

Seattle Public Utilities Customer Review Panel

First Quarter 2021 Meeting | Monday, February 8, 2021

3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

WebEx mtg

Meeting Participants:

CRP Panel Members and Facilitator			
Noel Miller, Chair	X	Noel Miller	X
Suzie Burke	X	Thy Pham	X
Bobby Coleman	X	Rodney Schauf	X
Dave Layton		Puja Shaw	X
Laura Lippman	X	Karen Reed, Facilitator	X
Maria McDaniel	X		

Staff and Others			
Mami Hara	X	Paula Laschober	X
Kathryn Aisenberg	X	Andrew Lee	X
Idris Beauregard	X	Conteva Lee	X
Keri Burchard-Juarez	X	Thuch Mam	X
Kathleen Baca	X	Kate Morrison	X
Alex Chen	X	Natasha Papsoueva	X
ShaQuina Davis	X	Dani Purnell	X
Jeff Fowler	X	Karen Sherry	X
Akshay Iyengar	X	Karl Stickel	X
Brian Goodnight	X	Toby Thaler	X
Marcus Jackson	X	Jerry Waldron	X

Underlined text indicates action items. ***Bold italicized text*** indicates follow-up items.

Welcome

Karen Reed, Facilitator, opened the meeting with a roll call of Panel members. Mami welcomed everyone to the first CRP meeting of 2021 and announced staffing changes; Karen Sherry will be leaving CRP to focus on her role in the Logistic Division. Thuch Mam has joined the team to provide support to the Panel. Dave Layton has transitioned off the panel. Mami thanked Karen and Dave for their service on the panel.

Strategic Business Plan Adoption Process Timeline (Mami Hara, GM)

Mami shared the following tentative adoption timeline with Panel members.

- By February 8 – SPU transmitted the draft 2021 – 2026 Strategic Business Plan and CRP letter to the Mayor’s office.
- February 10 – The draft Plan and transmittal letter will be briefed at the Mayor’s Pipeline briefing.
- Late February – Finalize the legislative process and packet, submit to Council Chair, and post the draft Plan to the Strategic Business Plan external website and the notice of hearings.
- March – Full Council Committee hearing

- June – Full adoption of the 2021-2026 Strategic Business Plan.

Mayor and Council Update

Introductions: Kathryn Aisenberg, representing Deputy Mayor Sixkiller, and Customer Review Panel members briefly introduce themselves.

- Kathryn Aisenberg – As one of two Senior Operations Manager at the Mayor’s Office, Kathryn supports Deputy Mayor Sixkiller’s departmental portfolio to help advance key items quickly and thoroughly. Kathryn thanked the Panel for their extensive service in the development of the Strategic Business Plan.
- Noel Miller – Grew up in Hawaii and DC, but has roots in the Pacific NW. With a professional career spanning 35 year and a long-time residential customer of the SPU, Noel’s role on the Panel is motivated by his desire to help the Utility achieve their goals and inform customers of the values they receive from SPU. Noel is the Chair of the Customer Review Panel.
- Rodney Schauf – Grew up in the mid-west and moved west as a teenager. Rodney is the Director of Engineering at the Sheraton Hotel and has been in facilities management for over 30 years. He represents the downtown commercial community on the Panel. With an extensive career in facilities management, energy and water conservation have always been central to Rodney because of their relationship to cost of utilities services.
- Suzie Burke – Represents the North Seattle Industrial Association which includes Fremont, Ballard and Portage Bay. Suzie has enjoyed her service on the Panel as a customer and representatives of the industrial group. Suzie gave kudos to SPU for mitigating impacts of the Ship Canal Water Quality Project in the community.
- Laura Lippman – A longtime resident of Seattle and a retired family doctor, Laura has served on the panel for almost 10 years and has great interest in field biology, ecology, and clean water.
- Thy Pham – Lived in Seattle since 2004 and is currently working for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation where she oversees grants to organizations that perform research and vaccines therapeutics and diagnostics. Thy previously served on the SPU’s Creeks, Drainage and Wastewater Advisory Committee then transitioned her service to the Panel two years ago.
- Maria McDaniel – A lifelong Seattle native currently employed as a Senior Business Analyst with the City of Seattle IT department. Maria also served on the SPU’s Creeks, Drainage and Wastewater Advisory Committee then transitioned her service to the Panel two years ago. Maria’s service on the Panel is to understand decision making that impact customers, particularly low-income customers and seniors. She also supports a variety of youth organizations and promotes career paths to the City of Seattle and Seattle Public Utilities.
- Puja Shaw – Grew up in British Columbia and moved to Seattle in 2000. Puja is currently a civil engineer with a passion for stormwater management. Because her daily work so closely mirrors some of the Utilities, Puja’s service on the Panel provides a different perspective on aligned work.
- Bobby Coleman – A Seattle resident for almost 10 years, Bobby works for Seattle Housing Authority as a Sustainability Administrator. Bobby also serves on the board of the High Point Open Space Association which is a large natural drainage project in West Seattle.

