

**MINUTES OF COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING
OF THE WATER WORKS BOARD OF THE CITY OF BIRMINGHAM
February 10, 2025**

A Communications Committee meeting of the directors of The Water Works Board of the City of Birmingham was held on Monday, February 10, 2025 at 11:30 a.m.

The following Committee members were present: Committee Chairman Tom Henderson, Dr. Andre McShan, and Ivan W. Holloway.

Others present were: Darryl R. Jones, Interim General Manager; Mac Underwood, Interim Deputy General Manager (via phone); Barry Williams, and Philip King, Interim/Assistant General Managers; Cynthia Williams, Board Administrator; Anitra Clark, Corporate Governance Specialist; Elyse Page, Executive Assistant; Valecia Dulaney, Jessica Fadlevich, Michael Tartt, Jeff Wade, Charles McGee, Colandus Mason, and David Walker, BWWB Employees; K. Mark Parnell, Parnell Thompson, LLC; Frank Adams, Alex Perez, and Collier Craft, Direct Communications; and Rinesha Coleman, Allied Security.

Chairman Henderson declared a quorum in attendance.

Chairman Henderson called the meeting to order at 11:29 a.m., and Darryl Jones, Interim General Manager opened the meeting with prayer.

Following, Chairman Henderson asked the Committee to approve the agenda. The Interim General Manager requested to add item 2.4, The Pipeline Report to the agenda. Director McShan made a motion to approve the agenda and Director Holloway seconded the motion. On a motion duly made and seconded, the motion was approved by unanimous vote.

Following, the Committee moved to the first item on the agenda, Request Committee to approve the minutes from the Communications Committee Meeting held May 16, 2024. The Interim General Manager stated the Communications Committee has not met since the May 16, 2024 meeting; therefore, this meeting was the first opportunity to approve these minutes. Chairman Henderson stated he was aware the current Committee Members were not present at the last meeting; however, the minutes needed to be approved. Director McShan made a motion to approve the minutes and Director Holloway seconded the motion. On a motion duly made and seconded, the motion was approved by unanimous vote.

Following, the Committee moved to Reports of Officers. Chairman Henderson welcomed the new members of the Communications Committee, Directors McShan and Holloway. Chairman Henderson stated their input is valued to improve the overall communications to the public, and he indicated he welcomes their suggestions.

Following, the Committee moved to the second item on the agenda, Request Committee to hear a presentation regarding BWWB's Communication Channels, as set forth in agenda items 2.1 through 2.4. The Interim General Manager recognized the Public Relations Department: Valecia Dulaney, Communications Coordinator; Jessica Fadlevich, Public Relations Specialist; and Michael Tartt, Public Information Officer. Mr. Tartt began by providing an overview of The Water Current Newsletter. He stated BWWB employees are the target audience for the newsletter. He

stated *The Water Current* is produced internally by the Public Relations Department, and he indicated he is tasked with gathering all content. He stated the newsletter serves as a learning tool to highlight the current activities at BWWB and community programs. Mr. Tartt then gave an overview of the current newsletter. He highlighted the photo content, and he stated photos are important as BWWB employees want to be seen. The Interim General Manager questioned the frequency of the newsletter. Mr. Tartt responded the newsletter is issued monthly and all employees receive it, and it is also posted via BWWB Intranet. Director McShan questioned whether the newsletter is available on all digital platforms, and Mr. Tartt responded yes. Director McShan questioned whether the internal newsletter is printed. Valecia Dulaney, Communications Coordinator, responded yes, she stated the newsletter is printed occasionally for the Distribution Department and BWWB Filter Plants. Director McShan stated given all BWWB personnel receive the newsletter, he questioned whether the Public Relations Department can determine the number of people who read the newsletter. Ms. Dulaney responded the only way of knowing who reads the newsletter is by the feedback received from employees. Next, Mr. Tartt gave an overview of BWWB TV Channel. He stated BWWB TV is a closed-circuit television channel for BWWB employees located on the Main Campus and BWWB Filter Plants. He stated the content expands on the information presented in the Water Current Newsletter and it includes Departments sharing pertinent information, and other videos for community engagement, such as Hydrate the City and Wiser Water. Mr. Tartt stated regarding BWWB News, the newscast launched in November 2023 and the monthly broadcast highlights all good things at BWWB, digitally and electronically. Next, Director McShan referenced a “World Without Water,” he questioned whether there is more information about the content of the program, specifically the number of schools that participate and the activities associated with the program. Mr. Tartt responded Ms. Fadlevich manages this program. Ms. Fadlevich stated the program includes a BWWB engineer, also group activities tailored to fifth-grade students. Ms. Fadlevich gave an outline of the upcoming schedule, and she indicated seven (7) schools have participated in the program this year. She indicated the program is trying to get schools in Shelby County.

