



State of New Jersey

PHILIP D. MURPHY
Governor

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

SHAWN M. LATOURETTE
Commissioner

DIVISION OF WATER SUPPLY & GEOSCIENCE

Water System Operations Element
Bureau of Water System Engineering
401 East State Street
P.O. Box 402, Mail Code 401-04Q
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0420
Tel. (609) 292-2957 ♦ Fax (609) 633-1495
www.nj.gov/dep/watersupply

SHEILA Y. OLIVER
Lt. Governor

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
Licensed Operator Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes for November 8, 2021
Meeting held via Microsoft Teams

Approved by the Committee on February 23, 2022

Committee Members Present: Kristin Tedesco, Joe Bonaccorso, William Mitchell, Patricia Gardner, Keith Vaughn, Richard Eustace, Pam Carolan, Jill Plesnarski, Ronald Suto, Carol Broccoli, Robert Fullagar

There were 11 committee members present, constituting a quorum.

Committee Members Absent: Eugene Chebra, Richard Kunze

Committee Legal Representatives Present: DAG Cristin Mustillo, NJ Division of Law

NJDEP Staff Present: Kristin Tedesco, Patricia Gardner, Joseph duRocher, Chelsea Brook, Malathi Prabhu, Keith Vaughn, Casey Lippincott

Members of the Public Present: Richard Howlett, Mona Cavalcoli, Alan Dillon, Theodore Gassman

1. Call to Order

K. Tedesco presided over the telephonic meeting and called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm, noting there were enough committee members present to constitute a quorum.

K. Tedesco read the Open Public Meetings Act Statement (OPMA).

This meeting was held via conference call due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Notice of the meeting and instructions on how to participate by phone were provided by public notice in advance of the meeting.

2. Old Business

K. Tedesco stated that there were a limited number of individuals appointed to Committee vacancies, and there were recommendations from AWWA and AEA. J. Bonaccorso stated that there is a long-standing recommendation on file for positions on the committee and asked if these were being acted on. K. Tedesco replied that they are not being ignored and if there are any questions, she would follow-up.

J. Bonaccorso asked for the status of recommendations from a year ago. K. Tedesco replied that we will revisit those recommendations, and that DEP has been looking to fill vacancies on all boards and committees. She is committed to fill the vacancies.

J. Bonaccorso stated there is no formal reorganization for chair and vice-chair for the committee and since this is the last meeting of 2021, he moved that we maintain the existing leadership positions as they have been since the last meeting in 2019, and to hold off elections until 2022.

R. Eustace seconded. Hearing no objections, the motion passed unanimously.

3. New Business

Communication & Program Updates

P. Gardner stated that the LO program was transferred to the Bureau of Water System Engineering in February 2021, and the first order of business was to gather all information from 2020/early 2021 and get the exam process back on track. P. Gardner explained that they will be providing support to the Committee and that there have been updates to the website to make the application and payment processes more easily available. P. Gardner said that they are currently getting caught up with any new materials from Trish Conti's group for the Committee.

K. Tedesco took over the LO program in February 2021, and initially was focusing on backlogs, end of TCH cycles, etc. After Trish Conti retired there was a handicap with transition on handling policies and procedures and she is welcoming suggestions on this. K. Tedesco stated that Joe duRocher was promoted to Section Chief and will be managing the LO program along with his support staff, and that if there were any questions on individual course approvals to reach out to him.

K. Tedesco shared her screen to show the updates that were made to the Water & Wastewater System Operator Licensing website. K. Tedesco stated that they need to look over all procedures, protocols, and past meetings to see what needs to be updated regarding exams and the shift to online courses. K. Tedesco stated if there were any suggestions for improvements on the website to reach out.

K. Tedesco stated that in 2022 she plans to make updates to the LO rules and regulations. There will be focus groups of individuals to provide feedback on various topics including workforce development, training, and more. K. Tedesco will be reaching out to organizations to attend and give feedback on the suggested updates that need to be made.



J. Bonaccorso asked if the NJDEP can ensure all groups will be invited to these discussions since NJWEA had not been invited in the past.

K. Tedesco stated they will be looking for representatives from both wastewater and drinking water to attend these meeting, and it will be good to have more uniformity. K. Tedesco stated that if there are any other individuals on the wastewater side that should attend to let her know and that Cristin Mustillo was there to ensure they are operating in accordance with this program.