[Customer Review Panel Comment Letter Overview](#) (Noel Miller, Co-Chair)

- Noel gave a short presentation highlighting the main points in the Customer Review Panel’s letter accompanying the Strategic Business Plan. Points mentioned included: The 2021-2026 Plan was newly developed to include a new vision, mission and value statements.

- The Panel met 21 times over three years to gain greater understanding of the proposed Plan.
- The Plan’s initiatives and investments included affordability and accountability, addressed risk and resilience, and enhanced equity and empowerment as directed by the Council.
- The Strategic Business Plan and the Plan’s initiative and investments prioritize investment strategies, supporting customers and enhancing the environment. Implementation of these initiatives and investments will be carefully tracked through reporting metrics.
- Overall, the Panel is very supportive of the Plan including all 18 initiatives and investments and the 6-year average annual rate path of 4.2%.
- The Panel’s letter supporting SPU’s 2021-2026 Strategic Business Plan was signed by all 9 members.
- Affordability and Accountability highlights:
 - SPU’s water and drainage and wastewater aging infrastructure are over 80 years old, so renewal of the aging infrastructure needs to be cost effective.
 - A robust asset management program for continuous improvements in capital project delivery and operations will help slow the annual growth rate.
 - The Panel supports SPU’s effort to collaborate with Federal, State and local partners to develop cost effective approaches to meet health and environmental regulations.
- The Panel supports the Risk and Resiliency Initiatives for how SPU thinks about the future and approaches its work today.
- The Panel looks forward to further progress on:
 - Climate change adaptation strategy and seismic resiliency
 - Completion of the following operation facilities which was included in the last strategic plan and have been delayed in their completion.
 - ✓ North Operation Centers
 - ✓ South Operation Centers
 - ✓ Cedar Falls phase 2
 - South Park flood response which has been ongoing since the first 6-year strategic plan. We hope this work will be completed soon.
 - Workforce development and quarterly Shaping the Future Leadership forums.
- Other observations:
 - The Panel is very supportive of developing a financial assistance program for individual property owners to renovate or replace their private side sewers!
 - The Panel is also supportive of expanding the RV waste collection pilot program
 - The Panel supports the ongoing Clean Cities work including trash pickup and new hygiene trailers. These are central services for the unsheltered population and these measures provide needed protection of the local environment.
 - The Panel would like to see more coordination and cost sharing with SDOT regarding the mutual use of the City’s right of ways specifically on projects such as stream culvert replacements and street sweeping program for bicycle lanes.
- In closing, there are many continuing and growing pressure on SPU rates: renovation, placement of our water and wastewater infrastructure, response to climate change, seismic resiliency and efforts to improving water quality using GSI are no small tasks. All these efforts will increase pressure on rate affordability for SPU’s customers. The Panel recommends that work begins now to map out how we can address these long-term challenges.

Noel thanked SPU staff for their excellent work and a collaborative partnership. Noel had one last request, enhance engagement between the Panel, the Mayor and Council offices. Ongoing communications of concerns, priorities and questions would help the Panel with their work.

Kathryn Aisenberg, representing Deputy Mayor Casey Sixkiller, thanked the Panel for their extensive work and their commitment to the process.

Committee Business

Meeting Summary: There were a few corrections to the December 14, 2020 meeting summary. The Panel moved to approve the meeting summary with noted corrections.

