**DATE**: July 25, 2021

**TO:** Carolyn McVicker

Chair, PCJWSA Board of Directors

**FROM:** Rob Mills

**SUBJECT**: Teamwork and Communications Workshop

Summary and Recommendations

The purpose of the workshop your board requested was to improve teamwork and communication among board members. My individual interviews with board members and Authority Manager, conducted in preparation for the workshop, confirmed recent breakdowns in communication and resulting mistrust. Their insights were helpful in developing the overall objective and content of the workshop.

Our stated objective for the workshop was: “*As a board,* gain understanding, come to agreement, and commit/re-commit to the following principles”. The principles referred to are based on guidelines from SDAO resources and are also the subject of a PCJWSA Board of Directors policy adopted in 2018. In effect then, the objective was to gain board members’ *re-commitment* to principles of effective communication and teamwork they had previously agreed to, though not unanimously.

I recommend that the Board re-visit these principles as a regular agenda item in board meetings over the next few months. Take a few minutes at each meeting to discuss their importance, how the principles support teamwork and good communication, and share examples of how the principles play out in board members’ duties and responsibilities. This on-going conversation will help embed the principles in board members’ mindsets and eventually lead to more robust commitment that will, in turn, smooth the communication flow and improve teamwork.

* **One of the most significant responsibilities as a board member is to understand that the board is a team and members need to work together**.

Board members seemed to generally embrace this principle as stated. However, one/possibly two board members stopped short of explicit commitment over concerns about balancing individual styles/preferences with team membership/conformity. Nuances such as these can be cleared up with on-going discussions about the distinction and sharing board members’ examples of maintaining the right balance.

* **Overall, the role of a board member is to make and approve district policies, set the direction of the district, make decisions, establish strategic goals and objectives, and be an advocate for special districts.**

Board members seemed clear about this stated definition of their role as policy makers rather than subject matter experts. But at least one member indicated he felt constrained when not free to share his operational knowledge in conversations with constituents. It was pointed out that communication with the public is the role of the Authority Manager. Again, this is a nuance that deserves more discussion about how board members are to deal with the distinction between being a policy maker versus subject matter expert.

* **District board members have no individual powers separate from the powers of the board and have no authority to act individually without delegation of authority from the board. If a board member acts without authority from the board, the individual can be exposed to personal and district liability.**

One or two board members seemed to have difficulty fully accepting the boundaries on their authority imposed by this principle. In the absence of a comprehensive delineation of the authority its members have/don’t have, boards must rely on the basic understanding and good judgement of its members. Continued discussion of specific examples should lead to better understanding of the implicit and explicit authority PCJWSA board members have so that they may exercise good judgement.

* **Individual board members have no individual authority to direct district staff or administrative activities without delegation of that authority from the board.**

This principle is narrower in scope in that it speaks directly to board interactions with staff/administration. There seemed to be more straightforward acceptance by board members of the limitations posed by this principle and good understanding of the appropriate lines of authority or “chains of command” in the organization.