



**EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD MEETING
Virtual Teams Meeting
October 16, 2020
9:30 A.M.**

MINUTES

Roll Call and Introductions

Board Chair Dr. Rolf Wegenke called the meeting of the Educational Communications Board to order at 9:35 A.M. A roll call of Board Member attendance was taken and recorded. The complete attendance list follows:

Board Members Present: Representative Dave Considine
 Jose Delgado
 Niles Berman
 Jose Delgado
 Jim Zylstra (WTCS President Morna Foy designee), Vice-Chair
 Alyssa Kenney
 Eileen Littig
 Senator Luther Olsen
 Kurt Kiefer (DPI Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor
 designee)
 Heather LaRoi (UW System President designee)
 Rolf Wegenke, Ph.D., Chair
 Bohdan Zachary

Absent: Leah Lechleiter-Luke
 Chris Patton (DOA Secretary Joel Brennan designee)
 Senator Fred Risser
 Tara Senter
 Representative Pat Snyder

Approval of Minutes from the July 17, 2020 ECB Board Meeting

The approval of minutes occurred later in the meeting, between agenda items 3 and 4. At that time, Senator Luther Olsen moved, seconded by Eileen Littig, to approve the July 17, 2020 meeting minutes. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.



AGENDA ITEM 1. Report of the Board Chair

Dr. Wegenke recognized Senators Risser and Olsen who are retiring from elected office next January. Dr. Wegenke presented plaques for the retiring Senators and read the inscription from the plaques while they were displayed for the Board: “The Wisconsin Educational Communications Board recognizes Senator Fred Risser and Senator Luther Olsen for outstanding service as a member of the Board representing the citizens of Wisconsin. We applaud your active support of the ECB and your passionate advocacy for the role of public broadcasting, technology, and education in advancing Wisconsin’s future.”

Dr. Wegenke added that he considers it an honor to have worked with Senators Risser and Olsen and has always been impressed by their civility, openness, and ability to listen. Dr. Wegenke noted these skills have been valuable to the Board for many years and he appreciates the Senators willingness to serve. Dr. Wegenke added that if there was an award for being a decent human being, Senators Risser and Olsen would be worthy and appropriate recipients.

There were no questions or comments regarding the Board Chair report.

AGENDA ITEM 2. Report of the Executive Director

Dr. Wegenke introduced Marta Bechtol, ECB Executive Director, and reminded board members that a copy of the Executive Director’s report was included in the board packet distributed in advance of today’s meeting.

Ms. Bechtol echoed Chairman Wegenke’s comments regarding the retirements of Senators Risser and Olsen and noted that she appreciates the Senators’ help, guidance, advice and encouragement to the Board and herself over the years and they will both be missed.

Ms. Bechtol provided a “State of the Agency” update on the agency’s operations during the public health emergency. Ms. Bechtol reported that ECB’s Beltline office remains closed to the public while most employees continue to telecommute. Ms. Bechtol reported that staff have adapted to workplace mitigation strategies including masks, social distancing and personal hygiene (hand washing) measures to protect themselves and co-workers from risk of COVID exposure while working. Ms. Bechtol notes that “pandemic fatigue” is an emerging issue and she worries that the stress is compounded for staff with schoolchildren. Despite these challenges, Ms. Bechtol noted that ECB operations have continued to function at a high level and on schedule. Ms. Bechtol commended all ECB staff for working long hours and implementing extra precautions to protect the health of their co-workers and themselves. Ms. Bechtol thanked supervisors for implementing safety measures and also for the extra time they’ve taken to check in with staff and provide assistance with health and safety protocols.



Ms. Bechtol announced that as of yesterday, PBS Wisconsin's full primary channel service is now livestreaming on PBS.org, the PBSWisconsin.org web player, as well as numerous digital platforms such as Roku, Amazon Firestick, Amazon TV and others. Ms. Bechtol added that PBS Wisconsin's livestream will be added to Samsung TV in 2021.

Ms. Bechtol highlighted activities by the agency and identified how those activities were related to the ECB Strategic Plan. In the area of Direction I, Item 1: "Secure state appropriations that enable ECB to operate the network..." Ms. Bechtol reported that ECB submitted the agency Biennial Budget Request on September 15. Ms. Bechtol reported that the agency request included \$12.6 million GPR which is 30% of the overall agency budget, and \$30 million of program revenue which is 70% of the overall agency budget. The total agency budget request was \$42.6 million over the biennium.

