

Melaney Seacat

From: Margot W Garcia/FS/VCU [mgarcia@vcu.edu]
Sent: Thursday, April 24, 2008 2:07 PM
To: Melaney Seacat
Subject: RE: City/County Water & WW Study

April 24, 2008

Dear Melaney,

Thank you for your message. I know this process has been put together very quickly without the kind of time that staff would like to think through the process. Just a few observations from last night's meeting.

1. Please put the tables in a V shape. The U shape means that for the audience we see just five heads – one on the end of each leg of the U and the three at the head of the table. It is impossible to see who is speaking.
2. Please ask that the chair do a roll call of people present with the positions that have been selected to fill – i.e. County Planning and Zoning. Many of us do not know the people who are on the committee and do not know what group they represent. Alternatively, print the names and groups being represented on the agenda.
3. Please make the name plates BIG – say with four-inch letters so they can be read from the back. The current ones are hopeless.
4. The Chair is beginning to make the process a dialogue. In other words he is feeling an obligation to comment on every statement made by a committee member. This becomes unfair to the committee members. No one else gets to comment on every statement. When this becomes oppressive it will be time to go to a professional facilitator. He should be counseled on this before it gets overbearing.
5. I know many of the people on the committee know each other and have worked together before. But the chumminess of the proceedings begins to make it feel like an "in-group" and is very off-putting to the public who feels completely cut out. It develops a real we-they mentality, which is exactly what the public participation outreach efforts are trying to overcome.
6. I hate 6 o'clock meetings for a number of reasons.
 - People are at their low sugar ebbs and therefore tend to be cranky and less serene than if they have eaten
 - People are tired and less able to concentrate on the intellectual part of the meeting. This will become more of an issue, as the group needs to synthesize and integrate conflicting and competing ideas/concept/issues.
 - This is family dinner hour and so is very anti-family. Many studies have shown that the children of families that eat dinner together have better social skills, language development, and ability to express themselves.
 - There were about half of the number of people at the 6 o'clock meeting than at the 8 o'clock Friday morning meeting. Despite the plea that came from working people, and that is a legitimate plea, to have meetings when they don't have to take time off from work, fewer members of the public came. This becomes a perceptual/symbolic issue. I suggest that you vary the meetings – alternate between day and evening. Day meetings are better for the elderly who don't like to drive at night, for bus riders who have more frequent buses, those whose job it is to follow these meetings, at-home parents with in school age children, or small children at home they can bring and for retired people. Evening meetings are better for working people who do not have young children at home (except of course if there are two parents in the family), and working people with no children or grown children. There is no perfect time. That is why alternating times are better.

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7. You need to take some time to establish process covenants – rules of operating etc. The group should not assume everyone knows what they are. One of the committee members even asked for this. All professional facilitators I know would insist on beginning a process like this with at least ½ hour of time given to how the group will operate. If a member can't make a meeting who should he/she call? Etc.

I realize from talking to Arlan Coltan, a long-time friend, that you got thrown into this effort without warning and not much prep time. I hope you will take some of the time you have now – more than two weeks, to work on some of the issues, like who is doing what when and when this group sunsets. To the public not in tune with the nuances of what is going on, this committee appears very disorganized and confused. That is not helping the public have confidence in the outcome.

Thank you for reading this far. I hope these comments have been helpful. I want to see this process succeed.

Margot Garcia