

**Organizational Assessment and Capacity Building Report**  
**Tualatin River Watershed Council**

**November, 2016**

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**I. Introduction**

The consultant was hired to do an assessment of capacity building options for the Tualatin River Watershed Council (TRWC). Most Board members feel the Council is in a bit of a rut, and is not being as effective or influential as it could be, and many would like to see the Council play a more robust role. Most Board members are of the opinion that if they don't make some significant changes, funding will decline and the Council may be forced to greatly reduce operations or close its doors, probably within 2-3 years. The consultant interviewed various board members and staff, reviewed documents, and will offer some proposals around staffing and structural change that the board can consider. The goal is to have the Board agree to adopt a plan of action that will increase the capacity, stability and impact of the organization.

Previous efforts to increase capacity have not been successful. Hopefully this is a simple enough plan that the Council can make some quick decisions and begin to implement almost immediately.

## **2. Methodology**

The consultant interviewed 9 people, 8 members of the Board and the Coordinator. The next step is to present findings and proposed opportunities for strategic realignment to the Board through this preliminary report and then gather with the board in a facilitated session to try to come to agreement about next steps (the week of Dec 5<sup>th</sup>). The final step will be to submit a final report, which will include decisions made at the meeting, by the 11<sup>th</sup> of December.

## **3. Overview and conclusions of interviews**

The interviews produced many shared views. There was general agreement among most Board members with the following statements: (but to be clear: not everyone agreed with everything and some felt more strongly, both for and against, than others)

1. Things are not financially sustainable the way they are now. The CWS has indicated that they will reduce or stop funding unless TRWC expands what it has been doing. OWEB funding may also be at risk if activities are not expanded. Funders need to feel that they, and the community, are getting sufficient value for their investment, and they do not feel that is currently the case. The \$15,000 from CWS that was traditionally general operating support is now restricted to capacity building. There is currently no replacement for those operational funds.

2. If changes are made, it appears that there is interest on the part of at least some of the funders to consider additional funds to support the capacity building.
3. TRWC is not as visible or as influential as it could be in the community. While all Watershed Councils are somewhat unique, there are helpful lessons and opportunities to be learned from other Councils in Oregon.
4. There is probably a need in the community for a strong TRWC, though that role needs to be clearly defined. TRWC might become a convener, it might become known as a “go-to place” for information, it could be more involved in broader discussions about the future of the Basin.
5. April, as the only staff, has been clear that she feels she has no room to do more than she is currently doing and needs help to effectively do all that is on her plate right now.
6. In order to increase capacity, TRWC needs to increase staff. There also needs to be an increase in involvement of at least some of the Board members in oversight, funding connections, community building.
7. The updated Work Plan is 88 pages long and as such is difficult to digest.. It would be helpful to the Council Members to see a much shorter (4-5 page) version that shows the highlights for each year to better understand the activities of the Council.
8. TRWC doesn't currently have the financial resources to increase staff.
9. The Board has experienced difficulty making decisions and even more difficulty in implementing actions. For some, there is benefit to a consensus decision-making process that slows things down but allows for well-thought out decisions. For others, it is frustrating and has limited the ability to the Council to adjust to new conditions and expand capacity.
10. While some of the meetings are informative, it has been hard to maintain enthusiasm and attendance. The Council could do a better job of reaching out to engage younger and more diverse people in the community, as well as find ways to engage Members with new ideas.
11. The Council could and should be more of a voice in the community for what is happening and what could be happening in the Basin.
12. Building ties to the business community is a multi-year project, but it could be of great benefit to the Council and to businesses.
13. Council Members feel they do not receive good orientation when they join. It is therefore hard to become an active participant, to understand the rules, to know how to volunteer, to feel engaged.
14. Many members are not clear about the role and authority of the various committees. More leadership on the part of the Steering and Capacity Committees would expand what the Council is capable of. The bylaws state that financial and operational decisions within the approved budget may be made by the Steering Committee. More outreach to and connection with

Council members and community members could lead to more vibrant sessions.

15. The staff and long-term board members possess an enormous amount of knowledge and connections about the basin and the history of the Council. There needs to be a way to save and pass on this knowledge or it will be lost as people leave the Council. Much of the knowledge and systems currently reside with April and Jan. If either were to win the lottery and decide to leave, it would be a big challenge for the Council. It would be helpful for the Council to institute plans for dispersing the responsibilities and knowledge.

#### **4. Recommended Steps for moving forward.**

The full council has already voted to approve increasing staff capacity. With that as a basis, this proposal recommends that the Council take the following steps.