Ms. Bechtol reviewed the Capital Budget Request. Ms. Bechtol reminded the Board that during the last year, ECB has completed a 20-year equipment replacement schedule. Ms. Bechtol reported that ECB is requesting \$3 million per biennium for equipment replacement and in some cases, new equipment when there are opportunities to expand coverage when the FCC makes more broadcast licenses available. Ms. Bechtol reported that FCC Chairman Pai has announced there will be an opportunity to apply for non-commercial educational licenses in 2021 and this fits into the ECB Strategic Plan Direction 1, Item 2: "Seek opportunities to expand service...". Ms. Bechtol noted that ECB Engineers have conducted spectrum surveys and identified areas in the state where coverage could be expanded by improving signal strength or establishing new stations. Ms. Bechtol reported that ECB will seek licenses to bring service to Sheboygan, Rice Lake and Phelps, Wisconsin. Ms. Bechtol reported the total Capital Budget Request was \$3,362,000.

Ms. Bechtol reported on the 2021 agency budget lapse related to COVID and the decision to reduce HD Radio service. Ms. Bechtol reminded the Board that ECB was exempt from the lapse for FY20 but must plan to lapse \$243,500 to the general fund in FY21. Ms. Bechtol reported that ECB and WPR reached a difficult decision to turn off HD All-Classical radio signals at seven stations in Superior, Brule, Ashland, Park Falls, Menomonie/Eau Claire, Adams/Wisconsin Rapids, and Sister Bay. Ms. Bechtol reported that by eliminating these services, the agency would meet the budget lapse by reducing utilities expenditure and retrenching other operating costs. Ms. Bechtol noted that reducing service is never an easy decision but after a thorough analysis, the ECB estimates that fewer than 500 listeners will be affected, and the listeners will continue to receive WPR on their usual FM and AM stations.

Jose Delgado asked Ms. Bechtol to clarify the costs of the HD Service and related equipment. Ms. Bechtol reported that utilities associated with the seven HD Radio stations are estimated to be \$70 – 90 thousand per year. Additional savings will be found in the Capital Budget by eliminating the need for bonding of equipment that will no longer be required.



Ms. Bechtol noted there was little to report regarding the Federal Budget and directed Board members to the notes in her written report, as no action on the federal budget requests that affect Public Broadcasting will not be considered until after the election.

Ms. Bechtol reported that she and Gene Purcell, Director, Wisconsin Public Media, have made no plans for an Advocacy event for 2021 as the public health emergency continues and the Capitol remains closed to the public. Ms. Bechtol reported that she and Mr. Purcell will re-evaluate the situation after the winter holidays.

Ms. Bechtol reported that she attended the August 26, 2020 meeting of the Governor's Broadband Taskforce and the next meeting is scheduled for October 28, 2020. Ms. Bechtol also reported that she is participating in a state interagency workgroup and has established an internal public media workgroup at ECB as well. Ms. Bechtol reported that broadband expansion grant applications submitted by the Wisconsin Public Broadcasting Foundation to the Universal Service Fund were not ultimately successful, but the application process was helpful and wherever possible, the agency will partner with service providers to support grant applications during the next round of grant applications.

Ms. Bechtol asked board members to watch for an email from the ECB related to Public Records Training. Ms. Bechtol noted that board members are required to attend the training which is web based and administered through an online training system at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. Ms. Bechtol reminded the Board that members who work at the University or in State government, and elected officials, may have already taken the training but should let David Cobb know when they receive the email.

There were no questions or comments regarding the Executive Director report.

AGENDA ITEM 3. Engineering: Guy Wire Evaluation, Adam Hargrove

Dr. Wegenke introduced Adam Hargrove, Director, ECB Engineering Division. Mr. Hargrove displayed a Powerpoint presentation and pictures related to Engineering Division's efforts to develop a method of quantitatively measuring the condition of guy wires at ECB tower sites.

