



# ***The Sewerage & Water Board***

## **OF NEW ORLEANS**

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March 7, 2023

The Strategy Committee met on Tuesday, March 7, 2023 in the Executive Boardroom.  
The meeting convened at approximately 9:00 AM.

### **1. ROLL CALL**

Present:

Director Robin Barnes, Chair

Director Lynes Sloss

Director Janet Howard

Director Maurice Sholas

Director Tamika Duplessis

Absent:

Present, but not a member of the Committee:

Director Alejandra Guzman

### **2. PRESENTATION ITEMS**

Director Barnes opened the meeting by acknowledging that the Strategy committee is focused on looking forward and thinking strategically about the work of the Sewerage and Water Board. The committee is mindful of the urgent challenges faced by the Board, and it is those issues that inform the committee's work. Director Barnes expressed her enthusiasm about the three presentations on today's agenda which showcase how the SWBNO staff is applying strategic thinking at all levels across the organization.

Executive Director Korban stated today's session reflects that there is very good alignment between the board and staff, and both are listening to each other, with staff taking the lead from the board on what is important. With input from the board to improve both internal and external communications, under the leadership of Interim Director of Communications, Grace Birch, the staff has drafted a strategic communications plan. ED Korban continued by saying that he and the staff are very proud of what is going to be presented, and that there will be glimpses and examples within today's presentations of how communications will be integrated into ongoing initiatives. ED Korban concluded by stating that the plan is a living document that will be modified accordingly based on the feedback received from the board.

Ms. Birch presented the Strategic Communications Plan which covers the initiatives the SWBNO Communications department from 2023 – 2025. The Communication department

functions are internal employee communications, customer communication, media relations, key stakeholder engagement, social & digital communications, crisis communications, community outreach and SWBNO identity management. Ms. Birch introduced the strategic blueprint which laid out three objectives: Earn trust and improve morale among SWBNO staff and leadership, establish SWBNO as a timely, trustworthy source of information and improve reputation, and build trust within community. Strategies and tactics are in place to ensure growth, improve internal communications, and cross-departmental collaboration. The internal strategic communication includes the strategic plan implementation, The Pipeliner, and the smart meter launch. Connections with community members in 2022 included 65 community meetings and events, 52 stakeholder conversations, 10 classes for teachers and professionals, and 9 customer advisory committee meetings. SWBNO also hosted the largest water industry conference in North America, WEFTEC. Ms. Birch also presented the 2023 major initiatives highlighting the utility “identity” standards, Smart Metering communications, hiring 3 new employees for the Communications Team and more.

Members of the Committee had an extended discussion about how best to manage SWBNO’s strategic goals with both elected officials and the media, in particular. Board members expressed a need for a form of organized campaign to communicate the value of the SWBNO, based the positive and strategic work that is occurring, and shifting away from crisis management. Board members highlighted intergovernmental relations as a major issue to focus on in the coming year.

Chief of Staff, Christy Harowski gave a presentation on the recently completed employee engagement sessions. Ms. Harowski stated there were three positive outcomes from the utility’s efforts to speak with employees about the utility’s financial stability: The first outcome was a well-attended learning experience where the leadership team and staff came together to discuss an important issue. The second outcome was enhanced internal communication between staff members. The third outcome was that the meetings functioned as focus groups for the utility to gather initial feedback on the financial stability topic. The small-group investment cost activity was an overall great success, and the utility is looking forward to great improvements. The high priorities amongst the groups were preventative maintenance and faster field repairs, expanded employee training opportunities, renovate drinking water treatment plans, and replace water lines. From a communications standpoint this opportunity helped us understand the amount of preparation and substance that makes up for a successful engagement.

The committee members discussed the need for a cultivated media presence that would help to keep the community informed about SWBNO initiatives and outcomes. The committee asked about what vacancies were currently in the Communications Department. The committee praised the staff’s approach and also encouraged the staff to speak honestly with the committee about the feasibility of ideas that the committee members suggested.

### **3. DISCUSSION ITEM**

Director Barnes turned it over to Tyler Antrup, Director of Planning and Strategy, to discuss progress and next steps on the utility’s Master Planning effort. Mr. Antrup gave a brief overview of what work has been done to date and the strategy moving forward. The current plan is to rebuild capacity in engineering/planning to ensure proper management of consultant work and complete technical planning tasks upfront to leverage federal/state infrastructure funds, as soon as possible. The plan will integrate community visioning with

communications strategy to rebuild trust and prime for future outreach/engagement.

Mr. Antrup discussed the water purification master plan and its scope. The scope will assess existing purification processes and suggest improvements or wholesale replacement, analyze facilities, and provide plans for better utilization of space. The most critical part of the master plan is capital plan for complete renovation of plants including new regulatory requirements. Mr. Antrup stated the kickoff will be in mid-2023 and will be an 18-Month planning period with interim deliverables to drive progress, expedited RFPs as appropriate. Mr. Antrup described the following steps would be confirming capacity to add additional planning activities, participating in community events to build support, and slowly rolling out plans for: Water Distribution, Sewer, Wastewater Treatment, Drainage/Stormwater. The committee asked about the order of plans, and it was explained that though there is an urgent need for all plans to be prioritized, funding and capacity are the key determinants.

#### **4. PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

There being no further business to come before the Strategy Committee, Director Barnes asked for a motion to adjourn. Director Sholas moved to adjourn. Director Sloss seconded. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:05 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

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Robin A. Barnes, Chair