Criteria for Approving Online Courses for TCHs

K. Tedesco stated that during COVID, there were several conversations about a shift to online training. When this first happened the DEP put together general criteria, which course providers gave general feedback on. Other providers have everything online, and we are seeing more of a shift for training on demand – attending training at any time of day.

K. Tedesco asked what type of verification and parameters we need to have consistency across the board, such as asking course providers to verify student attendance by having participants hold up ID's or having questions throughout the online training. K. Tedesco asked if we see a point in time where all training would be online.

J. Bonaccorso stated that NJWEA, Rutgers, and other commercial online providers require registration and attendance is taken. J. Bonaccorso raised concerns that when EPA gives courses there are tests at the end of the course and if they do not pass, they must retake the course, but there is no verification that the individual is who they say they are. We must be mindful of the reputations of organizations who give online training – is there any reason they wouldn't deliver what we think is justifiable credit? J. Bonaccorso stated that during COVID several organizations said they were following guidelines, or they verified test-takers identification and registration was legitimate. J. Bonaccorso suggested that we have a side meeting on this issue rather than discussing this today and to include the organizations who give courses online to see what their experiences have been.

K. Tedesco agreed to have a sub-committee meeting to discuss this but had just wanted to re-group and discuss what she had been seeing.

J. Bonaccorso stated that if there were any issues between meetings the sub-committee could review, and the authorized provider would review and discuss during the next meeting. J. Bonaccorso continued, stating that no courses would be accepted that the entire committee needed to discuss, and big courses by authorized providers like Rutgers didn't need to be reviewed.

K. Tedesco thanked Joe for clarifying and stated that she will be notifying the course providers of the new revisions once they are planned.



P. Gardner stated that one issue is not the approval process, but more that there is a basic requirement that all courses online should meet – where there is some verification of the person taking the course. P. Gardner specified that the committee would decide what the minimum requirement is.

W. Mitchell suggested that we need to look at the existing requirements and look at what everyone is doing online now; and then to give them a minimum requirement and have them tell us how they plan to satisfy that requirement.

Mona Cavalcoli indicated that she appreciates the Committee discussing this topic and that her organization (AWWA-NJ) takes the mission of operator education seriously. We want to make sure everything is done properly and are happy to participate in meetings to make sure they are doing what they should be and will continue to do so. Mona noted that online training will continue to be a part of their education program.

K. Tedesco asked if there were any further comments on the topic.

There were no further comments.

School and Instructor Approvals

K. Tedesco stated that several committee members said they did not get this information – there were some schools that had requested required course approval (Atlantic County Community College, Mercer County Community College, and NJIT). She added that separately we updated the list of course providers on the website and updates are being made on the old list and they are looking for more updates.

J. Bonaccorso stated that with respect to Atlantic, there was no indication of Ernest's background to allow him to be an instructor. He asked if anyone knows this individual and his background, or if there was a resume attached so it could be reviewed to see if he has the requirements to be an instructor.

K. Vaughn stated he has reviewed his resume – he was with ACMUA and has experience. J. Bonaccorso asked if he had a license. K. Vaughn answered yes, he has at least a T3, maybe T4. K. Tedesco confirmed that he does have a T4 to teach the advanced course.

J. Bonaccorso stated that based on his license and experience he moved to have him as an instructor. K. Vaughn seconded this motion.

P. Gardner commented on the advanced water treatment hybrid (referring to NJIT's request for Advanced Water Course), asking what that means. J. Bonaccorso responded that the submission should demonstrate adherence to the course agenda previously approved by the Committee. W. Mitchell asked if hybrid meant online, and if the requirements change. J. Bonaccorso stated that all information posted online is for course providers to utilize and that he does not know what is meant by hybrid. He asked K. Tedesco to contact NJIT for more information and she indicated that we would reach out.



J. Bonaccorso noted that NJIT gets quite specific and that in order for them to give college credits, they sandwich in the environmental engineer criteria. He states again that we need to ensure the criteria followed is what the Committee has approved and is posted online.

P. Carolan asked about the externship and if there was anything regarding what they do. J. Bonaccorso responded saying that it was not required and that it might be used for college credit, but he was unsure. P. Carolan stated that there is no hands-on requirement with the course work, she asked if there should be a requirement to go to facilities and see the equipment and how it works. J. Bonaccorso stated that in the course curriculum one facility tour is required for every semester, and that there are no further hands-on activities because of liability exposure when working with equipment.

