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Minnesota Ground Water Association
Board Meeting Minutes
Regular monthly meeting

Meeting Date: Tuesday, January 16, 2024

Location:

- Meeting was called to order at 11:34 AM. The meeting was held as an online Teams meeting.

Attendance:

- Rebecca Higgins, President; Jeannie Martin, President-Elect; Eric Bunge, Treasurer; Michael Ginsbach, Secretary; Sherri Kroening, Newsletter; Sean Hunt, Management; Jennie Leete, Management

Board Election Results:

- Jeannie Martin was elected President-Elect, Michael Ginsbach was re-elected secretary.
- All board members introduced themselves to Martin.
- Higgins gave Martin a quick introduction to the Google Drive and asked Hunt if he was the one in charge of granting access. Hunt confirmed and asked Martin to share her Google account information to get access to the Drive.

Agenda:

- Leete had a conflict with today's meeting and was not able to present on the various MGWA-related legal entities. She sent an email with an explanation of the MGWA Foundation, MGWA, and typical member organizations in lieu of discussing the topic.
- No changes to the agenda aside from the reordering of the topics and Leete's email.
- No changes to December minutes pending additional review. Bunge motioned to approve meeting minutes, seconded by Kroening. All in favor, December minutes approved.

Southeast Minnesota Karst Petition Request for Review:

- Per Sandeep Burman's email, members of the MGWA Education Committee will review as individuals instead of representing the entirety of MGWA. Higgins mentioned that the two members will share their comments after submitted.
- Hunt noted that he was glad to hear this as there was a lot of concern about the short turnaround time requested for the proposed review.

2024 Virtual Spring Conference Planning Updates:

- Higgins shared an update on her behind-the-scenes work to try and find speakers for the 2024 spring conference. She noted that the current title of the conference is "Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning: Application and Integration in MN Groundwater Science".
- Higgins said that she has five potential speakers for this topic and asked the Board what they would prefer when it comes to filling out the rest of the conference agenda. She

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suggested either having a call for abstract, student lightning talks, or if the Board had any other suggested speakers.

- Bunge asked if there had been any previous attempts to have a call for abstracts for any MGWA conferences and asked how successful they had been. Kroening was not aware of any and said that they might need to go quickly. Hunt said that it has been hit or miss in the past.
- Bunge looked at the list of proposed speakers and asked if there were any other potential contacts in the private sector.
- Higgins said the three speakers who have confirmed so far include a professor from University of California Irvine, two points of contact from an Australian company (Datanest), and two contacts at Seequent and AECOM who are working on a case study in 3D modeling in Washington County to help support the MPCA's Project 1007 work.
- Higgins is reaching out to a contact at EarthSoft to discuss a presentation for the conference and is also reaching out to the National Groundwater Association to see if they have any suggestions for speakers.
- Higgins also said that she is considering reaching out to the University of Minnesota and EPA ORD in Duluth. Higgins asked the board to see if they had any other additional points of contact to consider. Higgins asked Ginsbach if he had any additional contacts.
- Ginsbach suggested reaching out to Peter Kang at UMN, which Higgins said she will do. Ginsbach said that he will reach out to folks on the ITRC Environmental Data Management team that he worked with to see if there are any contacts there that might be willing to discuss.
- Bunge suggested reaching out to Jere Mohr, previous past-president, to see if there were any additional contacts that he knows. He also suggested reaching out to the Remote Sensing folks at DNR who may have some insight or interest.
- Kroening said that Mindy Erickson at USGS has used machine learning in the past for some of her models but that she might have discussed these at previous meetings.
- Higgins asked Hunt about the process for getting the speakers together. Hunt said that while the president usually leads the charge on this it is better to keep things collaborative. Hunt said that there needs to be an agenda to get folks interested in the conference and include in the mailing but also that occasionally speakers drop out.
- Hunt noted that the most important thing is that there is enough information to share with the membership about two months prior to the meeting time. Hunt said that the number of presenters is up to the president and notes that for virtual meetings, the increased number of speakers causes more handoffs which can impact the timing.
- Hunt said that there could be a document on the Google Drive to document the speaker list and potential changes. Higgins suggested writing an SOP on how to organize the conferences for incoming presidents.
- Higgins said that she would like to limit presenters to 30 minutes or less for the speaking portion with a 10 minute Q&A session. She notes that these potential speakers can get into the weeds and that it would be good to keep things high level to have a broad brush across the group.
- Higgins asked what the best way to organize the conference is both in terms of hosting software and facilitation. Higgins notes that while MGS had historically facilitated the hosting for these meetings there could potentially be an option for a consultant to host support the meeting.

