

OHIO RIVER VALLEY WATER SANITATION COMMISSION

Roundtable Issues Forum Charleston Marriott Town Center Charleston, West Virginia Wednesday, October 9, 2013

Chairman Frevert called the Roundtable of Commissioners meeting to order at 1:00 P.M. Wednesday, October 9, 2013. The meeting agenda was then turned over to Peter Tennant, Executive Director. Mr. Tennant introduced two general topics on public participation for discussion. He commented that the need to do a better job of communicating successes to the public has been identified at a number of previous meetings, and that the role of the Public Interest Advisory Committee (PIACO) would be discussed.

The Kanawha River: A Success Story

Capitalizing on the Charleston, West Virginia meeting location, Mr. Tennant acknowledged the incredible improvements which have taken place on the Kanawha River and that ORSANCO's mobile aquarium display in Charleston during Commission meeting activities received positive media attention. Mr. Tennant made the point that the Compact commits the states to doing certain things and recognizes the importance of work on the tributaries to the health of the mainstem and recognized West Virginia's accomplishments to clean up the Kanawha River.

Scott Mandirola of West Virginia DEP provided some comments on a program titled "Environment Matters" which is a series of short videos covering environmental issues which are shown on public television and accessible via the internet. These videos depict behind the scene activities to improve the environment and generally target success stories. Scott introduced one such video depicting the past and present conditions of the Kanawha River. Footage from a previous ORSANCO video depicting the poor condition of the Kanawha River in the 1960s was used. Scott also mentioned the vast improvement in the river since the mid-nineties, in particular the significant increase in fishing tournaments.

Commissioners then viewed the above mentioned video.

Comments followed on the use of video, such as the one viewed, as a valuable public information tool. Commissioner Nally indicated that Ohio uses short duration YouTube videos titled "Ask the Experts" to make information available to the public. They also utilize a tracking system to monitor hits to individual videos.

Scott Mandirola also indicated that West Virginia employs a school education program where teachers are trained and provided resources on environmental issues to use in the classroom. Commissioner Easterly suggested that staff research various resources developed within the states and available for use. Chairman Frevert concurred that with limited resources, the best approach is to utilize what others have created when appropriate. It was also mentioned that advertising job openings via social media and the web increases hits to other available information.

ORSANCO's Public Interest Advisory Committee

The remainder of the roundtable focused on the status, membership and role of the Public Interest Advisory Committee (PIACO) and how this Committee could support ORSANCO's need for improved public engagement and communicating success stories.

Eriks Janelsins, Committee Chairman, presented a report from the Committee's recent meeting and challenged Commissioners to provide guidance and direction to the Committee. Eriks believes that the Committee encourages and needs direction from Commissioners coupled with the fact that the Committee is supported with Commission funds.

The Committee worked to redefine its mission and objectives with the goal of identifying the Committee's value and role within the Commission structure.

The Committee members collectively developed the following mission statement and objectives:

The mission of the Public Interest Advisory Committee is to provide a communications conduit between the Commission and the public.

Objectives

1. Advise the Commission on issues and concerns within the Ohio River Watershed.
2. Advise the Commission on the effectiveness and transparency of its communications strategies and activities.
3. Serve as ambassadors to tell the Ohio River story.

Mr. Janelsins then posed a question as to the actual need for such a committee or is there a better use for these resources, and opened the discussion for input or comments.

A number of comments and input were received and recorded for further consideration. The general sense of the discussion focused on the actual need for such a committee, the committee's value and how it can support the Commission, and the makeup of committee membership. Discussion also took place regarding the perceived lack of focus, direction, and outcomes of committee meetings and the committee's understanding of Commission issues and what is being done internally to resolve these issues. A suggestion of more Commissioner involvement with the group was well received.

Further discussion took place regarding committee membership and the types of individuals who could add value and expertise to the committee. The possibility of repopulating the committee with new members with specific backgrounds, expertise, and connections to the public was discussed. It is important to define the expectations for new committee members when recruiting.

Eriks Janelsins summarized the discussion outcomes as follows:

- There is strong support for the continuation of PIACO and for the need to engage the public.
- There is little interest in changing the committee's name.
- The committee's objectives should better reflect two-way communications.
- There is general consensus on value of reviewing membership and consideration of re-populating the committee to capitalize on needed competencies.
- It is important to ensure geographic representation from all member states.
- There is value to have Commissioners attend and participate in committee meetings.

Mr. Janelsins made two requests. First, he asked that Commissioners give some consideration to new appointments to the committee from their respective states and provide candidate names to staff. Second, he asked Commissioners to consider volunteering to attend committee meetings.

Peter Tennant noted that in recent years the Commission has been reluctant to give direction to any advisory committee. However, in the past, the Commission did task advisory committees with reviewing specific issues and reporting back with recommendations. The committee was not told what to do but was provided guidance and asked for advice, which worked well. He also believes that, when appropriate, technical staff should participate in committee meetings. The committee seems to perform well when specific tasks are assigned.

Chairman Frevert concluded by mentioning that the Roundtable discussion should serve as input and direction for an ongoing process to define the committee's role and value. The key is to keep progressing forward to a shared understanding between the committee and the Commission on this role and value.

The Roundtable Issues Forum adjourned at 2:30 P.M.