



**Marion Soil and Water Conservation District (MSWCD)
Board of Directors March 11, 2024, Meeting Minutes**

6:30 PM to 9:04 PM

Facilitator: Chair Olson

Recorded by: Brenda Sanchez

Approved 04-03-24

Directors & Record of Attendance		Associate Directors
At Large 1-Peggy Hart	Present	Leland Hardy
At Large 2-Scott Walker	Absent	
Zone 1-Vacant	Vacant	
Zone 2-Vacant	Vacant	
Zone 3-Darin Olson (Chair)	Present	
Zone 4-Dave Budeau (Secretary-Treasurer)	Present	
Zone 5-Rochelle Koch (Vice-Chair)	Present	
Staff		Guests
Chelsea Blank		Brent Stevenson
Linda Lovett		Sue Geniesse
Brenda Sanchez		Al Hrynyshyn
Heath Keirstead		Aleita Holcombe
Rachel Kato		Kathy Weiner

Note: All documents and materials displayed or referenced are retained in the Board of Directors Meeting file at the Marion Soil and Water Conservation District (Marion SWCD or District).

- 1. Olson Call to Order:** 6:30 PM
- 2. Announcements - None**
- 3. Agenda Additions or Changes - None**

1. Public Comment

Geniesse, is a spokesperson for a group of ten landowners, east of the Capitol Mall in Salem. They would like to restore 900 linear feet along Mill Creek. Geniesse states that they wanted to apply for grants but there is a concern on how ten landowners can collaborate effectively as well as come up with the cash balance to start the project. Geniesse asks if the District would consider other grant opportunities to support urban homeowners and find ways for a group to come together and implement restoration in urban areas. She suggests it would serve as a good model. Geniesse adds that she would like to see the District

consider advancing some part of the grant award upfront. Olson responds by explaining why the District does not provide funds up front. It is difficult to retrieve funds from someone if they did not complete the project. Geniesse adds they are aging homeowners and it is difficult to complete the invasive plant removal and would hire a contractor to complete the work. She asks the Board to consider creative ways for grant funds. Olson adds that the District wants to work on ideas and Kassi Roosth (staff) will follow up with you with new information.

2. District Snapshot

Rachel Kato states that she is the new Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) technician and stopped in to say hello. She is based out of the Yamhill SWCD and will be working on both Marion and Yamhill County CREP projects.

CREP Projects for Signatures

This agenda item was moved to the beginning so that Kato could be available for discussion. Kato explained that because of changes and delays in the new Farm Bill, there are two CREP projects (Mugica and Whole Circle Farms) with new start dates and is why they are back for a signature. No changes to the project, just the date. Koch states she has a conflict of interest because she is the owner of Whole Circle Farms, however because there are only four directors present and the only change is the date Koch will vote.

Action: Olson motioned that the Board **sign the Mugica and Whole Circle Farms CREP projects both amended with a date change, 2nd** by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Koch, Hart, and Budeau], Opposed-0).

Chelsea Blank (Staff-Conservation Planner) started her Board update discussing the RCPP, sharing that the agreement is coming soon for signature and began working with the other partners and meeting monthly. Grant applications will open in fall of 2024. Blank explains she has also been working with others, joining in on other local workgroups such as the Wildlife Habitat Program-tax incentive program. Blank shares that she has been taking a training course on catastrophic events preparedness; free training that is providing her a great foundation in disaster response. She interviewed Jacob Shockey, for Conservation Spotlight. Shockey works on the Beaver Project. Airs March 20, 2024, KMUZ 100.7 Blank adds that we are getting more airtime.

Before ending the District Snapshot, Sanchez adds that Director election forms will be available after April 1, 2024. Because of the new eligibility the legislature

must create new forms. Sanchez warns not to use any of the old forms, they will not be accepted. Sanchez will let everyone know when the election forms are available.

3. Treasurers Report December 2023 and January 2024

Budeau, referring to the December Report, begins by pointing out that the current year levied taxes was around \$45,000, and November was over one million dollars, which is when we begin to receive those funds. Budeau explains that tax income will continue to decrease monthly through the end of the fiscal year, we are at 78 percent which is about \$100,000 dollars less than expected. Budeau suspects that the District will probably not receive that amount of taxes projected for this year. Budeau also noted that the December report shows where we are at half the year, and we are under budget.

Action: Hart motioned that the Board **approve the December 2023 and January 2024 Treasurers Reports, 2nd** by Koch. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Koch, Hart, and Budeau], Opposed-0).

Olson stated before moving onto the agenda, that he would like to see the District staff manage memberships. There was a short discussion regarding District memberships and including the membership dues in the next budget. Sanchez added that Special Districts has changed their membership dues and our cost will go up from around \$900 to around \$3,000 next October. Directors discussed membership and services.