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- Hunt notes that historically most meetings had been in-person and that the pivot to virtual meetings occurred during COVID. He also noted that Tony Runkel was on the board during this time and that MGS's Zoom account was used for this and that is what the team is familiar with.
- Hunt said that the Board would need to ask either Runkel or Julia Steenberg to use MGS's Zoom account going forward. Higgins thanked Hunt for the background on this.
- Kroening asked if the sponsor would be providing MGWA with their own Zoom account. Higgins said that the hosting would be an in-kind contribution to provide a platform and host the event, including being a facilitator for the process.
- Higgins suggested that there are two distinct roles in these meetings: an emcee and a facilitator and they are two very distinct positions. The emcee is the face of the group and the facilitator is the one doing the behind-the-scenes work to ensure that everything runs smoothly. She notes that this allows the emcees to focus on the presentation without focusing on the technical details. Higgins said that this has been the case with recent meetings in her workgroup meetings.
- Bunge asked if this was a specific company or if there were larger consulting firms that have experience with this. Higgins said that the larger consultants have dedicated teams for this and noted that the workgroup meetings uses ABT under a state contract for this.
- Higgins asked if this would violate the bylaws or any other rules or if this had ever been tried before. Hunt said he was not aware of any potential violations. Higgins said that if she didn't hear any objections she might try to pursue this for the spring conference. She said that she will reach out to a few folks that she knows to see if they would be interested in doing this as an in-kind contribution. Higgins notes that if she runs into roadblocks we can still continue to do what we have done in the past.
- Bunge said that it sounds like a great idea and that if there are specialists that can step in, it might integrate them into the community and foster name recognition. He thinks it would be a good idea.

2024 Presidential Initiatives:

- Higgins notes that she likes to set the bar high and wanted to outline her proposals.
- Higgins said that she would like to increase the views and interest in MGWA and that she likes to dream big. She would like to see MGWA approach this year with an open mind and try to do whatever they can to try to see everything come to fruition.
- One of the topics Higgins discusses is incorporating sustainable meeting initiatives. She said that when we contract with a location for the in-person conference that the Board reviews the proposed sustainability for the event. Higgins said that there is feedback to produce everything electronically and not provide anything on paper (using QR codes versus printed out folders). Higgins said that including these into the contracting could help brand MGWA and what the group stands for. She notes that the group could be reporting back in on what they are doing to be sustainable and, for example, reducing water usage via paper.
- Bunge said that this was a good idea and that backing up what the organization stands for is also a good idea. Bunge said that this could be a stand-alone board position - have a sustainability board member to track this and propose to how best support this effort. He notes that if this is going to be incorporated into MGWA's identity there might be an opportunity to include a new board member focusing on this. Higgins said that every organization is having dedicated staff to tracking these and that she loves the idea.

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- Higgins said that it would be good to expand the marketing materials such as using the social media accounts and really “put the brand out there” to try and make MGWA a more enticing meeting. She notes that there is a prevalence of state agencies attending and the number of private companies attending seems to be decreasing. She notes that it seems to be a case where folks want to put their time and effort into the ones that are most engaging for them and ensuring that the MGWA is marketing themselves in the best way. Higgins said that there could be a backdrop to take pictures during the conferences to share on social media. Higgins said that speakers might want to help “build their brand” and that this could help improve attendance at an in-person event. She notes that these are not very expensive and having MGWA banners could help produce provide visual indicators of the group to include as standard booth materials for both the conferences and for other events.
- Higgins said that there is an opportunity to have giveaways for sustainable items such as bamboo toothbrushes which could help break up conferences themselves and to keep people alert.
- Higgins said that the board members should be engaging with MGWA on their social media accounts to keep involved. Higgins said that growing the social media presence is a big thing especially since it is inexpensive and free.
- Bunge said that he has had a pending add for the MGWA LinkedIn account for at least two years. Leete said this is not the Management team as it is not a delegated activity. Kroening said that there is an interest from someone on the newsletter team.
- Ginsbach noted that there has been an outstanding opening as the social coordinator for a number of years and that the Board has been unsuccessful in trying to fill this position. He notes that it will take some time and effort to get this work done.
- Bunge and Kroening note that it would be good to get new folks (either on the Board or in general) to do this work. Higgins agreed and said that the marketing and the social media would be a similar position and may be something to discuss as one position or multiple. Bunge and Higgins both suggested that it may be nice to have a subcommittee take the lead on this if that expertise exists already in one of those groups.
- Kroening said that the social media presence position should be fleshed out to ensure that there is a distinct note on what MGWA wants to communicate with people. Higgins agrees and thinks that it would be ideal to have someone who is a brand expert or a communications expert to best share the information about how to leverage this brand with key points of interest to ensure that we see a return on the investment. She notes that there are metrics that can be evaluated to see how effective this is.
- Higgins said that one of the ITRC members uses LinkedIn all the time to grow the network to maintain relationships, build out awareness of the teams, and reach out to directly ask if folks are willing to join. She notes that the position will need to make sure that they are asking if people are members and, if not, share a link in how to join as a member. Higgins suggests revisiting this in a future meeting and will start putting position descriptions together for these. She also notes that if the board has ideas on who to fill this position - new subcommittee, new board member, new regular member, etc - it could be discussed then. Bunge agrees.
- Higgins’s last initiative is leveraging long term partnerships with groups such as NGWA and MWWA. Higgins has been talking to the NGWA director and has asked a number of questions. Her first question is why NGWA and MGWA don’t have a formal agreement to work together. Higgins notes that she would like to leverage the NGWA relationship and also work with other local groups to work to build the membership in a meaningful

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way. She asked if there are other organizations that could be engaged with to help grow members.