R. Fullagar stated that it appears that NJIT is trying to leverage a class they are already teaching to have students meet the education requirements for T2 and W2. J. Bonaccorso responded saying generally the Licensing Board denies these, and that this might be an attempt to get into the realm of how they operate, and the Board will have to see what they did in their work life to satisfy licensing. R. Fullagar asked if this would take the place of the Advanced Course. J. Bonaccorso answered yes.

R. Fullagar asked if, for Atlantic, there was any set criteria for attendance percentage. J. Bonaccorso answered stating that in the past attendance criteria was 90% but this became unacceptable and that now there are two (2) tests every semester.

P. Gardner stated that NJIT indicated that students are obtaining hours of experience through the externship and stated that we should clarify that those hours may not apply toward operating experience for licensure. J. Bonaccorso responded saying that the Licensing Board will determine if they meet the experience requirement. P. Carolan indicated the same concern as P. Gardner. P. Carolan asked if we can include having them watch people repair main breaks, GPS mains, locate mains, etc. in their program and suggested reaching out to utilities to see if that would be beneficial. J. Bonaccorso stated that we could respond that while NJIT's outline meets most criteria we need to identify what other items are needed and then wait for them to respond. P. Carolan asked if we can clarify this with the Licensing Board (regarding the externship). J. Bonaccorso stated that our response will be that they must meet the requirements of N.J.A.C. 7:10A. P. Carolan asked if that includes years of experience. J. Bonaccorso responded saying yes, and that we do not adopt protocols that allows for fast-tracking. P. Carolan stated that a discussion has been going on between engineers and operators, and engineers must get their license in the right way.

K. Tedesco stated the need to discuss Mercer County. P. Gardner responded saying that it is incomplete, there is no signature and no resume. K. Tedesco stated that this is similar to Atlantic County and that we need more information. P. Gardner stated that just by attending you receive forty (40) percent of your grade and that seems high. R. Fullagar stated that there needs to be some focus on attendance, but more on quality and participation. J. Plesnarski stated that her classes base only 10% of grade on attendance, and there are two (2) exams, and you must receive seventy (70) percent or better. W. Mitchell added



that when he has taught required course at Rutgers, they had homework, quizzes, and tests and they must receive seventy (70) percent and must attend a minimum number of classes.

J. Bonaccorso asked if there were any more comments. There were no further comments.

Course Providers

K. Tedesco stated that she will be sending out information on transition and remaining protocols.

C. Broccoli stated that CSUS (California State Univ – Sacramento) has an online pilot program option and asked if we are accepting this. J. Bonaccorso answered, to his knowledge, there is no online option, but correspondence courses are still in play. J. Bonaccorso stated that this becomes an option for South Jersey because there are very few in person courses available in the Pinelands. W. Mitchell stated that taking classes can be difficult and this is something that may work better for schedules.

J. Bonaccorso stated that last time the Committee met there was \$50,000 for wastewater and asked if this is the current funding, and if there were any reimbursement requests. K. Tedesco replied that she will have to look into it. She has not received any more requests but will check-in with staff on balances and follow up.

4. 2022 Meeting Schedule

K. Tedesco stated that she had sent a few dates for the next meeting, if any of those dates don't work to email her and we will see if we can accommodate everyone. K. Tedesco stated that the annual notice will also be sent out, and to let her know by December 1st if you can make it because we have to do notifications for annual meeting schedule, but we can always have additional meetings. J. Bonaccorso asked if there were any additional questions. There were no additional questions.

5. Public Comment

J. Bonaccorso asked if there were any public comments.

W. Mitchell asked if there was a possibility of in-person meetings again. K. Tedesco replied saying there will always be a virtual option available, but right now the DEP has protocols with the number of people in a room and she is unsure if that will change. She expressed that this is something they need to consider, but to anticipate the February meeting to be virtual and she will talk to others to see if this will change in the future. J. Bonaccorso responded that virtual meetings are more convenient for traveling purposes. K. Tedesco responded that some people prefer to be in-person, but she will look into it and touch base but to anticipate the February meeting to be virtual.

R. Eustace asked if there was a timeframe for the meetings in the future. K. Tedesco replied to anticipate a 10 AM - 12 PM timeframe for all future meetings.

J. Bonaccorso asked if there were any other public comments.



There were no additional public comments.

6. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made at 2:10 PM by J. Bonaccorso, seconded by W. Mitchell and unanimously approved.