[Customer Review Panel Recruitment Update](#) (Kate Morrison, Strategic Policy and Business Plan Advisor)

SPU will be recruiting to fill three vacancies and two additional vacancies later this year as their triennial term concludes. Because of COVID 19, all terms were extended by a year, which was not reflected in the presentation timeline.

Recruitments will be done in cohorts with recruitment for the first cohort to begin this month and appointment/reappointment to be completed by July 31, 2021. Recruitment for the second cohort will be conducted in early 2022 and appointments/reappointments will be completed by July 31, 2022.

Applications to serve on the Customer Review Panel will be accepted mid-February through mid-March. To promote access and reduce barriers, candidates will have multiple ways to apply including online, direct email or via voice message.

The recruitment goal is to acquire a broad cross-section of individuals representing different background, interests, expertise, and demographics. We hope to do this using traditional channels and relational network.

- Traditional channels will include resources such as the SPU's social media, Shape Our Water, At Your Service, etc.
- Relational network will include our partnership with the Department of Neighborhood and access to their connections and resources such as Community Liaisons who are community based individuals that serves as a pipeline to city departments to get information into the community; People's Academy for Community Engagement which is a civic engagement program that will be sending recruitment information to graduates; Community Engagement Coordinators who work in various sections of the cities will help to promote the recruitment opportunity. Several other commissions are also undergoing recruitment, so we'll be looking to piggyback on their recruitment efforts. SPU is also asking Panel members to help promote our recruitment.

Question: Is the presumption that those of us who have served on the Panel for a while are expected to step down?

Answer: No, if you are interested in continuing to serve, please submit your application.

Question: Kate, have you heard from anyone in the first cohort (Maria and Suzie) who might be interested in continuing to serve?

Answer: No, I have not. Those interested in continuing to serve should let me know and also apply. (Suzie Burke expressed interest in continuing her service on the Panel)

[Proposal: Panel Meeting/Structure](#) (Danielle Purnell, Corporate Policy Director)

As we continue to explore our commitments of continuous improvement and inclusion, we looked at best practices of an inclusive meeting from the City's 70+ Boards and Commissions.

SPU is proposing a couple of standardize changes that will help us become more community centered and inclusive in our practices. The first proposal covers three areas: First, creating meeting predictability and transparency on how we are convening our meetings. Second, how to include other perspectives in our meetings, particularly community voices that we have use to update our business plan. Third, standardizing our agenda elements that would allow us to publish a master agenda.

Standardizing Convening

Cadence: Propose quarterly meetings during non-business plan period year and monthly during the business plan period which would begin around August 2022. New members will be fully onboarded outside of the Panel meeting dates to prepare them for full participation including the business plan period. Proposal received no objections, but it did have a couple of requests below.

- Panel requested that materials be provided well in advance to allow enough time for Panel member to thoroughly review the materials, particularly during the business plan period.
- Panel also requested that we stop using acronyms for ease of tracking, particularly for new members.

Meeting Length: Propose a standard meeting length of 2.5 hours with one break as most members have expressed that a 3-hours was too intense, but 2 or 2.5 hours would be preferred. This proposal received no objections and was accepted by the Panel.

Meeting Day: Transparent and predictable quarterly meetings will be on the second Monday of the second month of every quarter allowing people to plan for it in advance. If a meeting date falls on a holiday, the Panel suggested moving the meeting to the following week. This proposal received no objections and was accepted by the Panel.

Meeting Time: After looking at other Boards and Commissions, the best practice for an inclusive meeting is to conduct meetings in early evenings for those without work flexibility and provide a light meal, childcare and transportation. The new proposed meeting time is 3 pm – 5pm, 4 pm – 6pm, 5 pm – 7 pm, or 6 pm – 8 pm. The Panel voted for 3 pm – 5 pm to start with, but we will reassess as we get new panel members.

Opportunities to Hear Different Customers/Community Perspectives

Public Comment: 5 minutes will be dedicated to receiving public comment at the start of each meeting. We'll have a standard way for people to sign up to provide comments. Customers with questions that do not pertain to the Panel will be redirected appropriately. Panel members suggested listing other ways for people to participate in the meeting. This proposal received no objections and was accepted by the Panel.