Mr. Hargrove discussed the history of the Park Falls, WI tower (WLEF) which was constructed in 1977 and is the oldest and tallest tower in the ECB network. Mr. Hargrove also discussed the structural importance of the guy wires which support broadcast towers and how those wires are exposed to corrosion and deterioration over time, as well as low frequency oscillation or "galloping" at sites with such as Park Falls. Mr. Hargrove reported that two guy wires were replaced at the Park Falls site in 2016 at an expense of \$175,000. Mr. Hargrove reported that ECB estimated the cost to replace the remaining guy wires at the Park Falls site at \$500,000. Before replacing the remaining guy wires, Mr. Hargrove reported that ECB Engineering sought to closely inspect and evaluate the condition of the remaining guy wires. Mr. Hargrove noted that until recently, guy wires were typically inspected from the ground and with the aid of



drones, which were limited to inspecting the outer surface of guy wires. Mr. Hargrove reported that the tower manufacturer provided an estimate to evaluate the tower using aerial drones for \$15,000.

Mr. Hargrove and the ECB Engineering team began researching inspection methods and technologies used for similar structures in other industries. Mr. Hargrove reported that data from a 2011 US Navy study proved useful in identifying the use of magnetic flux sensing equipment to provide quantitative inspection of wire rope. While this technology was in use to inspect bridges and mining equipment, Mr. Hargrove noted that it had not yet been tested on broadcast towers.

Mr. Hargrove reported that ECB Engineering worked with a company that developed a method of using magnetic flux sensors and robotic trolleys to inspect bridge guy wires. They adapted their technology for the use of inspecting broadcast tower guys wires. Mr. Hargrove displayed the company's webpage for the ECB Board of Directors, which featured some pictures of the work that was carried out at Park Falls.

Following this inspection, Mr. Hargrove and the Engineering team were able to evaluate quantifiable data and ascertain the guy wires at Park Falls were within normal levels of wear, and found no damage or issues that would necessitate immediate replacement of the guy wires, an inherently risky and expensive process. Mr. Hargrove reported that the Park Falls tower guy wires would be re-evaluated in 10 years.

Mr. Hargrove reported that such detailed analysis of broadcast tower guy wires while in operation has never been available before and the ECB will continue to utilize magnetic flux sensors inspections at other ECB towers. Mr. Hargrove reported that the La Crescent, Minnesota tower (WHLA) would be inspected in two weeks. Additional inspections include Menomonie, WI in FY22 and Fence, WI in FY23. Mr. Hargrove noted that the towers in Park Falls, La Crescent, Menomonie and Fence are the oldest and tallest in the ECB network.

Senator Luther Olsen asked how much the magnetic flux inspection cost compared to the drone (visual) inspections. Mr. Hargrove responded the magnetic flux inspection and data analysis cost \$24,000 compared to \$15,000 for a drone inspection.

Jose Delgado congratulated Mr. Hargrove and the Engineering Division and commended them for a job well done.

There were no additional questions or comments from board members.



AGENDA ITEM 4. Financial Reports, Aimee Wright

Dr. Wegenke reported that quarterly financial reports were included in the board packets distributed in advance of today's meeting and introduced Aimee Wright, ECB Finance Director to discuss those reports.

Ms. Wright reviewed the financial reports. Ms. Wright reported that fundraising goals remain on target for Radio. Ms. Wright reported that Television fundraising is on target but the data in today's Contributions and Fundraising report have not been finalized due to a financial software upgrade in progress.

Ms. Wright reviewed the Budget to Actual portion of the report. Ms. Wright reported that ECB has expended about 20% of the annual budget, and noted that the report has been updated to reflect a lapse of \$125,300 as Marta Bechtol discussed during the Executive Director report.

Senator Luther Olsen commented that ECB utility expenses were under budget in FY20 and asked if those expenses would be similar for FY21. Marta Bechtol replied to the Senator that while savings were realized in FY20 as a result of replacement of transmitters with newer, more energy efficient equipment, those expenses will increase in FY21 after a number of transmitters were approved for power increases.

There were no questions or comments regarding the Finance Reports.

AGENDA ITEM 5. Strategic Planning Process, Marta Bechtol

Dr. Wegenke asked Marta Bechtol, ECB Director; to lead a discussion related to the ECB Strategic Planning Process. Ms. Bechtol reviewed the development of the ECB's current 2019 – 21 strategic plan and noted that board policies require a new plan to be developed every three years. Ms. Bechtol distributed the current plan in advance of today's meeting and that plan was displayed for the Board. Ms. Bechtol reviewed Board Policy #107 related to the ECB Strategic Plan and the role of the Executive Director to oversee the development and implementation of the plan. Ms. Bechtol displayed a proposed timeline for the Strategic Planning Process which included presenting a draft Strategic Plan to board members at the January 2021 meeting, and a final plan to be adopted at the April 2021 meeting.

