The Board directed that meeting minutes do not wait for committee approval to be shared with the full Board.

President Barisonzi made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 26, 2024, and the April 10, 2024, Personnel Committee. Manager Salvato seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Government Relations Consultant

At the time of the Committee meeting, only one proposal for Government Relations Consultant had been received. The Committee discussed the process for retaining a Government Relations Consultant. The Committee decided to wait until additional proposals were received.

President Barisonzi informed the committee that Flaherty|Hood was planning to submit a proposal. A discussion of conflict-of-interest ensued because Flaherty|Hood was being considered as potential legal counsel. The Committee asked for a stand-alone conflict-of-interest policy for consultants and employees. A policy is not likely to be in place by the time the LMRWD extends an offer to a government relations consultant so conflicts of interest will be discussed with the applicants at the interviews.

The concern is that proposals for consultant will be dismissed out-of-hand because of who their client list is. There is not clear consensus among the personnel committee as to how conflict-of-interests should be assessed, other than to develop a conflict-of-interest policy. Manager Salvato asked that this discussion be set aside to return to the tasks at hand.

A Personnel Committee will be set-up solely to interview Government Relations Consultants.

Each Manager will draft questions and share with the Administrator to aggregate that will be posed to the Government Relations Consultants. The Committee will look at questions that were used for interviews with Legal Counsel and E & O Consultants.

President Barisonzi said he wants a firm that will Minute 37.5

President Barisonzi asked what the amount included in the 2025 Budget for Government Relations. He also asked if the LMRWD will need to seek reauthorization of the dredge funding. He also asked that last year's legislative item be sent to the Committee.

Administrative Services

President Barisonzi asked the Administrator for a timeline. Administrator Loomis shared that she was planning to leave at June 2025.

Administrator Loomis explained different options for providing administrative service to the district that the Board should consider:

- An independent contractor
- A firm that can provide administrative services on a consulting basis
- Staff that works directly for the district

If the LMRWD chooses to hire staff there are financial considerations, such as benefits, social security, PERA, Unemployment Insurance, vacation and more. There are also accounting functions that go along with this. Administrator Loomis explained that the Board of Managers at the time she was contracted felt that it was difficult to supervise employees.

Manager Salvato asked why that was. Administrator Loomis said she did not remember why they felt that way. [It was because it was hard to keep track of sick time and vacation]

President Barisonzi had three questions and asked other in attendance to feel free to respond.

- Why is the position for Watershed Districts called Administrators as opposed to Executive Directors
- Where are other watershed district doing for staffing between staff and consultant
- What is the best model for the LMRWD to be looking at

Joe Barten, Dakota SWCD, stated that the term of Administrator vs. Executive Director is an organizational decision. He noted that Minnehaha Creek has an Executive Director [if you visit the Minnehaha Watershed District website and look at staff, they have an Administrator not an Executive Director]. He also suggested to look at Watershed Management Organizations and that the Board should discuss where they see the LMRWD in 5 years.

Jen Dullum noted that the WMOs and Watershed district have different taxing authorities in statute.

Manager Kuplic said her biggest concern is the amount of knowledge they will lose and how to make the transition.

Manager Salvato asked to weigh the pros and cons of the different options and what might the LMRWD need to have in place for one option or another.

President Barisonzi shared some financial numbers that the LMRWD should look at when replacing the Administrator. He shared some options; a sole contractor, dividing functions between administrative function and executive functions, or going with a firm. He is concerned that this transition is coming a critical time for the LMRWD because of the capacity of the LMRWD levy.

Two tracks; President Barisonzi will draft a proposal for the Personnel Committee to consider for an executive position search which would include all three options; and then for Managers Kuplic and Salvato to meet with Administrator Loomis to see what the different scopes of work are.

The interview will be used to inform the proposal and to determine if more than one person is needed to manage the work of the LMRWD.

Education & Outreach

Young Environmental has indicated that they would like to have the Board agree upon an Education Plan.

President Barisonzi asked who is responsible for helping to develop the consensus on an Education plan. He sees the lead staff person as the person responsible for facilitating and organizing that process. He thinks that the Board has given feedback and that what the Board has been given in return is not where they want to be.

There was discussion about the direction of Education and the role of the CAC.

The meeting adjourned at 11:12 a.m.

Next Personnel Committee meeting: No date was determined, but a meeting will be scheduled to hold interviews of applicants responding to the request for qualifications for a government relations consultant