Mayor/Council Update: 5 minutes to hear from Council/Mayor's office staff that are relevant to SPU business. This proposal received no objections and was accepted by the Panel.

[Partnership Participation](#): SPU would like to increase engagement, grow our network, and increase connections with our customers and partners. One proposal is to invite customers/partners who are invested in what we do to present at our meetings so we may expand what we know about each other's interests. The proposal is to schedule one presenter for 40-45 minutes at each meeting. The Panel was concerned the time commitment could take away from Panel business. Instead, the Panel proposed starting partnership participating small, during the quarterly meetings, but not during the business plan period. The Panel will revisit to determine future needs and availabilities.

[Additional Networking Opportunities](#): SPU has several networking opportunities we would like to offer the Panel such as community partner field trips, Shaping the Future Leadership Forums, and network building for new members at sponsorship events. The Panel appreciated the additional, but optional, networking opportunities.

[Standardizing Agenda Elements/Master Agenda \(Danielle Purnell\)](#)

Dani proposed developing and publishing a master meeting agenda for the year to help us best use our limited time together. The agenda will portion time for each meeting and list information we hope to cover at each meeting and partnership networking opportunities. The proposal was accepted by the Panel.

Performance Reporting

[Performance Reporting Schedule](#) (Natasha Papsoueva, Corporate Performance Director)

Natasha reviewed the performance reporting summary.

- Quarterly reporting on essential service metrics
- We will also be reporting on initiative and investment milestones concentrating on investments reporting in Q1-3. As initiatives are reported annually, both investments and initiative will be reported in Q4.
- Quarterly reporting on Focus Areas
 - Q2 – Empowering Customers, Community and Employees – convening in February
 - Q3 – Stewarding Environment and Health
 - Q4 – Essential Equitable Service Delivery
 - Q1 2022 – Strengthen Our Utility's Business Practices
- Quarterly reporting on CIP investment Portfolio
- Quarterly reporting on financial performance and affordability metrics including an affordability metrics in Q4.
- In May we will be reporting on the Utilities' report card.

[2020 Financial](#) (Karl Stickel, Finance Director)

Karl provided Q4 financial update on Water, Drainage and Wastewater and Solid Waste Lines of Businesses.

The financial table is broken out by expenditures and revenues. Expenditures are further broken down by "plan" which is what we budgeted, and "actual" which is what we spent.

For all three lines of businesses, spending on operations and capital projects were less than planned due to the hiring freeze and the pandemic which delayed projects and contract spending resulting in an underspending for all three lines of businesses. Revenues saw similar changes across all three lines of businesses with increased revenue streams from residential customers while commercial revenue stream decreased.

Water

- Operating expenditure was down \$24M
- Capital expenditure was down \$59M
- Revenue was down a total of \$5M due to a \$7M reduction in retail and a \$2M reduction in wholesale revenue. But other revenue, which included tap fees from new development, were up \$4M.

DWW

- While spending for capital project was less than projected, funding for these capital projects remains available.
- The Ship Canal Water Quality Project along with other transportation related projects that were also delayed were the major driver for underspending.
- Operating expenditure was down \$23M
- Capital expenditure was down \$103M
- Wastewater and drainage revenues were down a total of \$15M

SW

- Operating expenditure was down \$14M
- Capital expenditure was down \$26M
- Revenue was up \$1M due to a \$10M increase from residential and other, and a \$9M decrease from commercial customers.

Overall, SPU is still in a good financial position and all funds are still financially strong despite the pandemic.

[Customer Response Center](#) (Marcus Jackson, Division Director of the Customer Response Center)

Marcus provided a quick overview of Seattle Public Utilities' Response Center which also includes the Customer Contact Center and the Business Support Team that supports the Contact Center with technical resources, training and education, performance reporting.

The Customer Contact Center handles all the calls for SPU and the bulk of the calls for Seattle City Lights customers. To improve customer experience, the Contact Center implemented several changes that included a call back feature, added an email which allowed customers to email their questions and concerns directly to the Contact Center, added a customer satisfaction survey at the end of each call so customers could rate their experience with the agent or with the Utility as a whole, and launched a self-service portal which allowed customers to conduct transaction services online. The Contact Center also set up 90% of the Contact Center agents to work from home during the pandemic.