- Bunge suggested reaching out to AIPG and to various student clubs or student groups that could be interested in groundwater. He notes that he is not quite sure how to engage with these groups as there are a lot of them.
- Higgins agrees and asks how to better partner with other organizations - work as sister organizations instead of competing with each other. She notes that there are a lot of cross memberships with these groups and wonders if there could be a way to benefit both groups. Higgins said that there is an opportunity to bundle together with the other groups and there could be options to get new members while not pulling away members from another organizations. Higgins said that there could be opportunities to support the other organizations by having booths for the various partner organizations to help lift each other up.
- Higgins noted that the major focus is to grow the membership. She said that if the board has any contacts or ideas to share them. She notes that this call could also be made to the membership as a whole. Higgins said that she would like to include these initiatives into a “stump speech” into the spring conference to show what MGWA would like to get done during the course of a year. Higgins said that she would also like to take in any ideas or thoughts on this initiative and encourages the Board members to reach out to her,.

Reports:

Treasurer:

- Bunge reported out on the funding. January to December 2023 had a gross profit of \$75,996.25, total expenses of \$60,817.54, and a net income of \$15,178.71, and total assets of \$122,551.92.
- Bunge said that the new member registrations are rolling into 2024 and a net income of \$11,267.79 and total assets are \$133,819.71 for the year-to-date.
- Hunt noted that the values might change a bit - there might be some additional data entry and bookkeeping that needs to be finalized. He notes that the Leete does all the bookkeeping but these numbers looked good to him.

Management Team:

- Hunt said that the membership renewals are coming in at the moment. Hunt said that there are 229 members while there have been about 350 members for the past two years. He notes that this is the primary focus at the moment and will focus on what he needs to do for the upcoming conferences.

Newsletter:

- Kroening notes that the December issue just went out and that the Newsletter team is working on the March newsletter. She notes that she will be reaching out to Higgins for the president’s letter and that will be reaching out to Bunge for the financial information.
- Kroening said including whatever information is available for the conference is always included in the March newsletter and that the goal is to get that out in mid-March.

White Paper Committee:

- Ginsbach noted that while both he and Vanessa Baratta are busy with everything and have reached out to Andrea Borich to help organize the meetings. He notes that both he and Baratta will continue to help lead the meeting but have asked Borich to help keep things moving.

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- Ginsbach notes that the White Paper committee hopes to have something more tangible by the spring conference.
- Hunt said that he took updates from Jared Trost on the overall White Paper committee updates from the Fall conference and that while Trost will step away after completion of the current white paper, the new points of contact are on the Google Drive.

Education Committee:

- Higgins notes that the Education Committee wants to have a booth at the Water Science Conference and that she is in support of this. She asked if anyone else has any experience with this and that it sounds like it should be a go.

Foundation:

- No updates as there were no Foundation members in attendance for this meeting.

Other

- Higgins asked if the current program of having a president organizing the meetings for a single year works and if there are opportunities to have the lifespan of the current roles changed to help ensure consistency and improve.
- Hunt said that there could be a survey of previous presidents to see if there was anything they wanted to do that they did not get done.
- Leete said that it is likely should not be shorter.
- Bunge said that he was not sure if a year as the acting president is enough time to get anything other than organizing the two conferences.
- Leete said that it used to be a team operation to get the conferences organized and is not sure why it has become more solitary in the recent years. Leete suggests that it might be because there have been two independent presidents in a row and that might have unintentionally pivoted the approach.
- Kroening said that this has evolved throughout time and there might be an opportunity to go back to a more collaborative approach. Leete said that the Board manual might help show things being more collaborative instead of the more independent approach.
- Bunge asked what the status of that manual is. Leete said that it used to be the Board's to maintain but it was taken by another group and not returned.
- Higgins notes that there is a good opportunity to define the tasks and responsibilities of each position. She said that she will reconvene this topic for next month to spend some time outlining what MGWA wants to do next. She notes that she has a "get it done" mentality and wants to hit the ground running.

Meeting Adjourned: 1:00 pm.

Action Items:

- The Board will follow up on potential speakers.

Next Meeting:

- Next meeting will be held on February 20, 2024.