

Bolinas Community Public Utility District
A Meeting Of The Personnel Committee of the Board Of Directors
March 10, 2020 270 Elm Road, Bolinas

1. Call to Order.

3:40 p.m.

2. Roll.

Directors Godino and Siedman present; General Manager Blackman also present.

3. Memorandum of Understanding Re: Compensation and Benefits between BCPUD Board of Directors and BCPUD Employees: *Request from BCPUD Employees for Increases in Wages, Stand-By Pay and Cell Phone Reimbursement for FY 2020-21.*

The Committee considered a request from the operations staff for the following revisions to the existing Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) for the FY 2020-21: a wage increase of 3.5%; an increase in cell phone reimbursement from \$43/month to \$50/month; and an increase in stand-by pay from \$55/shift to \$62/shift. Staff analyzed the budgetary implications of each request, in each case on an annual basis. For purposes of the draft budget for FY 2020-21, the Finance Committee has assumed a wage increase of 3% based on an assumed cost-of-living increase for the San Francisco Bay Area; if that wage increase is increased to 3.5%, the impact to the budget would be \$3,115. If the employees’ request for an increase in cell phone reimbursement is approved, the impact to the budget would be \$336. And, if the employee’s request for an increase in standby pay is approved, the impact to the budget would be \$2,555.

Staff noted that the Finance Committee recently requested an analysis of compensation and benefits paid to employees working for similarly situated districts in California and this information was presented at a meeting of that committee earlier in the day. Staff obtained information about compensation and benefits paid by Inverness Public Utility District, Stinson Beach County Water District, Bodega Bay Public Utility District, Valley of the Moon Water District, Forestville Water District and Clearlake Oaks Water District. Staff said the analysis shows that overall, the BCPUD is paying its operations staff very comparably to other districts in terms of wages and benefits. While this data does not take housing costs into account, each of these districts are located in areas likely impacted by high housing costs in the greater Bay Area.

Staff reported that the 2019 cost-of-living increase for the San Francisco Bay Area was 2.5%. That said, staff does not object to a 3.5% increase in wages given the relatively small overall impact to the budget; similarly, staff has no objection to the cell phone reimbursement request. As for the requested increase in standby pay from \$55/shift to \$62/shift, staff said this request is quite large on a percentage basis and noted that if an operator is called out during a standby shift, that operator also receives a minimum 2 hours of “call out” pay, which usually then converts to 3 hours of overtime pay (or compensatory time off) if the operator worked an 8-hour shift that day. On the other hand, of course staff on standby have significant impacts on their regular lives (i.e., must stay in town while on standby, must be able to respond 24/7 to emergencies and so forth), which certainly needs to be taken into account. Staff suggested it may be more appropriate to increase the standby pay by 3.5% to match the percentage wage increase, which would increase the standby pay from \$55 to \$57 (as has occurred in the past). Director Godino inquired whether there is a specific reason the Committee may be failing to consider as to why the operations staff is requesting such a large increase, noting this is the second time a large increase has been requested. Staff agreed to confer with the operations staff on this point. Subject to the operations staff’s response on that question, the Committee agreed that it is willing to recommend to the Board that the district approve the requested 3.5% wage increase, the increase in cell phone reimbursement to \$50/month and a 3.5% increase in standby pay from \$55 to \$57 per shift.

4. Retirement of BCPUD’s Chief Operator: *Next Steps in Hiring Process.*

Staff reported that director Smith submitted an email setting forth his thoughts for the Committee to consider in connection with the hiring process for the district’s Chief Operator position. In his email, director Smith describes a book he read which argues that most people make decisions based on “gut feelings” rather than rational analysis. Director Smith suggests that the district needs to counteract this impulse and employ a rational approach toward the hiring of its new chief operator by first objectively identifying key characteristics or traits the new hire must have so that the district doesn’t simply hire someone it “likes”, who may not have these key qualities. Director Smith detailed five traits that he feels are important for the Chief Operator position; he said he places a priority on the first three traits, which are engineering-related, because the remaining two could “more easily be shifted to other staff if we can’t find all five in one hire”:

- (1) engineering background in electrical power and control systems, hydraulics, mechanical hardware, and water chemistry;
- (2) operation and maintenance of systems for drinking-water treatment & distribution and/or sewage collection & treatment, including establishment of protocols for performance monitoring and scheduled maintenance of each piece of equipment;
- (3) computerized data systems, including collection and logging from transducers, plus spreadsheet design for flagging problems and scheduling maintenance;
- (4) supervision of operation & maintenance crews, including scheduling, training, performance evaluation, and team-building; and
- (5) proficiency with communication to employees, supervisor, governmental regulators, and the public.