##### **STEP 1**

##### **Vote to form a Transition Committee.**

The Transition Committee would ideally be comprised of 3-5 members of the Board who are prepared to commit extra time over the next 6-12 months to support, oversee and actively help implement the transition plan that TRWC decides upon. For now, the Board (all of whom were present at the meeting on December 5<sup>th</sup>, will comprise the Transition Committee and will bring recommendations to the Steering Committee which will have responsibility for implementing the agreed upon decisions from this report, and be in charge of hiring, training and orienting, overseeing and supporting staff.

The Transition Committee will create a work plan for the new position, but that plan will likely be structured along the following lines:

- The person in this new position will be someone who enjoys and has the capacity to reach out and meet with a wide range of community partners. These include government, business, and other stakeholders to forge relationships, expand the role of the Council, share information and begin to find additional and ongoing support and funding. This position needs to be perceived as a high enough level that doors will open and TRWC can be perceived as more of a player in the Basin.
- Work closely with CWS and OWEB (assuming they help fund this position) to build those relationships and continue to find areas of mutual interest. As TRWC is in the early stages of applying for another 2 year OWEB grant, now is the time for that to reflect any changes in budget or staffing that you hope for.

- Work with April and especially OWEB to see what additional projects and project support might be available, and help communicate clearly to the Council and the Community the value of these projects.
- Work with the Transition Committee and membership in general to energize and reinvigorate Council activities to raise the profile and reach of the Council.
- Work with the Transition Committee to develop good orientation materials for new members so they can feel useful, productive and engaged more quickly.
- Work with the committee to better organize meetings so people feel more productive and engaged.
- Build relationships with other Councils, borrow ideas that are working for them, recognizing that all Councils are different.
- Map out a longer term (3-5 years) strategy for the most appropriate role for the Council, and build support within the community.
- Once there is greater clarity about the role that the Council will be playing, begin to implement some elements of the marketing report that was created 2 years ago.
- Expand the participation of the community in the Council meetings, and make the meetings more relevant to their needs.

**STEP 2:** There are two proposed options to fill this position

### **1. Option One – Hire to fill a permanent position**

Do a search to hire a full or half-time position (depending on funding, though this probably warrants a full-time position if funding is available). The title is negotiable, but it needs to be someone with high level skills in relationship and community building, fundraising, grant writing, nonprofit board management, motivating volunteers .

Pros – this person would build long-term relationships. For the right person who wants to do good work in the environment, this is a potentially great job.

Cons – it may take a while to find a person with the skill level and experience you seek at a salary level you can afford. It may take this new person quite some time to get fully up to speed, and clarify the relationship between this position and the Coordinator’s position.

### **2. Option Two – Hire an Interim**

An interim Director or Interim Transition Consultant – you can select the title. A high-level Interim would be an experienced professional who knows how to help an organization through a structural transition and can be useful in

implementing systems you might need. One possibility would be the Interim Executive Director program at NAO.

A traditional interim engagement is 4-8 months and positions tend to be .5 - .75FTE, depending on budget and goals. It generally takes about 3 months to do a search for a new Executive Director if the Council decides to go in that direction. In general, Interim Directors can be available almost immediately.

Pros – Quicker and easier than a traditional hire. You would get a higher level of nonprofit executive experience than if you hired for the position the traditional way. An ETS consultant would be experienced in transitions and would get up to speed very rapidly. Because they would not be creating a permanent position for themselves, they might be more objective about sorting out appropriate roles for existing staff vs. a new position. They would be experienced and comfortable working with boards and well versed in how effective boards should operate. Although there is a commitment to an agreed upon period of time, the contract can be ended at any time if someone else is hired or funding falls through or you just want to end it.

Cons – On an hourly basis, this option is more expensive than a permanent hire. (An interim is usually contracted for 20-30 hours a week.) The person may not have the level of environmental or watershed council experience you might get from an open market hire. If you decide to maintain this position permanently, you will still need to do a hiring search for the permanent position in 2-3 months.

**STEP 3:** Identify and talk with potential funders for this position.

- The work plan from the Transition Committee (mostly outlined in Step 1) should serve as a basis for talks with initial funders. My assumption based on these conversations is that you would talk with 1) CWS, 2) OWEB, and 3) Kristel's program at the City of Hillsboro.

**STEP 4:** If funding is available, convene the Transition Committee to move forward with the actual hiring of additional staff.

- Oversee and engage in the search process, or work with NAO if you go the route of an ETS interim person

**STEP 5:** The Transition Committee continues supporting and working with the staff

- Be actively involved in oversight of both positions. Work closely with the person in the new position to make sure that goals remain clear and there is good communication between the board and staff.
- If you start with an interim position, the Transition Committee would also be in charge of any permanent hire.