

**September 23, 2004**

**TO: Southern Willamette Groundwater Management Area Committee**

**FROM: Kathi Wiederhold, Facilitator**

**SUBJECT: Group Process, Committee Structure Agenda Item**

I can hear some of you groaning at the subject of this memo. Although group process may be frustrating or boring to some members, covering this ground now will help ensure the smooth functioning of this committee—really! This memo outlines some considerations about group process for the committee.

The staff project team gave a lot of thought to the process of how the committee meetings should be run. We wanted to give it enough structure at the outset so that the committee didn't need to spend a lot of valuable meeting time in deciding routine procedure, yet allow flexibility for the committee to shape its own structure. In that light, the staff project team decided to have a facilitator conduct the first few meetings and to comply with the Open Meetings Law in providing notice of the meeting and keeping meeting notes. A facilitator is neutral, keeps things on track and ensures opportunities for all members to participate.

After the committee discusses and decides how it wants to operate, I will draft ground rules or bylaws for the committee to consider.

### **Action Requested**

**Staff requests that the committee discuss and agree on the considerations about group process discussed in this memo: decision making, decision making when there are absent members, whether to have a committee chair; and how to handle public comment at committee meetings.**

### **Decision Making**

**What decision making process does the committee want to use?**

Keep in mind that the Director of the Department of Environmental Quality will have final decision making authority regarding proposed management strategies to address nitrate issues, a decision that will occur after the committee sunsets.

In general, there are two choices for how the committee can make decisions. It can vote and reach decisions based on majority preference, or it can make decisions using a consensus process. Either process may be tailored to fit the committee, such as by allowing for a minority report along with a majority decision or by providing for a back-up decision making process for time when the group cannot reach consensus. Consensus is more inclusive but can be time-consuming. Majority decision making can take less time, but can leave folks behind who are not part of the majority. I believe the committee is familiar with the majority process, so this memo does not discuss it further.

Decision making by consensus means that decisions are made with the support of all participants. Consensus is reached when all members agree on a single alternative. The guiding concept is that consensus is possible when each participant can honestly say:

- I believe that other members understand my point of view;
- I believe I understand other members' points of view; and
- Regardless of whether I prefer this decision, I support it because it was arrived at openly and fairly, and it is the best solution for us at this time.

Consensus is reached when no one objects to a proposed alternative. Each member, at a minimum, "can live with" the decision. No one feels that he or she cannot participate in the decision or must work to block it. This does not mean that all members will be equally enthusiastic about a solution.

The following scale helps explain the consensus concept by identifying different levels of support for decisions. Consensus is reached when no one indicates level 6. A partner who believes he/she has legal decision making responsibility on an issue being discussed by the committee may choose to abstain from indicating any level of consensus. Abstention for this reason will not affect the ability of the committee to reach consensus.

1. *Wholeheartedly Agree*, will take a lead in follow-up
2. *Good Idea*, can bring resources toward
3. *Supportive*, but not likely to provide resources
4. *Reservations*, but will stand aside
5. *Serious Concerns*, but can live with the decision
6. *Cannot Participate in Decision*, will work to block it
7. *Recuse*

### **Decision Making When There Are Absent Members**

**How does the committee want to handle decision-making when there are absent members?**

Quorum requirements deal with this issue when a committee operates by majority vote. In the case of consensus decision making, the committee can adopt provisions such as the following:

- When one or more members are absent from a meeting, the members present will determine if they feel comfortable making a decision or deferring it to a later date.
- Members absent from a meeting in which a consensus decision has been made will have an opportunity to discuss the decision at the next committee meeting.

## **Chair**

### **Should the chair facilitate the meetings?**

The staff project team decided to have a facilitator conduct the first few meetings. It is a consideration for the group whether to continue with that arrangement with the remaining meetings, or whether to shift to having the chair facilitate the meetings after the first few. Another option is to split the meeting duties between the chair and a facilitator.

Whoever is facilitating an item should not have a vested interest in the issue being considered by the committee. The facilitator's role is to develop a process for the committee to discuss and resolve an issue, give all members an equal voice, and to stay neutral. A chair with a vested interest in the issue at hand may have difficulty playing this role, and may need to give up some opportunity to voice his/her own interest in order to facilitate.

Selecting a chair gives the committee ownership of the process, but brings with it the unknown—will the chair selected be skilled at the duties required of a chair? The members may not be familiar with each other's skills such as running a meeting and keeping the agenda moving and on time. The committee may want to consider assigning those duties to a facilitator. The chair's input on developing the agenda is valuable, as is the voice of the chair in setting the tone for committee discussion and cooperation. The committee could assign those duties to the chair.

## **Public Comment**

### **Does the committee want to have time on each agenda for people in the audience to comment on the issue being discussed by the committee?**

Staff suggests that the committee provide a time at the beginning of the agenda for people in the audience to comment on issues being discussed by the group.

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