



Commissioner's Retreat

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, February 4, 2025

11:00 a.m.

Chair Harmony Quiroz, Vice-Chair Wubbold (outgoing), and Commissioners Moore, Donahue, Burton (remote), and Lugo Knapp were present, as were Executive Director Allegra Willhite and Budget Analyst Brittanie Abayare for this in-person meeting held in the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District Board Room, at 5211 N Williams Ave, Portland, OR 97217

Lunch from Grand Central Bakery was served to all attending.

REGULAR MEETING

Chair Quiroz called the meeting to order at 11:07 a.m.

Introductions and Backgrounds

The meeting began with a round of introductions for the new Commissioner Rita Moore, and the new TSCC Budget Analyst, Brittanie Abayare. All Commissioners and TSCC members provided background on their tenure, professional experience, and personal lives.

Presentation of Recognition

Allegra Willhite presented a commemorative mug to outgoing commissioner Wubbold in recognition of his eight years of dedicated service to TSCC. Allegra Willhite expressed appreciation for Commissioner Wubbold's contributions, particularly in fostering positive relationships with various districts and advocating for their successes. Allegra added that his mentorship and inclusive approach would be greatly missed as he transitions out of his role.

Vote for 2025 TSCC Chair and Vice-Chair

Allegra proposed moving forward with the election of a new Chair and Vice Chair. Chair Quiroz offered to continue as Chair, reflecting on the importance of maintaining stability during the transition period. Commissioner Donahue was nominated to step into the Vice Chair role. The responsibilities of each position were clarified, highlighting the Chair's role in conducting meetings and overseeing public hearings, while the Vice Chair would manage HR-related duties and assist with operational tasks.

The commission then held a vote for the positions of Chair and Vice Chair for the upcoming term. Commissioner Lugo Knapp nominated Chair Quiroz as Chair and Commissioner Donahue as



Vice Chair. Commissioner Moore seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, with Commissioner Burton abstaining due to technical difficulties. Commissioner Donahue was confirmed for a one-year term.

2025 Budget Process and Certification

Allegra went over the history and duties of TSCC and discussed the upcoming budget season, emphasizing the critical role of TSCC in ensuring compliance with state budget laws. She outlined the key components of the budget review process, which includes analyzing, reviewing, and certifying budgets from various districts.

Chair Quiroz elaborated on the significance of public hearings, noting that they serve as a platform for community members to voice their opinions and concerns regarding budget proposals. She emphasized that even if community members do not attend the meetings, all materials, including minutes and recommendations, are made available on the TSCC website to encourage ongoing public engagement.

The discussion highlighted the unique challenges faced by smaller districts, particularly regarding their capacity to navigate complex budget laws. Allegra mentioned that many smaller districts often lack staffing capacity, making TSCC's support vital. She stressed the importance of building strong relationships with these districts to ensure they feel comfortable seeking guidance and assistance.

Chair Quiroz and Allegra also addressed the potential consequences of non-certification of budgets, which could prevent districts from legally adopting their budgets and accessing necessary funds. They reiterated the collaborative approach TSCC takes to help districts achieve compliance, often resulting in recommendations or objections that are resolved prior to the adoption of budgets.

Preparation for Budget Hearings

Allegra detailed the workflow for preparing budget reviews and for budget hearings, which involves collaboration among staff, commissioners, and district representatives.

The importance of engaging board members during the hearings was emphasized, with Commissioner Wubbold suggesting that having targeted questions prepared could ensure participation. Chair Quiroz suggested encouraging dialogue and spontaneous follow ups to keep answers from being too scripted.

The unique challenges faced by different districts, such as resource constraints and varying community needs, were discussed to underscore the need for tailored approaches during the hearings.



Budget Forecast and Contingency Funds

Allegra presented the budget forecast for the current fiscal year, projecting a potential surplus of \$21,000. The discussion turned to the factors influencing the budget longer term, including inflation, personnel costs, and the ongoing impact of economic fluctuations on funding. She highlighted that salary-related and benefit expenses are expected to increase due to inflation and rising health care costs. She explained that these increases are driven in part by factors such as cost of living increases and Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) rates.