Staff noted that the three engineering traits outlined in director Smith's email represent a very different view of what the district's Chief Operator position should be as compared to what it historically has been (and currently is), which is certainly something the district can consider. However, based on staff's knowledge and understanding of what the Chief Operator currently does in the field, staff questions whether requiring them in the Chief Operator position is the appropriate mechanism, assuming the full Board agrees that the engineering traits identified by director Smith are necessary to have in-house. Instead, it may be more appropriate to require these traits of the district's General Manager. Or, it may be more cost effective to enter into a consulting contract with an engineering firm to provide these services to the district on an as-needed basis. From an operational perspective (in staff's opinion), the district needs to have sufficient trained and experienced personnel to run the district's operations on a daily basis which, given the small size of the staff, means that the Chief Operator's focus is primarily on the fourth and fifth traits identified by director Smith (in addition to personally performing many of the shift operator tasks, being on call, working weekend shifts, and the like).

Discussion ensued and director Siedman said he questions whether an engineering background is necessary for the General Manager job given the regulatory, managerial, administrative and community responsibilities that are the major part of that role. Staff agreed that the district for decades has engaged in activities far afield of its utility services responsibilities which impacts the scope of work expected of the General Manager; that said, perhaps it is time for the Board to revisit the scope of the General Manager role. Director Godino said she appreciates director Smith's suggestions and agrees that specific criteria should be developed for the Chief Operator hiring announcement, but she thinks it is unrealistic for the Board to think it can employ someone with an engineering expertise for the amount of the district is able to pay this position. In addition, she questions the importance of engineering skills over other skills critically needed in this position, such as an intimate operational understanding of the district's facilities, the ability to function fully as a Shift Operator and perform on-call and weekend duty, and effective team-building skills. Finally, with regard to the General Manager position, director Godino said she doubts that the Board will conclude that the district should cease performing its greater community functions, particularly in light of a recent uptick in developments with the California Coastal Commission and the implications thereof for the community. Director Siedman agreed that engineering skills aren't needed on a daily basis at the district, whereas other skills are, and he said that the district can always obtain engineering skills as needed on a consulting basis from outside firms.

Staff said that while assembling compensation and benefits information from other districts for the Finance Committee, she focused on similarly-sized special districts in rural areas with fewer than 20 employees and they all are structured quite similarly to the BCPUD with a General Manager, Chief Operator, Shift Operators and administrative personnel. None of these districts have engineers on staff, whereas the larger districts do. Staff emphasized that she would have no objection at all to hiring someone with engineering skills, but day-to-day operational considerations are most critical. Staff has obtained numerous model job descriptions from ACWA/JPIA and other sources that might be a good starting point for drafting an updated Chief Operator position description for the district. Directors Godino and Siedman said they are most interested in hearing from Bill Pierce as to what he believes the job description should require; they suggested Bill be provided with the model job descriptions and asked for his feedback. Discussion ensued about whether the Chief Operator position should remain a non-exempt position (meaning that the position is eligible for overtime pay) or become an exempt position (the model district engineer job descriptions all designate that position as exempt), and directors Godino and Siedman said the position should remain non-exempt as it is critical that this position is in the field, performing standby and weekend duty along with the other operators and therefore deserving of overtime pay.

Staff said the Board may well want to consider entering into a standing engineering consulting contract with an outside firm so that staff can call on engineering expertise on a regular basis and perhaps even "outsource" scheduled inspections of district assets so that such inspections do, in fact, take place and needed repairs or upgrades are then calendared. Staff said that Bill Pierce is willing to consult for the district for a period of time after his retirement in a manner consistent with the CalPERS rules applicable

to retired employees; he may be willing to work on institutionalizing this process, for example. Discussion continued, and the directors requested staff work with Bill to develop a comprehensive Chief Operator job description which the Committee will review with him (and staff) at the next Committee meeting, tentatively scheduled for March 24, 2020 at 11:30 a.m.

5. Minutes of the January 27, 2020 Personnel Committee Meeting.

Directors Godino and Siedman unanimously approved the minutes of the January 27, 2020 Personnel Committee meeting.

6. Community Expression.

None

7. Adjournment.

4:31 p.m.