

**LEWIS AND CLARK COUNTY
WATER QUALITY PROTECTION WQPD
BOARD MEETING**

Hybrid – Zoom
June 23, 2026

Members Present:

Ed Kerins, Adel Johnson, Sherri Ohs-Mosley, Patrick Johnson, Diana Hammer, Commissioner Payne.

Staff & Guests Present:

Fred Sargeson, Jennifer McBroom, Kegan McClanahan, Theo Lewis, and Sandy Whittington

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Kerins, Chair, called the 293rd meeting of the Lewis and Clark County Water Quality Protection WQPD (WQPD) Board of Directors (Board) to order at 4:00 p.m. A quorum was established. Introductions of Board members and WQPD staff were made.

REVIEW OF AGENDA

The agenda was reviewed and approved with no changes.

MINUTES

The Chair, Mr. Kerins requested a review of the minutes, and they were unanimously approved as written. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Kerins commented on the thoroughness of the minutes.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW EMPLOYEE

Ms. McBroom introduced the new Water Quality Specialist, Theodore Lewis. Mr. Lewis shared that he was born and raised in Great Falls, Montana. He discussed his professional background, noting that he worked for the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in the Mining Bureau for more than six years, where he focused on reclamation efforts. Mr. Lewis expressed his passion for water resource protection and preserving water quality for future generations. The Board engaged in a brief discussion regarding Mr. Lewis's upcoming responsibilities and duties.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Mr. Kerins opened the strategic planning session by emphasizing that discussions should focus on future activities rather than past accomplishments. He noted that the Strategic Plan would be reviewed quarterly and could be modified as needed.

Ms. McBroom outlined the four focus areas of the Strategic Plan: monitoring and sampling, restoration, outreach and education, and board organization.

Ms. McBroom explained that standard operational tasks would continue regardless of whether they were included in the Strategic Plan. She also reviewed the voting process, noting that a simple "Go/No Go" vote would be used to efficiently identify activities for inclusion in the final plan for approval. The Board agreed to prioritize high-impact activities and to develop a roadmap containing approximately five to seven key activities within each focus area.

Board Organization

Approved activities for inclusion in the Strategic Plan:

- Develop annual outreach programs.
- Develop and implement a water conservation and water quality plan.
- Update Quality Assurance documents.
- Create and maintain a data management system.
- Develop and review written work plans.
- Research and apply for grants.
- Ensure adequate funding for technical and supervisory staffing.
- Create and update recruitment and retention plans as needed.
- Provide staff training.
- Provide orientation, board development, and education.
- Develop documentation for public dissemination.
- Include project budget proposal protocols as part of standard operational tasks.
- Conduct QI/PDSA activities, as necessary, as part of standard operational tasks.
- Study the potential expansion of the WQPD.
- Take a more active and effective role in development and subdivision reviews.
- Continue outreach efforts to secure a Conservation WQPD representative on the WQPD Board.
- Develop and implement staff work plans using a centralized internal service.
- Research and identify risks to water quality and water quantity, such as data centers.

Discussion on Approved Activities:

During discussion of the water conservation plan, Ms. Hammer emphasized the importance of including water quality as a component of the activity. She also requested documentation outlining the Water Quality Protection WQPD's water quality program and plan as referenced in the bylaws. The Board discussed appropriate language, relevant regulations, and the WQPD's role regarding water quantity and outreach efforts.

At the prompting of Mr. Kerins, the Board discussed whether standard operational tasks should remain within the Strategic Plan as a means of monitoring staff performance. The Board agreed that standard operational tasks would be grouped into a single Strategic Plan item and tracked through the WQPD day-to-day operations checklist.

During discussion of the potential expansion of the WQPD, Ms. Ohs-Mosely noted concerns regarding the potential costs associated with expansion. Ms. Hammer expressed support for exploring the concept but agreed that further study was warranted. Ms. McBroom noted that funds had already been allocated to study possible expansion of the WQPD boundaries. At

the request of the Chair, the activity was revised to read, "Study the potential expansion of the WQPD."

