East Side Water Supply Project
Citizens' Advisory Panel (CAP)
Summary Comments
July 12, 2011

The East Side Water Supply (ESWS) Project is a comprehensive study of current and future supply of and demand for drinking water in Madison's Pressure Zone 6E. It is funded jointly by the Madison Water Utility and the federal Environmental Protection Agency. Both the MWU and the EPA require public participation as part of projects involving new facilities or significant changes in existing facilities. For the Madison Water Utility, the formation of a Citizen Advisory Panel (CAP) is a first step in ensuring public participation. In turn, the CAP has a role in informing and gathering feedback from the larger public.

The ESWS CAP was convened in October, 2010. Over the next eight months, it held twenty regular meetings, two extra voluntary meetings, a half-day workshop in January, and a half-day tour of well-sites in March. In addition to MWU staff and consultants, about twenty-five CAP members and observers attended some or most of these events. Two public learning and listening events were held at the end of June, 2011 to inform and gather feedback from the larger public About 60 members of the public attended.

I want to comment on my personal experience of serving on the CAP.

- The ESWS was a new departure for the MWU because it involves an integrated study of a substantial portion of the water system. The larger scope reflected citizens' call for a coordinated study of the whole water system, not just individual wells. As a result, the charge of the CAP was more complex than those of past CAPs. The first responsibility of a CAP is "To provide input and recommendations to the Project Manager/Engineer regarding the *public goals, preferences, and community values* as they relate to the proposed project."[1] A CAP does not merely collect the existing opinions of the members: those opinions evolve as a result of the CAP process. Given the broadness of the ESWS study, it took this CAP a long time to reach consensus on public goals, preferences, and community values. Most of us refined our opinions as we learned more about hydrology, hydraulics, methods of estimating future demand, capacity and characteristics of existing wells, and water treatment options and talked with other participants.

- The scope of the ESWS project was written well in advance of the formation of the CAP. In the future, CAP members should be recruited before a project is finalized to allow community input on the issues to be included.

- Water conservation and protection of water resources were of concern to most CAP members throughout the process. Clearly this is an important community value and deserves the emphasis that the CAP has given it. The CAP was also concerned with costs and repeatedly tried to weigh the financial impact on consumers of various

[1] Public Participation Process for Water Utility Facilities, SOP # ENG-001, 5.1 (a). Emphasis added.

capital expenditures, rate structures, and conservations measures. Both of these topics deserve further collaborative study between the MWU and the community.

- Although the process took a surprisingly long time and required a heavy investment of volunteer energy, it was organized efficiently and moved along at a rapid pace, contrasting favorably with some earlier CAP efforts.

- Because of the long time-line and a somewhat unpredictable meeting schedule some valuable members who set the tone at the beginning weren't able to continue all the way through. I missed those voices when they were absent. As new CAPs are formed, I hope that MWU will work to convey to citizens the importance of every voice. The ESWS CAP was lucky enough to attract new members along the way, however, and in the end, I think that the CAP succeeded in reflecting a range of perspectives. Various CAP members provided creativity and leadership in their areas of expertise, and we all did considerable listening and responding, including extensive email exchanges.

- CAP members were self-selected. This ensured that the people who joined had a commitment to the subject. However, certain stakeholder groups were under-represented—members of minority communities as well as businesses and neighborhood, governmental and non-profit entities. A more systematic recruitment effort would be recommended and should include efforts by the MWU since citizen volunteers cannot easily take this on.

- Outreach to the larger public is part of the CAP's responsibility. Some of us wrestled with ways to inform and engage the public. This is a huge job that is beyond the capacity of a volunteer committee. Web sites are essential butnot sufficient; neighborhood meetings, alder involvement, newspaper coverage, mailings, a Facebook presence, and other contacts with the public can help but need coordination. Developing a list of stakeholders (businesses, governmental entities, and community organizations as well as customers) at the beginning of a project would be an important step.[2] If CAPs are viewed as an on-going conversation with the community, the MWU will build long-term relationships with interested people and organizations and public engagement will become easier.

- Early drafts of the ESWS participation plan envisaged a series of public meetings on the various parts of the study, e.g. Water Demand and Water Quality Supply, Hydraulics, Well Sites. As it happened, we had only one very ambitious meeting, I believe for good reason. The ESWS issues are so interconnected that few members felt comfortable signing off on one recommendation until the others were also drafted. CAPs concerned with just one well site may find it easier to hold several public meetings.

- MWU and the consultants encouraged the CAP to assess the public's expectations of its water supply and of MWU. This proved to be a difficult assignment since they are

[2] SOP, 4.1 (b) 1).

probably vague and the technical details on wells, contaminants, and water safety are complex. However, the CAP reiterated the public's concerns about responsibly managing our water supply through more effective conservation efforts, something the public has been very engaged with since at least 2007, but wasn't originally contemplated in the project scope.]

- The CAP was a fascinating opportunity to study one aspect of modern civilization in detail. There isn't much that is more essential than a safe water supply, or more dependent on a complex intersection of history, culture, governmental policy, engineering, technology and our specific natural environment. Non-specialists like me were overwhelmed with technical information. Nonetheless, I think we all were driven by the belief that there was always much more exciting information to learn and discuss, and not enough time to do it. The public proved that they are perfectly capable of understanding technical information if they are given the opportunity to engage with, mull over, and ask questions about it.]

- I think that members of the CAP would be interested in hearing how the MWU would evaluate the CAP process. Did it find the process valuable? Did it reevaluate any previously-held assumptions or learn anything new? For example, is it significant that the study of demand gives prominence to a low estimate of future demand rather than a high one, and was this choice influenced by the public involvement?

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