

November 29, 2022

Chris Tippery, P.E.  
APWA WI – Leadership & Management  
37944 Wildwood Lane  
Summit, Wisconsin 53066

***Subject: Emerging Public Works Leaders Program: 2022 PWX Conference Experience***

Dear Members of the Executive Committee:

I'd like to start out by thanking you all for the amazing opportunity to attend the 2022 PWX event down in Charlotte, NC. It was an amazing honor to represent the Wisconsin Chapter and I was completely blown away by how welcomed I was by my co-chapter attendees! My involvement in APWA at the Wisconsin Chapter level had only just started a little over a year ago, and already I feel so connected with this organization. I never expected, when attending my first conference in the Fall of 2021, that I'd end up being so involved and get the opportunity to represent the Chapter on the National level.

Through conversations leading up to the event with my Mentor and coworkers who had attended the event in the past, I thought I had an idea of what to expect, but nothing could have prepared me for what proved to be one of the best 4 days of my professional career! The opportunity to go to PWX provided by the 2022 Emerging Public Works Leaders Program has been such a huge benefit to me in ways I never would have expected. I was introduced to countless new mentors, attended so many amazing sessions, saw innovative new products on the national vendor floor, and was pushed to apply to the National ELA program. It was because of my acceptance into the Emerging Public Works Leaders Program that I was pushed to apply to the Emerging Leaders Academy, a program I know so many within our Chapter have attended in the past. I believe it was this program that played a huge role into getting accepted into the 2022/2023 Emerging leadership Academy!

I've summarized some of my highlights from my 2022 PWX experience below.

**Opening Session**

I flew into Charlotte first thing in the morning on the Sunday of the conference. I had just enough time to check into my hotel and get ready and head over to the Conference center before the Opening session kicked off. I was instantly blown away by the sheer size of the conference. I was in awe to be surrounded by so many other public works professionals! The opening session was the perfect way to kick off the week.

Keynote Speaker Seth Mattison opened the conference with an informative talk on Leadership Insight in the new world of Work. He highlighted how the newer generations are changing the workplace. I found myself nodding in agreement several times throughout his presentation. The idea of how to connect to a new younger generation was a theme I found throughout several presentations. It was this topic that stuck with me all the way to my attendance of the National ELA retreat in Kansas City. There we further

discussed the ongoing issues with workforce and succession planning. These discussions grew into what would become our class project to be presented at PWX 2023 in San Diego.

In addition to Seth, we also heard from past president Stan Brown and CEO Scott Grayson. It was so great to see our APWA leadership in person as they got us excited for the conference.

### **General Sessions**

One of the biggest things my mentor, Kamron Nash, highlighted about the PWX conference was that the general sessions were a tier above the Chapter conference sessions I was used to. I had such a hard time deciding what sessions I wanted to attend, but I was glad to have planned in advance of the conference. I wanted to get a mix of sessions that would benefit my personal career and sessions I could take back to benefit the Wisconsin Chapter. The wealth of knowledge I was able to soak up in such a short time period was amazing. I tried to do a mix of sessions I was personally interested in and topics I thought I could bring back to benefit the Wisconsin Chapter.

I found the lightning round sessions and the short sessions on the Equipment floor to be some of the most rewarding. Something about getting as much information into a 10 – 15 minute presentation really makes for informative and exciting sessions. It also allowed me to see so many of the amazing vendors between the sessions. I found the various Roadway Rehabilitation presentations to be the most informative. There were several techniques and products that I learned about that I was excited to take back to the communities I work with.

I attended several sessions surrounding the concept of Small Cities/Rural Communities. These sessions opened my eyes to a lot of the problems lots of the communities I work with face all the time. I was very interested in these discussions and to hear how different communities were handling different situations. I was excited at the idea of having these conversations with communities at the Wisconsin chapter and hope to one day facilitate these types of sessions. I'm a strong believer in the idea of bringing communities from different areas together to learn from one another and help each other grow!