The Board also discussed taking a more active role in development and subdivision reviews. Ms. Hammer expressed a desire to receive monthly updates regarding subdivision reviews and development activity. Discussion included the distinction between City and County planning boards and opportunities for the WQPD to provide comments during the planning process. Mr. Johnson suggested obtaining planning board meeting minutes for Board review. Commissioner Payne inquired about access to the Trak-It system, and Mr. McClanahan and Mr. Sargeson provided background information regarding its use.

During discussion of data centers, Ms. Hammer recommended expanding the activity to focus on research. The Board discussed potential impacts of data centers on both water quality and water quantity, including potential benefits and risks. Following discussion, the activity was revised to read, "Research and identify risks to water quality and water quantity, such as data centers."

Board Organization - Declined Activities: Addressed in other areas

The Board declined to include the following activities in the Strategic Plan:

- WQPD Board education on relevant topics through invited speakers and staff presentations.
- Increase the effectiveness of the WQPD and Board.
- Develop a Technical Advisory Group with local experts to guide and evaluate WQPD work.
- Complete a marketing plan to improve public outreach and increase public interest.
- Conduct a public relations campaign in preparation for a fee increase and highlight the value of WQPD services.
- Share and educate Board members on groundwater and surface water monitoring plans and annually updated Quality Assurance documents.
- Provide comments on all new developments within WQPD boundaries.
- Address other infrastructure needs.

Board Organization - Discussion on Declined to Include in Strategic Plan Activities:

Commissioner Payne questioned the wording of the proposed Board Education activity, while Ms. Johnson noted that the concept was already addressed under the approved board orientation, development, and education activity. The Board agreed not to include the item separately.

Discussion of the proposed activity to increase the effectiveness of the WQPD and Board centered on Board communication and engagement. Commissioner Payne requested clarification regarding the activity's scoring. Mr. Kerins and Ms. Johnson recommended striking the item, while Ms. Hammer stated that the intent was to improve communication and keep Board members informed. Ms. Ohs-Mosely suggested incorporating those objectives into the approved board orientation and development activity.

The Board questioned the purpose and function of a proposed Technical Advisory Group and ultimately chose not to advance the activity.

Discussion on the proposed marketing plan included questions from Commissioner Payne regarding WQPD funding sources and the distinction between WQPD funding and Public Health funding. Following discussion, the Board agreed not to advance the activity.

The proposed public relations campaign generated discussion regarding WQPD assessments and fees. Ms. Ohs-Mosely raised questions regarding potential fee increases for property owners, while Commissioner Payne asked about assessments paid by City residents. Mr. Kerins and Ms. Hammer both indicated that the intent of the activity was already addressed elsewhere in the Strategic Plan, and the Board chose not to include it.

The Board also declined activities related to annual education on monitoring plans and Quality Assurance documents, providing comments on all new developments within WQPD boundaries, and addressing other infrastructure needs. No further action was taken on those proposals.

Restoration Stream Work

The Board approved the following activity for inclusion in the Strategic Plan:

- General restoration activities.
- Discussion on Approved Activities
- No substantive discussion was recorded regarding the approval of general restoration activities.
- The Board declined to include the following activities in the Strategic Plan:
 - River and watershed health.
 - Achieve cleaner rivers and streams.

Restoration Stream Work Discussion on Declined to Include in the Strategic Plan Activities:

The Board determined that river and watershed health activities were already being addressed through ongoing educational efforts and the Water Watchers program. No additional discussion was recorded regarding the proposal to achieve cleaner rivers and streams.

Monitoring & Sampling

The Board approved the following activities for inclusion in the Strategic Plan:

- Annually reassess groundwater and surface water monitoring networks to optimize their effectiveness.
- Collect groundwater levels and conduct groundwater sampling projects.
- Collect surface water flow data and conduct surface water sampling projects.
- Assess the need to monitor recreational waters.

- Identify and prioritize critical water resource areas for protection, monitoring, and related activities.

Monitoring & Sampling Discussion on Approved Activities:

During discussion of groundwater and surface water monitoring networks, Ms. Hammer questioned the purpose of reassessing the networks, while Ms. Ohs-Mosely asked whether the process could help notify property owners when wells begin going dry. Ms. Hammer recommended revising the language to incorporate optimizing network effectiveness. Commissioner Payne inquired about long-term data storage and asked whether WQPD had provided information to Emerald Ridge residents regarding declining water levels. Mr. McClanahan explained where monitoring data is stored and noted that WQPD has collected and shared data with Emerald Ridge residents since 2012, including attendance at HOA meetings. The Board agreed to revise the activity to read, "Annually reassess groundwater and surface water networks to optimize their effectiveness."