4. September 6, 2023, January 3, 2024, and February 7, 2024, Draft Board Meeting Minutes

Sanchez starts by explaining that the September 6, 2023, minutes were already approved during the October 2023 meeting and that Walker's request for edits were resolved in the meeting and that the September minutes are no longer on the agenda for approval. Sanchez was confused regarding the edits Walker wanted clarified and went back through the board meeting recordings to verify what the edits were and realized that the edits were resolved during the meeting and there was no outstanding work regarding the September 6, 2023, minutes. Olson asks that when Board minutes are not resolved within a couple months that the minutes are then written word for word as stated in the recording. Directors agreed by consensus.

Action: Hart motioned that the Board approve the **January 3, 2024, and February 7, 2024, Draft Board Meeting Minutes as presented, 2nd** by Budeau. No further

discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Koch, Hart, and Budeau], Opposed-0).

5. United States Department Agriculture Services (NRCS) Report.

No Report

6. 2024-2025 Budget Appoint Budget Committee Members and Budget Update

Sanchez began by stating that all five Budget Committee citizen members are willing to return. The Board will need to re-appoint Ralph Fisher and Brent Stevenson.

Sanchez noted that the Budget Committee is scheduled for April 24 and 25. Sanchez also discussed that she will be following the same format as the fiscal year 23-24 budget and that there is a consideration to abolish the Multi-Reserve Fund and transfer to the General Fund. Directors discussed the budget and concerns regarding inflation.

Action: Budeau motioned that the Board **appoint Ralph Fisher and Brent Stevenson for the term of 2024-2026 to the Citizen Budget Committee of the Marion Soil and Water Conservation District, 2nd** by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Koch, Hart, and Budeau], Opposed-0).

7. Administrative Committee

a) Proposed Policy Work Sanchez presented a table with District policies listed, explaining that all the District policies were reviewed by the Admin Committee over the course of four meetings. The review resulted in a list of policies prioritized for revisions, updates, and potential abolishment and there are some proposed new policies. Sanchez then went through the table explaining the changes and revisions proposed as well as new suggested policies. Directors asked questions regarding some of the revisions, Sanchez explained why they were needed (also noted in the table). Sanchez asks the Board to approve the policy prioritization and policy work laid out in the table. She further explained that each policy will be worked on by staff, sent through the committee (designated in the table) for further development and then recommended to the Board for final approvals and amendments.

Before moving on Sanchez shared that the Admin Committee reviewed the Pay Equity Analysis Report and recommended it for legal review. Sanchez explained that legal review occurred and was followed by some edits and changes. Sanchez will bring the report to the April Board meeting for review.

Action: Budeau motioned that the Board **approve the prioritized policy work recommended by the Admin Committee**, 2nd by Koch. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Koch, Hart, and Budeau], Opposed-0).

8. Natural Resources Committee

a) Conservation Assistance Grant (CAG), Special Projects Grant (SPG), and Cover Crop Grant Limitations

Sanchez states that the Natural Resources Committee recommends that the District increase the grant award amount from \$7,500 to \$10,000 per grant. The Natural Resources Team researched that ten years ago (last time max grant award was increased) \$7,500 in project costs would take \$10,000 today because of inflation. It was also noted by the Grants Coordinator that most applicants request the entire amount of the grant and provide more than the fifty percent match required, showing that people could use more funds to cover the costs of projects. Directors continued to discuss the grant award amount and the concerns and benefits of increasing it.

Action: Budeau motioned that the Board **adopt a revision to the Grant Limitation Policy to increase to the maximum grant amount of the Conservation Grants (CAG, SPG, and Cover Crop) to \$10,000 and concurrently increase the five-year rolling maximum to \$30,000 (which also applies to the large grant amount)**, 2nd by Hart. Prior to making the motion, Budeau asked if this would apply to the large grant amount as well? Sanchez stated yes. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Koch, Hart, and Budeau], Opposed-0).

b) Special Projects Grant (SPG) Program Discussion

The Natural Resources Committee suggests that the SPG continue. Directors discussed the history of the grant. Sanchez explained it is not used often but we do not market the grant other than on our website but staff offers it up when a project may qualify for it. Hardy recommends that the SPG remain, to allow for new practices with a conservation benefit to be developed. Directors continued to discuss the merits of the grant and agreed it should remain.

c) CAG Partial Payments

The Natural Resource Committee proposes an update to advance payments. The payments would occur after awarding but before any practice is completed. Payment could be made with Board approval and receipts would be needed within 60 days. Directors asked how would the District get their money back when an advance payment was issued but the work never occurred or the contractor walked off the job? There was no clear answer.