I targeted several sessions at the conference in hopes to take what I learn and apply it to the Young Professionals Committee I Vice chair at the Chapter level. The session "Are you the one? An APWA Mentorship Mashup" drove home the importance of a good mentorship program as well as how to go about setting up a successful program. The session highlighted the importance of participation at both the Mentor and Mentee levels as well as how important it was that everyone's time is respected. We then broke out and paired up with different individuals based off a quick personality assessment. I was able to make a connection and form a relationship with a new mentor in a short 15-minute conversation. My hopes are that we can adopt the concepts from this session and create our own mentorship program at the Wisconsin chapter.

### **Exposition Floor**

The exposition was amazing! I'm pretty sure the moment I rounded the corner and caught my first glimpse of the equipment floor, my jaw dropped. The size of the room and exhibits and number of vendors blew my mind. Whenever I had a break in my session schedule, I would head down to the Expo floor to go

explore and grab a bite to eat. Each time I found myself wandering up to a new table that I hadn't seen before and learning something new! I really enjoyed seeing all the different ways that different regions of the country tackled their unique problems. Pieces of equipment that were developed for specific tasks, processes for roadway rehabilitation that were uncommon in the Midwest, new innovative technology that I hadn't seen before.

I enjoyed seeing the exhibitors from the Wisconsin Chapter as well! One exhibitor that I really enjoyed seeing, was the Neenah Foundry exhibit. They were demonstrating a unique locking manhole lid that I had just incorporated in a design in the past year. I had never actually seen the product in person, so getting that chance halfway across the country was a unique experience. I found talking with all the exhibitors to be extremely rewarding and look forward for the chance to continue growing these new relationships in the future!

### **Small Cities/Rural Communities Brunch**

One event I was really excited to check out was the Small Cities/Rural Communities Brunch. This was a committee that I was unfamiliar with but was very curious to learn about. A majority of the communities that I serve fall under this umbrella of populations less than 50,000. During the brunch I was introduced to several individuals from across the country and got to talk with them about the unique challenges they faced as a smaller community. It didn't seem to matter where people were working, they all were facing similar problems. At my table the topic of hiring and succession planning was very popular. While we mostly talked about the problems they were facing, we were also able to talk about a few different solutions that some communities seemed to be having success with.

### **Social Events**

Where I felt most welcomed during my stay in Charlotte was during all the social events! From the Get Acquainted party, to the Wisconsin chapter dinner, I always felt welcomed. It was during these events that I got to really know some of my fellow chapter members. We had some amazing conversations, drinks, and food over the course of my 3 nights in Charlotte. I feel like the opportunity to really network with your fellow members is amplified when you are across the country together and get to explore the City.

Speaking of the City, Charlotte was an amazing location. Having never been there before, I was impressed with what the city had to offer. I was able to sneak away and explore the outskirts of town and stop into some local shops and talk with some locals. The public transportation made it pretty easy to get around the city, and I even used one of the electric scooters to get from my hotel to the Convention center (super useful when it was really hot and humid!).

### **Overall Experience**

Overall, I felt incredibly blessed to have gotten this opportunity to attend PWX. When I first started getting involved with APWA, I never imagined that it would take me halfway across the country or introduce me to so many amazing people! I know that the experiences and connections I made at this conference are going to impact both my career and personal life for years to come.

From the moment I landed, my PWX experience was nothing short of amazing and I'm so incredibly thankful for this opportunity. I want to personally thank everyone involved at the APWA Wisconsin Chapter for giving me this opportunity and specifically, I'd like to thank The Leadership and Management Committee, The Executive Committee, and my mentor Kamron Nash. I hope to use my experiences not only from PWX, but also the National ELA program, to help grow our chapter and better serve the communities of Wisconsin in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason Atchison". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jason Atchison, PE  
BAXTER & WOODMAN, INC.