During discussion of groundwater and surface water sampling projects, Commissioner Payne asked what parameters were being tested. Ms. McBroom explained that these monitoring efforts are ongoing. Ms. Ohs-Mosely noted that both activities are standard operational tasks and suggested they be recognized as such.

The Board also discussed recreational water monitoring. Ms. McBroom explained that testing has included nutrients, algae, and harmful algal blooms. Discussion followed regarding whether DEQ performs similar monitoring. Ms. Johnson stated that DEQ generally conducts testing in response to reports or complaints. Commissioner Payne expressed concern regarding the results and asked Ms. Hammer about her knowledge of changes to testing metrics used in water quality assessments. The Board discussed legislative changes affecting testing requirements, current monitoring methods, and opportunities for public education. Ms. McBroom emphasized the importance of continuing monitoring efforts, while Ms. Hammer recommended revising the activity to read, "Assess the need to monitor recreational waters," particularly if no other entity is conducting the monitoring.

Discussion regarding critical water resources focused on watershed and sub-watershed priorities within WQPD boundaries and areas where additional work remains. Ms. Hammer and other Board members agreed that the proposed wetland and riparian area study could be incorporated into this broader activity.

The Board placed the following activity on hold pending further discussion:

Complete a baseline study to delineate wetlands and riparian areas within the WQPD and incorporate the data into the WQPD Interactive Map.

Monitoring & Sampling Discussion- On hold:

Ms. McBroom noted that wetland mapping had previously been completed, which Ms. Johnson indicated she had not been aware of. Ms. Hammer expressed support for the activity and stated that the information would be valuable. Ms. Ohs-Mosely noted that wetlands are already protected through regulatory processes and questioned whether the activity fell within the WQPD's scope of responsibility. Following discussion, the Board agreed to place the activity on hold.

The Board declined to include the following activities:

- Public Involvement and Integration Plan.
- Test springs in Dry Gulch near the Old Shooting Range parking lot and in Orofino Gulch for drinking water parameters.
- Develop environmental indicators as a water quality performance measure.
- Achieve cleaner rivers and streams through innovative strategies.

Monitoring & Sampling Discussion on Declined to Include in the Strategic Plan Activities:

During discussion of the Public Involvement and Integration Plan, Commissioner Payne requested clarification regarding the term MS4. Ms. McBroom explained that MS4 refers to Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems. Ms. Ohs-Mosely asked about the need for updates, and Ms. McBroom explained that population growth exceeding 50,000 residents has resulted in DEQ requirements related to participation in county stormwater programs. Mr. Kerins suggested that the concepts associated with this activity would be better addressed through education and outreach activities already included in the Strategic Plan.

Discussion of spring water testing focused on public use of the water sources. Commissioner Payne questioned the value of testing if individuals chose to drink from unregulated sources. Mr. Lewis explained that studies have previously identified contamination concerns, though it was later clarified that he was referring to a separate water source near MacDonald Pass. After discussion, the Board agreed that installing signage warning against drinking the water would be more appropriate than conducting additional testing.

During discussion of environmental indicators, Ms. Hammer stated that the activity was one of the more important proposals under consideration. Ms. McBroom noted that performance measures are already incorporated through Quality Assurance Project Plans (QAPPs) and Surface Water Assessment Plans (SAPs), as well as existing groundwater and surface water monitoring efforts. Commissioner Payne questioned the use of the term "suite," and Mr. McClanahan explained that the term refers to the group of analyses performed by the state laboratory. The Board ultimately determined that the activity was sufficiently addressed through existing monitoring programs.

The Board declined to pursue an activity focused on achieving cleaner rivers and streams through innovative strategies, determining that the concept was either addressed by other approved activities or lacked sufficient specificity for inclusion in the Strategic Plan.