The self-service portal, launched in 2020, allows customers to conduct transactions and perform automated service online. Currently, all solid waste requests/transaction are included in the portal with more features to be rolled out in 2021 including a start and stop service feature that will allow customers the ability to open and close their utility accounts. Conteva Lee, Training and Education Coordinator for the Contact Center, gave a demonstration of the new self-service portal.

Contact Center Performance for 2020:

- Target: Calls answered $\geq 95\%$
 - Achieved: 98% of calls answered (received 471,836/answered 462,973)
- Target: Average Call Wait Time ≤ 3 minutes (length of time customers wait to speak to an agent)
 - Achieved: 34 seconds
- Target: Average Call Abandoned Rate of $\leq 5\%$
 - Achieved: 2%

- Target: Emails answered within 3-5 business days
 - Achieved: 3.5 business days
- Target: Customer Satisfaction Customer Service Score of \geq 85%
 - Achieved: 94%

Thy Pham complimented Marcus for the performance metrics chosen and for the outstanding performance in all target areas.

Maria McDaniel shared her own experience using the portal to learn why one of her utility bills was much higher than usual. She found the portal to be very user friendly and has referred families, friends, and neighbors with questions about their utility bills to the portal.

Question: How many customer assistance staff do you have?

Answer: Customer assistance is in a different workgroup. We have other workgroups that handle emergency assistance and delinquencies. If customers have difficulty paying their bills, the Contact Center agents will find out their income and household size and if appropriate refer them to the City's Utility Discount Program, which is managed by the Human Services Department, or the Emergency Assistance Program within SPU.

Question: What score are you looking for on the customer satisfaction survey?

Answer: Contact Center calls are randomly evaluated and scored for all agents. The score is then added to the score from customer surveys. The result of these scores is then averaged to produce the Satisfaction Survey scores and that information is also used to help identify areas of improvement.

Question: Do you have a chat option to get help?

Answer: We're expecting to offer chat later this year. The feature we have now with the portal is called a co-browse which allows agents to take control of the customer's screen, circle and highlight information on their screen to help them navigate the portal.

Question: What is the Utilities' practice for water leak bills?

Answer: SPU asks that customers notify the Contact Center as soon as they are aware of a leak. Contact Center agents will walk customers through what to do and how to check for leaks. SPU offers a rebate program that will adjust up to two billing period for the excess portion of the water leak bill that is beyond the normal monthly amount.

[Construction Highlights](#) (Jerry Waldron, Construction Management Director)

The construction management dashboard displayed three stakeholders: drainage and wastewater, water and solid waste. The Ship Canal Water Quality Project was excluded from the dashboard because of the size of the project expenditure.

The construction management team is responsible for inspections and construction management for a variety of projects from underground pipes to facilities project like the Ship Canal Water Quality Project. They also work on emergency projects such as landslides, sink holes, and watermain breakage; partner with other city departments on capital improvement projects to help protect our assets, and help support the private development community.

The projects trends from 2018 - 2020 shows an increasing number of new projects while our resources have remained unchanged.

In 2020, during the pandemic, SPU was committed to keeping construction moving while keeping staff safe. They did that by procuring PPE kits for field staff, partnered with contractors to develop a health and safety plan within 48 hours that adhered to public health requirement, and developed contact tracing for contractors.

Construction projects are complex, so the construction team will often partner with other departments to relocate underground utility infrastructure, work with local businesses to reduce impact, and work with landscape architects to restore the project construction sites.

SPU is also participating in the City's priority hire program that promotes construction careers for women, people of color and low-income communities. Participants in the priority hire program do not need a college degree.

Suzie Burke gave kudos the flagger in Shilshole Bay. Jerry will be sure to convey kudos to the flagger.

Question: The total capital expenditure for 2020 was \$235M, but the construction management dashboard showed a total of \$40M. Would you please explain the variance?

Answer: *The variance could be the removal of the Ship Canal Water Quality Project from the dashboard, but Jerry will follow-up.*

Karen Reed adjourned the meeting at 5:14 pm.