

Minutes of the  
Boone County Regional Sewer District  
Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees  
March 6, 2025

Board Attendees: Randy Chann, Chairman  
Dave Bennett, Vice Chairman  
Debbie Schnedler, Secretary  
Bill Watkins, Assistant Secretary

Other Attendees: Kip Kendrick, Presiding Commissioner  
Janet Thompson, Commissioner  
Justin Aldred, Commissioner

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. A quorum of the Board was present.

Agenda Item C: Update County Commission on District Goals

Commissioner Kendrick began with opening remarks, stating the commission's concern over Jesse Stephen's resignation. He said he felt that Stephens was the best thing to happen to the district, and that Stephens understood the politics and players in the area. He called attention to the turnover of staff at the district and referred to a toxic culture there.

Chann and Schnedler pushed back on the characterization. Schnedler presented a history of the board's attempts to instill a management structure focused on cost-efficient delivery of services and development of core competencies within district management. Chann reiterated that several years ago the board saw a need for changes, including better analysis of services provided, charges for those services, and formulation of personnel to deliver those services cost effectively. His opinion was that, if the demographic of personnel was considered (i.e., the district was basically fully staffed at inception) as well as how staff were managed for years, the recent turnover was an anticipated outcome.

Chann pointed out that Joe Foster's resignation was due to family health matters. Chann has since done a gut check on critical functions and met with managers to solicit their analyses of the status of projects and initiatives; he reviewed the report of these findings. Senior managers have all agreed in multiple meetings that the district is headed in the right direction, and although there would be a temporary gap in engineering, they presented recommendations for potential adjustments on priorities to ensure that critical projects stayed on their respective timelines.

Commissioner Kendrick brought up culture and his assessment that it is worse than under the previous manager. Bennett provided his impression that there were culture issues previously and that the district situation was great with Joe Foster. Bennett's understanding is that Stephens feels insecure not knowing who the future director will be, and the current situation is disheartening.

Watkins stated his agreement that a change of management had been justified, and the district was headed in the right direction. However, he stated that he had "heard" of problems with the district not paying its bills, negative comments from an administrative assistant before she left employment, etc. He believes that the district needs to have a staff member manage on an interim basis. Schnedler commented that Foster had recommended the finance manager to coordinate management and administrative functions until a new executive director was hired. This was based on his analysis that professional managers in projects and operations could continue the bulk of their work without significant day-to-day direction. The board followed his recommendation. Watkins replied that it should not be her, and if board members are not comfortable putting Stephens in as executive director, they should consider putting him in as an interim director because "people" are not happy. Chann replied that he cannot control the timeline on an outside hire, and Watkins replied that district cannot wait another five or six months to get this addressed. Watkins also stated that an option he had considered was an interim director from outside the organization, with a few people in mind, but questioned whether that was still an option, since the process may now be tainted.

There was brief discussion on the education and skills required for the position. Chann was criticized for not offering Stephens an interview; he stated that his communication to Stephens was that the board would continue to solicit applicants with business experience and that no interviews had even been conducted or scheduled.

Considering Watkins' comments, Schnedler questioned how the board could get to the bottom of the state of the organization if staff was giving different information to different trustees. There was further discussion on channels of communication among the full board and Stephens, as he had requested. Commissioner Thompson suggested the district bring in a facilitator so that everyone can be heard.

Watkins said he is a team player and will do what the board wants to do, adding his perceptions of issues such as no job descriptions, the district is subsidizing some customers at the expense of others, nobody on staff knew how to handle a customer question the previous day, and no confidence in finance management. Chann pointed out that the example of the customer question related to staff that had walked out with no notice, over which there is little control.

Chann summarized that there are only so many options to consider, and discussion ensued on steps necessary to decide and act on filling the executive director position. He acknowledged the current management challenge at the district and the commission's concerns. He will set up a board work session to look at paths to move forward on an interim vs. permanent basis. The commission recommended that this process needs to include a representative "voice of staff." Watkins stated in his view the district needed to hurry.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:28 a.m.

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Meeting Minutes approved on \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary: \_\_\_\_\_