

Walla Walla County Conservation District

April 2020 Board Meeting

Date: April 13, 2020 Time: 5:00 p.m. Place: Via phone conference

Presiding Officer: Ed Chvatal

Supervisors Present: Ed Chvatal, Jeff Schulke (5:10), Pat McConnell, Jim Kent (5:20) Associate Annie Byerley

Supervisors Absent: Todd Kimball

Other Agencies: Tracy Hanger, NRCS; Allisa Carlson SCC

Also present: Renee Hadley, Audrey Ahmann

Members of the Public: none

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by Ed Chvatal in absence of the chair.

Minutes: The Board reviewed the March minutes. **Motion by Pat McConnell and second by Jeff Schulke to approve the minutes as presented, motion passed.**

Financial Report: The board reviewed the April Financial Report. **Motion by Jeff Schulke and second by Pat McConnell to approve the April financial report and pay the bills, motion passed.** Checks included 13787 to 13713, total all accounts: \$385,826.41

As of this date April 13th, 2020 the Board by a majority vote does approve for payment checks included in the April financial report and further described as follows: Checks 13786 to 13813, total all accounts \$385,826.41

New Business:

- 1. NRCS update:** Tracy Hanger informed the board NRCS is still taking CSP applications until April 29th. Producers can contact staff through direct lines. NRCS is encouraging producers to sign up to the Client GateWay online where they can, among other things, sign documents electronically. She asked board members to spread the word that NRCS is seeking producers who will mentor new NRCS employees to help them learn and understand basic farming practices.
- 2. Office lease update:** Hadley drew the board's attention to the lease update which shows the district is on track in meeting our 2020 lease obligation with NRCS.
- 3. Internal Audit** Ahmann said that the SAO has requested an extension from the governor of the deadline for submitting the Annual Financial Report, but

no word yet. Currently the Covid-19 restrictions do not allow for a board member to be in the office. The board suggested moving forward to complete the report and conducting the audit when possible.

4. **Late Burn Refund.** As per policy, the board was asked to decide whether to refund the district's portion of a burn refund request. This was submitted very late despite repeated calls to the producer. The refund request deadline is December 11th. At this late date neither the county nor Ecology could refund their portions. After discussion, **Jeff Schulke moved and Pat McConnell seconded to decline refunding the permit.**
5. **Follow-up February executive session and COLA:** After the executive session in February where the performance of employees was discussed, it was the intent of the board to return to open session and approve changes to the wages of employees. This was overlooked. **Pat McConnell moved and Jim Kent seconded to approve the pay increases as presented, motion passed.** As per our personnel manual, the board discussed performance awards to all staff in light of recent superior performance. **Pat McConnell moved and Jeff Schulke seconded to approve performance awards for staff as presented, motion passed.**
6. **Review of Annual Plan of Work:** Hadley prepared a draft annual plan of work. The template is provided by the SCC. Some projects were carried forward from the previous annual plan. Task orders with NRCS were added. Some planned outreach from the previous plan was reluctantly canceled, but we are optimistic that things will return to normal in the coming year. **Jim Kent moved and Pat McConnell seconded to approve the plan as presented, motion passed.**
7. **Discussion and Action regarding medical benefits:** Hadley explained that the district currently offers \$450.00 as a stipend in lieu of benefits and the 2% Simple IRA contribution. Other CDs offer medical insurance benefits. Hadley sees this as an important recruiting and staff retention tool. The district may participate in the state employee insurance plan. Hadley said the costs of plans vary from 770 to 913 per employee per month. Most staff must participate but staff may opt out to a minimal level costing about 160 a month. The District would not be required to offer insurance to staff who work fewer than 20 hours a week in a 6-month period. The board asked to see more details, including the number who would participate and the financial impact to the district overall. The board was not opposed and agreed it is an attractive benefit.

News from the Commission: Allisa Carlson congratulated the district in organizing a call-in board meeting which seemed to be functioning well. She referred the board to the SCC Covid-19 resources page on their website. It

includes frequently asked questions and is updated weekly. The deadline for submitting the annual financial report is still May 29th. There is a one-day webinar on the state budget and development of district priorities. The recently approved supplemental budget includes match for RCPP projects. The SCC has asked districts to submit any end-of-year funding requests.¹

Program Updates: **Hadley** reported on behalf of staff that most are engaged on CRP field checks and have a steady workload ahead of them. Cowles Cleveland will review all final inspection sheets.

Restoration work is on hiatus. Hadley has called the county every week regarding the permits for the Rea-Lyons bridge. The Touchet River Conceptual plan is moving forward. Projects from Dayton to Prescott are ranked high in the plan because while they are not in the upper reaches, they have a higher cost/benefit ratio, along with strong landowner support. Hadley also mentioned that Clark Nealy of WSU reached out regarding weather stations. WSU has funds to install and monitor a station for 5 years. The site is 5 miles east of Walla Walla. Hadley said we will compare reports from this station to the reports received from cooperators in the same area. Finally, at the end of March Hadley was invited to participate in a national forum hosted by NACD about the new farm bill. Hadley and later Roylene Comes at Night spoke of how reductions in rental rates and reduced payments are impacting participation in CRP.

Joint Agency Meetings

- 1. Snake River Salmon Recovery Board.** No March meeting.
- 2. WW Water Management Partnership:** Byerley reported that the Partnership is completing a financial and performance audit through the State Auditor's Office.

Public Comment: There were no public comments.

Executive session: as per RCW 42.30.110 (1)(g) To review the performance of public employees. The board went into executive session via a separate phone number at 6:05. Hadley announced the board would return to open session via the public line at 6:20. There was no one on the public line when the board announced extending the session to 6:55. The board returned to open session at 6:55.

Employee wage action: After discussion, **Jeff Schulke moved and Pat McConnell seconded to authorize Hadley to offer an employee a pay increase as presented, motion passed.**

¹ In subsequent communication from SCC, this offer was rescinded.

With no further action, the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 without a formal motion.

Respectfully submitted,

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| Audrey Ahmann | Jim Kent | Ed Chvatal |
| Assistant Manager, Finance | Chair | Secretary |

Next meeting: May 11th, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.

Motions:

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| To approve the March minutes as written, | Motion: McConnell Second: Schulke Motion passed |
| To approve the April financial report, | Motion: Schulke Second: McConnell Motion passed |
| To decline to refund the District portion of a late burn permit refund request | Motion: Schulke Second: McConnell Motion passed |
| To approve pay increases as presented, | Motion: McConnell Second: Kent Motion passed |
| To approve performance awards as presented, | Motion: McConnell Second: Schulke Motion passed |
| To approve the annual plan of work, | Motion: Kent Second: McConnell Motion passed |
| To approve a pay increase as presented, | Motion: Schulke Second: McConnell Motion passed |