

MINUTES OF MEETING
DIVERSION AUTHORITY PUBLIC OUTREACH COMMITTEE
CASS COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT
WEST FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA
SEPTEMBER 27, 2011

The Diversion Authority Public Outreach Committee met on September 27, 2011, at 8:30 a.m. at the Cass County Highway Department, West Fargo, North Dakota.

The following Committee members were present: Rodger Olson, Cass County Joint Water Resource District, Chairman; Kevin Campbell, Clay County Commissioner; Mike Thorstad, West Fargo City Commissioner; and Gerald VanAmburg, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District. Members absent were: Brad Wimmer, Fargo City Commissioner, and Brenda Elmer, Moorhead City Commissioner.

Also present were Daron Selvig, Advanced Engineering and Environmental Services, Inc., Public Relations Team; Carol Harbeke Lewis, Cass County Joint Water Resource District Secretary-Treasurer; and members of the local media.

Organization of the Committee

Chairman Olson called the meeting to order. He informed the group that Darrel Vanyo, Chairman of the Diversion Authority, appointed him as Chairman of the Public Outreach Committee and that he asked Carol Harbeke Lewis to take minutes at the meetings. All members present were in agreement with that arrangement.

The Committee discussed scheduling its regular meetings on the Wednesdays prior to Diversion Authority meetings and that future meetings will be held at the Cass County Highway Department. The next meeting was set for October 12, 2011, at 8:00 a.m. at the Cass County Highway Department. The Committee will report at each Diversion Authority meeting.

Public Outreach

Daron Selvig informed the group that he is going through information regarding the Fargo-Moorhead Metro Project to develop a communications plan. The plan would include keeping the public informed with the facts relating to the project and providing helpful materials in various formats. The domain name of *fmdiversion.com* has already been secured. He would like input from the Committee as to website content and how it is formed. He suggested looking at WAWSP.com for an idea of what Advanced Engineering has done on a large project in western North Dakota.

Mr. Selvig said information will largely be based on Corps of Engineers documents, which have been studied and are official. Specific questions from the public could be taken and if the answers are not known, he could contact the Corps of Engineers or local engineers for correct answers. Chairman Olson said the Corps of Engineers is now able to release answers to all of the questions from the Environmental Impact Statement, which would be a wealth of information. Aaron Snyder, Corps of Engineers, hoped to have the information out this week. Mr. Selvig said he would look into that.

Kevin Campbell asked about monitoring local media for issues relating to the project. Mr. Selvig said that is in their scope of services. They will note anything they believe should be brought to the Committee. He suggested Committee members share and discuss any questions emailed to them at future meetings as well. Mike Thorstad said having factual information is important. It was agreed that only new pertinent questions be addressed and not to go over and over old information. The Committee wants to be sure everyone feels they are being heard. Information will also need to be approved by the Diversion Authority.

Mr. Selvig asked about inviting a Corps of Engineers representative to the Committee meetings. Chairman Olson said it may work for the Corps of Engineers if the meetings are held the day before the Diversion Authority meetings. The Committee will confirm with the Diversion Authority if they would support direct contact between the Public Relations Team and the Corps of Engineers. Chairman Olson asked about getting an overview of information before it goes public. Mr. Selvig said information will go through the Committee and the Diversion Authority before being released to the public.

The use of various forms of media was discussed. Gerald VanAmburg suggested using the website, newspapers and blogs. The Committee agreed there needs to be transparency and that information needs to be updated regularly. There is also a need to be able to edit any inappropriate language. Mr. Thorstad suggested making a list of all the options available.

Mr. Selvig will present the website design at the next meeting, which can be refined as the project proceeds. It could currently have links to Corps of Engineers documents and project updates. Twitter feeds could also help keep people updated with what is happening. Information could also be posted on Facebook.

Having a spokesperson for the group was considered. Mr. Campbell said it depends on the audience. At times it may be beneficial for Mr. Selvig to speak on behalf of the Committee / Diversion Authority.

Mr. Olson said the Cass County Joint Water Resource District met with township boards to discuss the project and recommended communication continue with those groups. Mr. VanAmburg said they certainly need to get answers for those that do not know how the project will affect their property. Mr. Thorstad asked if the Committee should break

the project into segments and target messages for those segments. He suggested showing examples of what certain levels of flooding would mean in various areas. Mr. Selvig said they can get that information and prepare flyers for meetings. Mr. Campbell said it is also important to inform the public about the number of people that will be taken out of flooded areas with the project. Information on the continued cost to fight floods and the cost if a flood fight is lost should also be set out. Mr. Selvig agreed. Mr. Campbell said they also need to continue updating state legislators. Mr. Selvig said on the WAWSP.com website, they have a newsletter for legislators. Information from the Greater Fargo-Moorhead Economic Development Corporation also needs to be distributed.

Mr. Thorstad said citizens have been contacting the Mayor of West Fargo about recent Right of Entry requests to study the Sheyenne River. Chairman Olson said the Cass County Joint Water Resource District has been working with the Corps of Engineers on access issues. Carol Harbeke Lewis reported on how the process is being handled.

Mr. Campbell suggested holding periodic press conferences, possibly before / after a Diversion Authority meeting, depending on the issues before the Board. It would be beneficial to have someone from the Corps of Engineers / technical people available for press conferences also. The matter will be discussed with Mr. Vanyo. Publishing a time table for the project would also be helpful to the public.

Communication with groups that oppose the project was discussed. The Committee agreed they would be open to meeting with anyone, provided it is in a well structured atmosphere. Mr. VanAmburg said the benefit of upstream storage should be addressed, even though there is not enough storage to offset the project. Chairman Olson pointed out that retention affects property owners too. Aaron Snyder indicated to Chairman Olson that he is very willing to meet with those groups, but they would need to make a formal request through the Diversion Authority to have him do so.

Mr. Campbell said there still needs to be ongoing communication within the protected area of just how important this project is. He referenced the flooding in Minot as an example. Mr. Thorstad suggested setting out what would happen if the dikes would have failed when the Red River was at the 40' level and the negative impact it would have in the area with the loss of jobs, infrastructure, etc. Mr. VanAmburg suggested reminding the public of the history in the area.

Chairman Olson said he is often asked why the area needs 500-year protection, as opposed to 100-year protection. Mr. Campbell said the Corps of Engineers studied flooding trends and the increased protection was well worth the additional cost.

The Committee would like to see the website up and running as soon as possible.

Adjournment

There being no further business for the Board to consider, the meeting adjourned without objection.

APPROVED:

Rodger Olson
Chairman

ATTEST:

Carol Harbeke Lewis
Cass County Joint Water Resource District
Secretary-Treasurer