Ms. Bechtol reviewed the ECB Mission and Vision statements. Ms. Bechtol reminded the Board that ECB's Mission Statement is a distillation of state statute, and that statute has remained unchanged. Ms. Bechtol asked the Board to consider whether any changes are needed to the ECB Mission and Vision statements.

Senator Luther Olsen commented that he considered the Mission and Vision Statements to be the agency's purpose and those statements are stable over time. Senator Olsen suggested that



unless the agency's purpose has changed, there's no reason to change the Mission and Vision statements.

Ms. Bechtol reviewed Strategic Directions from the 2018 – 21 Strategic Plan and displayed them for the Board. Ms. Bechtol informed the Board there are a number of events coming up in the next three years which may impact agency operations including the implementation of Next Gen TV (ATSC 3.0), signal expansion opportunities, the development of rural broadband, budget lapses and unknown costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Niles Berman asked Ms. Bechtol if ECB staff evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, or effectiveness of the strategic directions and are those evaluations shared with the Board as part of the strategic planning process. Ms. Bechtol replied that staff will evaluate the directions and incorporate any recommended changes into the draft Strategic Plan presented to the Board at the January meeting.

Ms. Bechtol noted that she welcomes feedback from Board members today, or before the January meeting concerning the Strategic Directions.

Heather LaRoi suggested removing language related to the reorganization of UW Extension since that process has been completed.

Niles Berman suggested including the ECB's role in public safety in the Vision Statement since it's an important part of the agency's mission.

Alyssa Kenney suggested updating the language of Strategic Direction 1: "Strengthen the impact, reach and performance" to better reflect the goal of ubiquitous coverage of the state, and not simply stronger signal strength.

Jose Delgado discussed the economic effectiveness of the agency's operations, and the Board's earlier discussion regarding the retirement of HD radio transmitters. Mr. Delgado suggested including a similar cost benefit analysis of agency operations in the strategic directions. Mr. Delgado noted this could help the agency identify operations that are not cost effective, and in some cases, those resources could be allocated to other areas. Mr. Delgado volunteered to draft some suggested language that he would forward to Ms. Bechtol.

Senator Luther Olsen suggested strengthening the language of the Strategic Direction 2 and the action items to incorporate Mr. Delgado's suggested change. Senator Olsen suggested the Direction include "good stewardship of agency resources."

Ms. Bechtol commented that the Strategic Plan action items would be an appropriate place to include language related to the allocation of resources and assessment of their use, and she thanked Mr. Delgado for his willingness to draft suggested changes.



Dr. Wegenke thanked everyone for today's discussion and asked board members to provide any additional suggestions to Marta Bechtol as she prepares the draft Strategic Plan for the January board meeting.

There were no questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 6. Proposed Meeting Dates for 2021

Dr. Wegenke asked board members to review the proposed 2021 meeting dates (January 22, April 16, July 23, October 15) and let him know by next Monday, October 19 if there are any conflicts. Dr. Wegenke will verify there are enough members to reach a quorum for each date before they are finalized.

There were no further questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 7. Questions/Comments from Board Members

A number of Board members thanked Senator Olsen for his public service and for serving on the ECB. Senator Olsen thanked everyone and encouraged the Board to keep up the good work.

Eileen Littig shared that she had contacted Ms. Bechtol to discuss strengthening diversity in the ECB workforce and asked Ms. Bechtol to discuss the agency's plan. Ms. Bechtol noted that ECB has succeeded well in the recruitment and hire of veterans and that ECB is meeting minimum targets for women and minorities, but it remains challenging to reach some populations for recruitment. Ms. Bechtol reported that she is developing a diversity and inclusion plan and will be meeting with staff from the Bureau of Equity and Inclusion at the Department of Administration before the end of the year to develop action steps which she is hopeful will lead to more diverse job applicants. Ms. Littig commended Ms. Bechtol and the ECB for those efforts and also suggested that more diversity in Board member composition would positively reflect the diversity of the state itself.

There were no further questions or comments.



AGENDA ITEM 8. Adjournment

Jim Zylstra moved, seconded by Senator Luther Olsen, to adjourn. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote. Dr. Wegenke announced the meeting adjourned at 11:00 A.M.