

September 20, 2021

Dear Members of the Executive Committee:

I'd like to sincerely thank you for the opportunity to attend the 2021 PWX National Conference in St. Louis as part of the Wisconsin chapter Emerging Leader Program. PWX was unlike any conference I had ever attended and my experience was beyond what I anticipated. The theme of "Stronger Together" resonated throughout the conference and it was inspiring to see and meet other public works professionals from around the county. Since I was chosen to participate as a member of the Wisconsin chapter Emerging Leader Program in June of 2020 through the PWX conference, I have gained knowledge, experience, professional relationships and an increased awareness of how important the public works profession is to our communities.

#### First-Timers & New Members meeting—Sunday, August 29<sup>th</sup>

My experience at PWX began with attending the First-Timers & New Members meeting on Sunday morning. The YP Committee Chair, Kati Horner, provided her experience as a Young Professional with APWA. She explained that APWA is like a family in which APWA members are available to help and support each other and encouraged all young professionals to "drink the APWA kool-aid". At this session attendees were provided tips and tricks of how to get the most out of their PWX experience, including additional young professional events and the PWX app, and overall involvement with APWA. With those at our table, we shared where we were from, our job title and what we hoped to gain from our time at the conference. This meeting was a great kick-off to the conference and I would highly encourage any new member and/or young professional attend this meeting at future conferences.

#### General Sessions—Sunday and Tuesday

The general session on Sunday was a fantastic and inspiring start to the conference! The speaker, Ben Nemtin, spoke about his personal experience of going through a depression to then creating, what seemed to be, an impossible bucket list. His bucket list began with a simple list of items he and his friends wished to achieved but their list grew to not only complete a bucket list item for themselves but also give back to others.

From this experience he created *5 Steps to Make the Impossible Possible*:

1. Write—write down your dreams
  2. Share—talk about your dreams
  3. Persist—work, continually, to achieve your dreams
  4. Moonshots—shoot for unrealistic goals
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#### 5. Give—helping others fills you up

During the session, attendees were asked the question “what do you want to do before you die?” The entire session inspired me to think about my bucket list and my goals that I have been afraid to pursue because they felt impossible. I left this session energized for the rest of the conference and my future goals that I would achieve.

Tuesday’s general session was a panel discussion about resiliency and natural disasters. The session focused on the Texas winter weather disaster that occurred in February of 2021 and reviewed the importance of planning for the unprecedented events that public works and our communities can face. The panelists shared their lessons learned and how communities should create response plans in the event a natural disaster occurs in their area. From this session I was persuaded to attend “Public Works, the Other First Responder’ in the City of Houston” education session following the general session to hear more about emergency management and how Houston responded to their winter weather event.

#### Educational Sessions—Sunday, Monday and Tuesday

I was amazed by the variety of educational sessions offered at the conference which occasionally made it difficult in selecting which session to attend. I focused on sessions that related to leadership, management and GIS as these areas interest me and are key topics within my role. I began my education sessions with “Rapid Deployment, via-the Award-Winning and Industry Changing Two-Day ‘Kick-Off’ meeting, aka—“How to Build and Lead Highly Effective Teams.” This session provided an overview approach to building and leading effective teams and focused on the importance of a leader. A few items I took away from this session include:

- Indecision is the #1 reason that leadership fails
- Goals and objectives are important but what is the vision
  - Leaders have vision while managers keep the status quo
- “Management actions are responsible for 85% of all problems”
- Tools such as:
  - Kotter’s 8 stage model for change
  - The Seven-step visioning process

During this session the speakers explained that they were compacting a semester’s long course into this session. While the session provided a great overview, it made me desire more time to review the subject matter. Following my attendance at the conference, I’ve done additional research on the items that I took away to see how I can incorporate this into growing professionally as a leader and what I need to work on to become a better leader.

Another session, “Learning Leadership: APWA’s Leadership Framework,” provided a summary of the five practices of exemplary leadership: model, inspire, challenge, enable and encourage. I was motivated by the five practices being all verbs which signified that leaders need to take action and continue to take action to professionally grow to become a better leader. A quote from the session, “leadership is the ability to influence and guide positive

change,” made me realize the importance of being an influential and positive leader by utilizing the five practices rather than being in a leadership role and dictating to staff. Being a leader takes time and effort and having the opportunity to attend the PWX conference helps leaders continue to grow.

All of the educational sessions provided the opportunity for continued professional growth along with gaining knowledge about topics that I may or may not have been involved with, such as a natural disaster and emergency management planning. I also attended several GIS focused sessions in which communities provided how they utilize GIS for public works functions as well as other available technology within GIS that could be incorporated. Overall the variety of sessions available allows public works professionals to focus on key areas that are important their roles or municipalities.

### Exhibitor Hall

This portion of the conference was far beyond what I was expecting. Initially I thought this would be a small variety of vendors and products to look at but I was extremely surprised when I entered the exhibit hall on Sunday. There was a wide variety of equipment vendors, technology vendors along with education opportunities at the exhibitor solutions theater. I attended two exhibitor solutions theater sessions “Leveraging ArcGIS to Efficiently Manage Assets and Infrastructure” along with “Asset Lifecycle Management with Cityworks.” These brief sessions provided a summary of tools that could be utilized to aid in the efficient management of the assets handled by public works. While at the exhibit hall, I spoke with NEXGEN regarding their software product and they provided a tutorial of how their product evaluates risk for the assets tracked within their software. Overall I was profoundly amazed and at times overwhelmed with the exhibitor hall. I encourage other new members and/or young professionals budget their time in order to be able to tour the entire floor throughout the conference.

### Social Events and Technical Tour

One of the main foundations of the PWX conference is the ability to network and meet fellow public works professionals from around the county. From the general sessions, educational sessions to the social events and technical tours, the conference attendees are afforded the opportunity to meet new people and learn about what they do in their job for public works. From walking into the conference on the first day where I met a new member from Nevada to introductions at the First-Timers and New Members breakfast meeting a public works professional from Georgia to spending time with fellow Wisconsin chapter members at The “Get Acquainted Party” held at Ballpark Village, the conference provides the space and time to meet so many public works professionals. The “Get Acquainted Party” was a networking

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party where attendees could relax and enjoy live entertainment after a great opening day of sessions.

I also attended a technical tour at the St. Louis Aquarium and received a behinds-the-scene tour of the facility. Tour attendees were shown the facility and provided knowledge about the animals but also information on how the facility was changed from being a mall to what it is today. I learned that there is approximately three miles of pipes within the Aquarium alone to operate the water habitats for the animals along with the daily duties of the staff to assure the animals are provided the best care possible. This tour was a great opportunity to see a local tourist site in St. Louis, to learn about the daily responsibilities and overall facility structure and operation system.

#### Overall Experience

The 2021 APWA PWX conference was an experience I won't soon forget. It was a unique experience that inspired me to continue my leadership development, learn about new approaches and technologies available for the public works profession, and the ability to meet people from around the country. The theme of "Stronger Together" seems like a theme that should continue for APWA and the public works profession. While each public works position may be different, we can learn from one another to make us stronger together in our job performance and how we can impact our communities. I again want to thank you for providing me with the amazing opportunity to attend PWX and be a part of the Emerging Leader program through the Wisconsin chapter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aimee Irwin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Aimee Irwin  
Assistant to the Public Works Director  
Village of McFarland  
608-838-7287  
[aimee.irwin@mcfarland.wi.us](mailto:aimee.irwin@mcfarland.wi.us)