Directors discussed the 60-day option for receipts and whether they could add an inspection to confirm the work was done. Olson and Koch discussed the difference between partial and advanced payments and is concerned that everyone would want advance payments if they knew about the policy. Olson states we could pass this back to the committee with a request for more information and provide examples of a project that the Board would review for an advanced payment. Directors discussed further how this policy could be modified to protect the District from fraud. Budeau adds that he is most concerned that the District does not have a policy to get back funds if the project is not completed. Hardy says that the Board could rescind this policy if any fraud becomes apparent.

Action: Budeau motioned that the Board **adopt a revision to the current partial payment process to advance payments as identified in 1b to require Board approval on a case-by-case basis and have receipts due in 60 days for Fiscal Year 24-25, it will sunset unless continued by the Board, 2nd** by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION FAILED (Aye-3 [Koch, Hart, and Budeau], Opposed-1 [Olson]).

Hart wants to add that there should be an inspection added to 1b. Olson adds that he would like to see this returned to the committee. Olson says he will attend the next Natural Resources Committee meeting to discuss the risk involved in advance payments to see if there is a path forward.

9. Education Committee

a) Salem Audubon Society CLEAR Grant

Action: Hart motioned that the Board **approve the \$2,000 Salem Audubon Society CLEAR Grant for their Traveling Education Program, 2nd** by Olson. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Koch, Hart, and Budeau], Opposed-0).

b) CLEAR Grant Limitations

Action: Budeau motioned that the Board **adopt a revision to the CLEAR Grant Limitation Policy to increase the maximum grant award to \$10,000 and concurrently increase the five-year rolling maximum to \$30,000 (which also applies to the large grant amount), 2nd** by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Koch, Hart, and Budeau], Opposed-0).

10. 2024-2028 Strategic Planning Update

Sanchez provided for Directors the Summary of interviews Amy Stork consultant completed. Stork asks that we all review the summary and prepare to discuss it at the retreat. Sanchez also provided the agenda for the March 14, 2024, Strategic Planning Retreat. A map to the venue was provided. The retreat will be at the NRCS headquarters on Hawthorne Ave. from 9 AM to 3 PM.

11. Accidental Credit Card Charge Discussion

Olson wanted to review the accidental charge with the Board for transparency and to see if there is any other actions needed regarding this issue. Sanchez explained that in December 2023 there was an accidental charge of an Amazon Prime movie (\$19.99) on the District's credit card by an employee. Sanchez premised the incident by recalling that she had given the employee permission in July of 2022 to go into Amazon to purchase items because it was a detailed purchase and Sanchez was focused on other work, so the employee was provided access to the Amazon account through their work email. At that time there were a few individuals allowed to purchase from Amazon, probably because of COVID and management changes, to make it easier to get materials needed.

The employee contacted the District when they received an email receipt for the movie. The employee says that they did not initiate the movie purchase or even aware of how it was ordered but was able to contact Amazon and have the charge reversed on the credit card, this was done immediately after learning of the purchase.

This was the second time this happened with the same employee, the first time happened in September of 2022. Same situation an Amazon Prime movie purchase for \$2.99 and the employee immediately repaid the District; admitting that a family member purchased accidentally using the wrong Amazon account. At that time, it was decided to investigate the Amazon account and remove the employee from Amazon. This was completed but the account was not completely removed, as we thought, because the second charge that happened in December 2023 alerted us of this. It seems that when we "removed" the employee from Amazon it turned their email into a personal account. We had seen the note from Amazon explaining this but did not follow up on it at the time.

After the second accidental purchase, while we were looking into the Amazon account we removed all employees from the Amazon account, moved the account into our company email and removed all credit card info. Procedures moving forward for Amazon are that only the Financial Administrator and the District Manager can purchase from Amazon and credit card info will be entered at each order, not saved. Sanchez also cancelled the District's credit card and ordered a

new one. Purchasing with the District's credit card will only be by the District Manager and the Financial Administrator. The credit card numbers will no longer be provided to anyone and never saved online unless it is a recurring credit card charge. Sanchez is also asking employees to disclose any purchasing accounts they may have, so they can be closed and any credit card info removed. Sanchez also proposes new policy on how, why, and when District email can be used to open an account. Sanchez added that she discussed with the staff person that they need to secure District equipment (laptop and cell phone), that no one else should be using District equipment, and to secure online accounts associated with the District. Sanchez feels this was truly an accident and feels that the actions she took will protect the District and staff from any more accidental purchases on Amazon or with any purchasing account. Sanchez also discussed the many ways that she and the Financial Administrator have put into place a system of checks and balances to reduce risk and manage expenses and have written Purchasing Procedures into a document made available to all employees.

The Directors decided that the actions taken were sufficient and no further action is necessary. Sanchez followed up on Hart's concern regarding the COGENT IT need for our credit card information, which was discussed at the Admin Committee meeting. Sanchez explained they are the administrators on a few of our IT online accounts and will follow up with them to see how they can best protect our credit card information.

Adjourn: Chair Olson adjourned the meeting at 9:04 PM



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