Allegra and the Commissioners reviewed the contingency fund, budgeted at \$12,000, and discussed the need to transfer \$5,000 from this fund to cover anticipated commissioner compensation. She explained that the contingency fund is designed to address unknown but potential expenses, including commissioner compensation. The transfer would not impact the overall budget, as it had been set aside for such purposes. As part of the contingency transfer conversation, she referenced the TSCC policy for providing commissioner compensation, which was created as a result of a new state legislature mandate.

The financial structure of TSCC was also discussed, with Allegra clarifying that funding comes from district contributions based on their tax revenues and budget sizes. Multnomah County covers approximately half of the overall expenses per the statute that governs TSCC funding.

Chair Quiroz motioned to approve the contingency transfer, Commissioner Donahue seconded the motion and all Commissioners voted to approve the transfer.

Proposed Budget Discussion

Allegra presented a proposed budget for the next fiscal year. Notable budget changes include an increase in personnel costs due to standard COLA and merit-based increases, adjustments in professional services to account for commissioner stipends, and a contingency increase to accommodate potential commissioner compensation changes and backup consulting services in the event of staff transitions or leave. Minor increases in supplies and training were also proposed to align with inflation and operational needs.

The discussion then turned to long-term financial planning. TSCC's budget is capped at a 4% annual growth rate, and the commission anticipates needing to revisit its funding structure with the legislature by fiscal year 2029. Questions about cash flow management due to the reimbursement-based funding model were considered, along with historical challenges in budget flexibility, particularly in handling retirements and personnel transitions.

Chair Quiroz motioned to approve the 2025-26 budget, Commissioner Moore seconded, and all Commissioners voted to approve the budget.



Annual Work Plan Progress Updates

Allegra shared progress on the 2024-2025 TSCC Annual Work Plan, highlighting several projects related to commissioner and staff transitions that are completed. Allegra also discussed the current considerations related to TSCC office space project, including thoughts on operational needs weighted against costs. The group discussed various options for cost-effective solutions, including renting shared office spaces with other agencies and the implications for operational efficiency. Staying in the current office may be the most cost-effective solution given the potentially high cost of moving.

The project for TSCC budget manual revisions was also discussed, with staff sharing a plan to simplify terminology and making the content more digestible for readers.

The commission reviewed progress on the website revamp, a multi-year project to be addressed only if staff has time and availability. Staff provided an update on the improvements made to enhance web site user experience and accessibility. In order to meet current accessibility standards, TSCC should consider migrating to a new website platform or template.

Audit Report and Over Expenditures

Brittanie Abayare presented the audit report, detailing that TSCC has received audits from 28 out of the 43 districts, with 23 of those being member districts. She announced that most of the audits had already been reviewed and entered into the system, with eight audits still pending entry. The City of Portland was found to have exceptions for non-compliance with a meeting notice, and both Multnomah County and the Port of Portland had over expenditures.

A discussion followed on the implications of these findings. Commissioners expressed concern over recurring compliance issues and debated whether additional recommendations should be implemented. Regarding over expenditures, the Commissioners emphasized the importance of improving financial monitoring and accountability within districts to ensure better adherence to legal budget appropriations.

Training Feedback

Allegra shared feedback from the recent training session, noting that the guest speaker from Prosper Portland went over time which was noted by several attendees in their feedback comments. TSCC and the commissioners agreed on implementing stricter time controls for speakers in future training to ensure all agenda items receive adequate discussion. Allegra suggested for future trainings to move guest speakers to the end to give attendees the option to leave early.

Upcoming Budget and Tax Hearings

Allegra and the Commissioners reviewed the schedule for the upcoming public hearings and



discussion meetings; the first one taking place April 15, 2025. TSCC will distribute finalized schedules and materials in the coming weeks.

Commissioners discussed focusing their questions on key financial trends, significant budget changes, and potential fiscal risks for the current environment. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that questions encourage transparency from district representatives, particularly in areas where financial stability is uncertain.

Commissioners briefly discussed the PPS proposed bond measure, particularly regarding long-term financial implications and transparency on spending.

The meeting was adjourned.