Outreach and Education

The Board approved the following activities for inclusion in the Strategic Plan:

- Work with partners to develop and participate in events as part of standard operational tasks.
- Maintain the WQPD website and display collected data as part of standard operational tasks.
- Promote the WQPD through standard operational activities.
- Distribute water quality sampling options (kits) to residents as part of standard operational tasks.

- Maintain a Volunteer Stream Team program as part of standard operational tasks.
- Collaborate with City and County planning officials, commissioners, sanitarians, and developers on new developments as part of standard operational tasks.
- Provide general information to the public as part of standard operational tasks.
- Continue the Water Watchers program as part of standard operational tasks.
- Provide education and outreach regarding wastewater discharges.
- Establish a process for reporting well water contamination.
- Focus on pollutant reduction efforts, including drinking water contaminants and emerging contaminants.
- Include hydraulic gradient data, surface water quality monitoring results, Helena Valley Controlled Groundwater Area information, and water and sewer WQPDs on the WQPD Interactive Map.
- Board education to include information on private well testing and maintenance, septic system maintenance, and water conservation.
- Support development of a Water Conservation Plan addressing drought, wildfire, and flooding in coordination with City and County partners.
- Promote and encourage green infrastructure practices.

Discussion on Approved Activities:

The Board reviewed several outreach activities that were identified as standard operational tasks and agreed they should remain ongoing components of WQPD operations.

During discussion of wastewater discharges, Ms. McBroom noted that the activity had originally been designed as a presentation topic. Board members discussed whether it would be more appropriately categorized as Board education or public outreach. The Board agreed the topic should focus on community education and public outreach efforts.

The Board discussed pollutant reduction efforts, including potential costs associated with the activity. Members emphasized the importance of focusing on drinking water quality and emerging contaminants. The activity description was revised to reflect those priorities. While discussing additions to the WQPD Interactive Map, Mr. McClanahan provided information regarding the effort required to incorporate additional data layers. He noted that development of the hydraulic gradient layer would be the most labor-intensive component of the project.

During discussion of a Water Management Plan, Mr. Kerins noted that development of such a plan may extend beyond the primary responsibilities of the WQPD. Ms. Hammer expressed strong support for including the activity, and the Board agreed to retain it as a collaborative effort with City and County partners.

Ms. Hammer also expressed strong support for promoting green infrastructure practices. Ms. McBroom noted that green infrastructure initiatives would align with and support future MS4 program requirements and activities.

The Board declined to include the following activities in the Strategic Plan:

- Sponsor a WQPD science fair focused on water-related topics.
- Stormwater management.
- Nutrient pollution.

- Promote water conservation.
- Develop outreach and educational materials regarding xeriscaping, stormwater, nutrients, well and septic management, irrigation, and other water management best practices.

The Board declined to include the following activities in the Strategic Plan:

The Board discussed sponsoring a WQPD science fair but ultimately chose not to include the activity in the Strategic Plan.

The Board declined to include separate activities related to stormwater management and nutrient pollution, determining that those topics were sufficiently addressed through other approved activities and existing programs.

The Board also determined that promotion of water conservation was already incorporated within other approved Strategic Plan activities and did not need to be included as a standalone item.

Similarly, the Board agreed not to include a separate activity for developing outreach and educational materials related to xeriscaping, stormwater, nutrients, well and septic management, irrigation, and other water management best practices, as those topics would be addressed through broader outreach and education initiatives already approved for inclusion in the Strategic Plan.

BOARD MEMBER ROUND-ROBIN

- **LCC Commissioner Payne** – Commissioner Payne noted budget work continues with the commissioners until finalization on July 9th. She added she is a little grumpy with the public is complaining about road work needed but not wanting tax increases.
- **City of Helena** – No Report
- **City of East Helena** – No report
- **Board of Health** – No report
- **Helena Citizens Council (HCC)** – Ms. Hammer advised of the upcoming meeting to meet the new City Manager on July 10th as well as, the HCC offered comment on the City of Helenas proposed budget.
- **Conservation WQPD (CD)** – Mr. Sargeson noted the newly appointed CD Supervisor, Rebecca Boslow King might be interested in taking the open WQPD board seat.
- **Public at large** – None

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

There being no public comment; the meeting was adjourned at 5:53pm.