Next, Ms. Fadlevich continued the presentation with an overview of The Tap External Newsletter. She stated *The Tap* is distributed to 80,000 BWWB Customers. She stated she is currently tasked with managing the distribution list that was handled by a former Public Relations firm. She stated the newsletter has a monthly open rate of thirty-eight percent. She then indicated there are discussions of changing the newsletter to quarterly to better showcase more content. The Interim General Manager questioned whether there is a sample of the external newsletter. Ms. Fadlevich responded yes, and she stated she is in the process of working on the February newsletter, which will include pictures of the newly appointed BWW Board Members, “World Without Water,” and Birmingham Promise Students. She stated the articles will contain a link that redirects back to BWWB website and newsroom, to monitor the web traffic. Chairman Henderson questioned whether the external newsletter will be sent to the Directors, and Ms. Fadlevich responded yes. The Interim General Manager referenced the content of The Tap Newsletter, and he stated The Pipeline Newsletter is also an agenda item. The Interim General Manager questioned whether both newsletters provide the same information, targeted to a different audience. Ms. Fadlevich responded *The Tap* provides general information about the current activities, not limited to the main break fixes, including pictures of the workers. She also stated other than Facebook, BWWB does not engage with the community. She indicated that pictures create an awareness by highlighting BWWB’s community presence. Next, Ms. Dulaney proceeded to the last presentation of the section, The Pipeline Newsletter. A copy of the handout is on file in Diligent. She stated *The Pipeline* is issued monthly to elected officials. She stated towards the end of the year, some

negative comments were received regarding the frequency of the newsletter, and requests of a different format. Ms. Dulaney then gave an overview of The Pipeline Newsletter. She stated the newsletter provides an update regarding the water infrastructure, pipeline replacement projects, and community engagement efforts. She stated currently, she is working with Direct Communications to find better way to circulate the newsletter to the elected officials. Director McShan questioned which elected officials receive The Pipeline Newsletter. Ms. Dulaney responded all elected officials receive it which include Jefferson County, City of Birmingham, Shelby County, Walker County, and more. The Interim General Manager referenced Jefferson County, he then questioned whether the delegates from Montgomery, Alabama, receive the newsletter, and Ms. Dulaney responded yes. The Interim General Manager questioned the other cities and municipalities within the county. Ms. Dulaney responded yes, and she stated she has an extensive list, that can be provided. The Interim General Manager stated the newsletter does not always get to the elected official; however, the Public Relations Department is tasked to come up with a solution. Next, Director Holloway referenced The Tap External Newsletter, he stated it provides excellent information, and issues regarding elected officials receiving the information needs to be resolved. Director Holloway referenced Mr. Tartt regarding the health and wellness programs, he stated most people are more interested in the rates. He then questioned how BWWB can utilize *The Tap* to help its customers understand the rates in comparison to other rates in our region. He stated this would provide an understanding that customers are receiving a quality product and service in the City of Birmingham. Director Holloway stated how BWWB communicates to elected officials about the rates would then have more impact with the customers. He also stated BWWB should find ways to convey this information consistently in the newsletters. The Interim General Manager responded the information will be part of the website update, by having access to the customers continuously more than the newsletter approach. Chairman Henderson then stated one of the reasons for The Pipeline Newsletter is to keep the legislatures and elected officials informed of the rates so that when contacted by the public, they are already informed and can respond accordingly.

Following, the Committee moved to the third item on the agenda, Request Committee to hear an update regarding BWWB's website. Colandus Mason, Information Technology Manager, provided a project overview of the website redesign. He stated the primary goal of the redesign project is to enhance the user's experience, modernize the website's look, and improve functionality. He stated the Information Technology Department engaged with local vendors to perform the work and InfoMedia was recommended to update the website. He indicated the Board approved an agreement with InfoMedia on June 5, 2024, with a 6-month deadline to complete the project. The expected completion date was December 2024; however, that date has passed. Mr. Mason stated part of the scope of the agreement was to customize an interactive design and custom development for the actual website, in addition to developing a custom "About Us" video. He stated the About Us video would implement drone footage to capture the Main Campus and BWWB Filter Plants. He stated the main purpose of the customization was to engage more with customers and potential employees when browsing the website. Next, Mr. Mason gave an overview of the work performed. He stated the process started by engaging with Executive Management and the internal BWWB project team, led by Public Relations, Information Technology and Customer Service. He stated a kickoff call with InfoMedia was held July 2, 2024. He stated the project entered Phase 1, which was a 45-day process to complete the strategy onboarding form, revamp a site map design, and scope of work. Next, he stated an internal meeting with Executive Management was held to review a site map of the proposed workflow once the information was gathered. Mr. Mason stated the next step was to provide InfoMedia with

BWWB's Google Analytics, which included various web links with the most traffic and clicks per day. He then stated a meeting with Direct Communications was conducted for the project review. Mr. Mason stated the project was put on hold September 2024. Subsequently, the Interim General Manager reiterated the project with InfoMedia was put on hold for several reasons but is now in the process of moving forward to update the website. The Interim General Manager also stated the dollar amount of the agreement has not changed. He then referenced Director Holloway regarding his suggestion for rate messaging, he stated that information can be accessed from the website, through an interactive portal. Next, Mr. Mason provided an overview of the status of the website review and redesign template. He stated since reengagement with Direct Communications, there were a couple internal stakeholder meetings. He then reviewed the steps that involve the additional departments. He stated the redesign template was created to engage additional departments into the new design. He stated each department will be assigned a representative to update the content to be added to the website, with keeping in mind the design and visuals. He also stated the functionality feature routes to the department, to ensure customers would be able to navigate, and key areas are easy to access. Mr. Mason stated departments can provide suggested changes and create a wishlist of things to add to the website. He stated the next steps are for the departments to complete the redesign template by Friday, February 14, 2025. He stated once the templates are completed, responses and a review of the common themes are gathered, there is a meeting to be scheduled with Direct Communications to review the content. Following, he also stated a meeting with Executive Management to request approval to reengage with InfoMedia. Mr. Mason stated once the project is resumed, another meeting with the Interim General Manager to review the final site map design created for the structure and page plans for final approval. He stated he would provide the Communications Committee and the Board with an updated estimate timeline for completion. The Interim General Manager stated updates to the Committee will be provided throughout the process. Chairman Henderson questioned whether outdated information will be regularly deleted from the website, and Mr. Mason responded yes.

Following, the Committee moved to the fourth item on the agenda, Request Committee to hear a presentation regarding BWWB's Social Media Engagement. Ms. Fadlevich gave a brief overview of the social media platforms. She stated BWWB has about 3,000 followers on Facebook, with 16,000 impressions. She indicated an increase in engagement the month of January, mostly due to the Ensley main break. Ms. Fadlevich stated followers utilize social media or Nextdoor, a neighborhood hub social media app, and are receiving information quickly when leaks, main breaks or road-related maintenances occur. She then stated BWWB has about 126,000 followers on Nextdoor and the Public Relations Department consistently posts through segmented neighborhoods. Next, Ms. Fadlevich reviewed performance of Facebook posts from the last forty-five (45) days. She stated the data displays an upward trend in various categories, including audience growth and engagement rate. She also stated most of the content published are photos and text. Next, Ms. Fadlevich gave a brief overview of X, formerly Twitter, performance. She stated most of the content posted on Facebook is also posted directly on X. She then highlighted impressions and engagements, and she stated both have increased this year. Next, Ms. Fadlevich gave a summary of Instagram performance. She stated BWWB has about 2,000 followers, with a high engagement rate. She stated this past month, the account activity increased due the Ensley main break, and then provided updates by posts and stories. She stated the Public Relations Department posts three to four times a week, depending on the event or an emergency. Ms. Fadlevich then reviewed the top performing posts from the last forty-five (45) days. She stated based on the data, engagements are trending upward, to include hashtag usage, post likes, and story taps. Ms. Fadlevich concluded with a brief overview of the network benchmarks and audience

demographics. She stated in comparison to other utilities, BWWB's performance ranks in the 61st percentile. The Interim General Manager stated with the planned efforts of the Public Relations Department, social media engagement is expected to trend higher in 2025.

Following, the Committee moved to the fifth item on the agenda, Request Committee to hear a report from Direct Communications regarding Communication Plans for 2025. Mr. Adams stated Direct Communications is a strategy and communications firm, based in Birmingham, Alabama. He stated the firm has experience in managing complex issues, and working with large companies who have complex services such as BWWB. Mr. Adams then introduced his colleagues, Mr. Collier Craft and Mr. Alex Perez, whom both serve as support to BWWB. He then stated, the latter part of last year, the Board engaged the firm to support the Public Relations Department, currently in their efforts to communicate better with the public, customers, and other stakeholders, including management of the media. He stated since working with the Public Relations Department, there are improvements with more engaged relationships, ongoing dialog with members of the media, related to positive stories about the people who do the great things at BWWB, and the services that are provided. Mr. Adams then highlighted the importance of providing more information to customers about issues faced when dealing with BWWB. Mr. Adams stated the firm has a proposal to help with some of the issues that are faced by customers, and how BWWB will help customers work through those issues going forward. He stated, as BWWB continues to work through its reorganization efforts, Direct Communications will continue to support the Public Relations Department, Senior Management, and the Board, to make sure the public is aware of changes that could impact the customers and other stakeholders. Next, Mr. Adams gave a brief overview of the Public Relations Department. He stated the staff has a wide range of responsibilities, including daily inquiries received from the website or social media, and information to send out. Mr. Adams referenced the Interim General Manager, regarding the integration of services, he stated there are elements from the website and social media that have improved. Mr. Adams then referenced Mr. Mason, regarding the website redesign presentation. He stated the website does need improvement. He also indicated there is information to be gathered from other departments, to ensure customers can do business and find information much easier. Mr. Adams stated another element of the integration is getting information to customers, by making sure they can receive updates on service interruptions, or anything pertaining to access to water via text, email, or automated calls. He stated this another important area being explored with the team.

Following, Mr. Perez gave an overview of the whiteboard animation concept. Mr. Perez stated the whiteboard animations would be helpful to BWWB customers. He stated one of the firm's main roles is working with the media and customers regarding frequent issues with water service or BWWB. He then highlighted three (3) things commonly seen when communicating with the media and customers: 1) Misunderstanding how meter works, 2) Common leaks, and 3) Seasonal impacts and other reasons for leaks. Mr. Perez stated the proposal includes a series of three (3) videos that would address these questions. He stated each video would offer a two-fold solution: 1) Proactively communicate with customers and the media about these issues to better inform, also handling questions on the front-end, and 2) The videos are evergreen, in terms of the content having minimal edits over time. Mr. Perez then gave a visual of the *How Does a Water Meter Work* animation video. He stated the video typically displays a whiteboard, with a hand drawing an animation. He stated the voiceover is a critical piece of the video, given it would outline how the meter works, and make sure customers understand when they have a complaint or question about a bill that contacting BWWB is the solution. Next, Mr. Perez reviewed the recommended

vendor for the project. He stated Cloud Animations, specializes in whiteboard animation services, and have worked with companies, such as CVS Pharmacy, Microsoft, and Disney. Following, Mr. Perez reviewed the cost of the project. He stated for a 10-minute animation, the cost is \$5,000.00, which would give enough time to input other video ideas. Mr. Perez stated being Director McShan and Director Holloway are new members of the Committee, he welcomes any opportunity to meet with them to provide updates on recommendations.

Following, the conclusion of the presentation, Interim General Manager stated the information provided regarding the whiteboard animation video are being reviewed to bring back to the Committee for approval. Board Attorney Mark Parnell questioned whether the cost of the animation video is \$5,000.00, and the Interim General Manager responded yes. Mr. Parnell stated the Board does not have to approve the animation video, since it is within the Interim General Manager's discretion. The Interim General Manager responded he will keep the Committee informed throughout the process. Director McShan stated he is familiar with the whiteboard animation, which is effective. Director McShan then referenced the three (3) things commonly seen when communicating with the media and customers that was presented by Mr. Perez, and he questioned how those were identified as common sources of complaints to address. Mr. Perez responded these items were identified based on the firm's experience working with the media and discussing those issues with the Public Relations Department. Mr. Perez stated the volume of comments were received either through the customer's interaction with the Customer Service Department or social media. The Interim General Manager then confirmed those are the most common issues customers communicate. Next, the Interim General Manager stated staff are in the process of hiring a Public Relations Manager. The Interim General Manager indicated he is working with Chairman Henderson throughout the process. Subsequently, Director McShan stated the importance of listening and understanding the voice of the customer. He questioned BWWB's reputation in the community, whether the viewpoint is known, including favorability ratings. The Interim General Manager responded the Board recently approved an agreement with J.D. Power, to conduct a survey with customers, and he indicated the findings of report were reported to the Communications Committee. The Interim General Manager stated a large percentage of BWWB customers are pleased with the water quality and the service provided. He stated in regards to the negative media coverage, BWWB is working through back-billing and using water without a contract issues. He stated most news that is reported is when something has gone bad, such as a main break or interruption of service. He stated BWWB is doing great things, which is why the communication piece is important to make sure the public is informed. Chairman Henderson stated BWWB has been battling a perception problem; however, it is has improved with the new changes. Subsequently, Board Attorney Mark Parnell stated the last time the Committee met was May 16, 2024. Mr. Parnell advised the Committee to meet regularly.

Next, Director McShan made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Director Holloway seconded the motion. On a motion duly made and seconded, the motion was approved by unanimous vote, and the meeting was adjourned at 12:24 p.m.

/s/
Darryl R. Jones
Interim General Manager

/s/
Thomas Henderson
Communications Committee Chairman

/s/

Dr. Andre McShan
Director

/s/

Ivan W. Holloway
Director