

**OKEECHOBEE UTILITY AUTHORITY****WORKSHOP MINUTES**

Thursday, April 11, 2024 1:30 P.M.

Okeechobee Utility Authority

100 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Okeechobee, Florida

**Vice Chairperson Gilliland called the meeting to order at 1:35 P.M.**

**Vice Chairperson Gilliland led all participating attendees and visitors in the Pledge of Allegiance.**

**Vice Chairperson Gilliland addressed Agenda Item No. 1, the following Okeechobee Utility Authority Board Members were present:**

**Board Members:**

John Gilliland  
Harry Moldenhauer  
Tabitha Trent

**Alternates:**

Tom Conely  
Michelle Willoughby

**Absent:**

Melanie Anderson  
Tommy Clay  
Steve Nelson  
Glenn Sneider

**OUA Members:**

John Hayford  
Lauriston Hamilton

**Vice Chairperson Gilliland Agenda Item No. 2 ‘Compensation and Classification Study’** Executive Director Hayford discussed the draft report from Evergreen Solutions, LLC dated march 14, 2024. The results of the compensation and classification study were presented the OUA board at a previous meeting. Executive Director Hayford discussed that Evergreen reviewed OUA data, policies and procedures to understand a baseline condition of the OUA. Evergreen wanted to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the OUA with respect to the employees, the market and relationship to the peer group included in the Study. Executive Director Hayford discussed that in review of the current OUA Job Classification schedule Evergreen found some job titles which seem repetitive. Additionally, a few job titles appeared to be dated and in need of modification to bring them in to current HR practice for defining the position. Evergreen also suggested in adding two classifications. Executive Director Hayford discusses that Evergreen grouped the current OUA pay classifications in to 23 pay grades. Established minimum, midpoint and maximum pay ranges for each pay grade. Executive Director Hayford discusses that Evergreen recommends the Authority adopt a methodology to transition employee salaries into the proposed pay plan that aligns with its established compensation philosophy. Executive Director Hayford discusses the implementation options (Bring to Minimum. Class Parity, Hybrid Parity, Tenure Parity) suggested by Evergreen. Evergreen suggests that the OUA conduct this type of study every 3 – 5 years dependent upon market conditions. Executive Director Hayford discusses that while the final Evergreen report has not been submitted, it is the belief of the OUA team working with the Evergreen team that should not be any significant differences between the draft report you have today and the final report. Board Member Trent discusses that the survey provides a good benchmark, but that the OUA does still have improvements to make.

**Vice Chairperson Gilliland addressed Agenda Item No. 3 'PTO 'Paid Time Off'** Executive Director Hayford discussed that currently full-time employees earn both annual leave and sick leave. Executive Director Hayford discussed employees earn annual leave based upon hours worked and commensurate to their years of service. The amount of annual leave employees receives each year increases with the length of their active employment. The length of eligible service is calculated on the basis of a "benefit year." The "benefit year" begins on the date the employee is hired and starts to earn annual leave. Up to 240 hours of annual leave may be carried over to the next fiscal year. Executive Director Hayford discussed that as a part of the employee benefit review, consideration was given to a paid time off (PTO) evaluation in lieu of employees earning annual leave and sick leave. Executive Director Hayford discusses that employees that have PTO make better use of and managing of their personnel time off. Executive Director Hayford discussed that based upon current policy, employees are entitled to full use of their sick if used as sick time. They are not allowed to cash in their banked sick time on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Converting sick time to PTO will now allow this practice. Executive Director Hayford discussed that based upon the latest tabulation of OUA personnel sick time, a cash basis of this time equated to an expense of approximately \$117,000.00 as allocated to banked sick time. *Tabitha Trent out at 2:33 P.M.* Executive Director Hayford discussed that rather than an accrual rate based upon actual hours worked during the year, apply a tired annual PTO amount to each full-time employee at the beginning of the fiscal year. *Tabitha Trent in at 2:34 P.M.* Board Member Moldenhauer asks about an annual carryover of PTO. Executive Director Hayford discussed that up to 240 hours would be allowed to carry over at the end of each fiscal year. Any time in excess of that amount would be paid out to the employee prior to September 30<sup>th</sup>. This item to be discussed at the next board meeting on April 16, 2024.

**Vice Chairperson Gilliland addressed Agenda Item No. 4 'Paid Holiday'** Executive Director Hayford discussed that on pages 5-13 of the Evergreen report the issue of paid holidays by OUA peers were highlighted with an average of 11.4 days paid holidays. Executive Director Hayford discussed a comparison listing between OUA paid holidays and 2024 Federal holidays. Executive Director Hayford discussed that although the table identifies 10 approved holidays, as per OUA Employee Handbook. It should be noted that only scheduled plant operators and maintenance staff on call received a benefit via a premium pay for work done on Easter Sunday, while the remainder of the staff are generally off on a Sunday. Executive Director Hayford discusses that in an attempt to increase the number of paid holidays by the OUA, staff recommends approval of two additional holidays. Executive Director Hayford discusses that the increase in the number of holidays, will only result in a minimal increase in salary. This item to be discussed at the next board meeting on April 16, 2024.

**Vice Chairperson Gilliland addressed Agenda Item No. 5 'Employee Merit & COLA Payment'** Executive Director Hayford discussed that during discussions with the Board on the implementation of the COLA and Merit adjustments, the decision was taken to defer for further discussion and implementation to after receipt of the Evergreen Salary and Benefits Survey Report. Executive Director Hayford discussed that with the draft study submitted, with an underlined notation that despite the OUA's favorable position compared to its peers, it was recommended that the OUA continue to make proactive decision in order to maintain its market positioning. Executive Director Hayford discussed that both the COLA and Merit adjustments were included in the approved FY24 budget. Board Member Trent asked whether or not suggested \$1.00 per hour and COLA are the same thing. Board Member Moldenhauer asked if the \$103,176 that is presented is a total for all staff. Executive Director Hayford discussed that

the \$103,176 is in fact the budgeted total for Merit increases to include all employees. This item to be discussed at the next board meeting on April 16, 2024.

**Vice Chairperson Gilliland addressed Agenda Item No. 6 ‘Health Allowance’** Executive Director Hayford discussed that the Board approved an increase in the monthly health stipend from \$750.00 per month per employee to \$1,100.00 which from all indication from staff, was greatly appreciated. Executive Director Hayford discussed that include in the presentation from Evergreen’s Salary and Benefits Survey, the report indicated that the OUA’s health benefits package, although being comparable to its peers in three classifications, a notable shortfall in cost share was observed for family coverage compared to peer cost share percentage. Executive Director Hayford discussed possible cost sharing options available for board consideration. Executive Director Hayford discussed that open enrollment is scheduled for August therefore considerations for health allowances should be determined by the July Board meeting. Attorney Conely discussed that the board needs to know the impact on the budget before final decisions should be made. Board Member Moldenhauer discussed that the board needs to address family coverage costs. This item to be discussed at a future board meeting.

**Vice Chairperson Gilliland addressed Agenda Item No. 7 ‘Longevity Bonus’** Executive Director Hayford discussed the current employee recognition plan that is in the current Employee Manual. Executive Director Hayford discussed that currently employees are recognized every five years on their anniversary with a certificate and longevity bonus. Executive Director Hayford discussed that longevity bonus increases every 5 years of employment. Executive Director Hayford discussed that a modification to the longevity bonus could be considered by the board. The suggested modification is to move the longevity bonus to a percentage of the employee salary. Executive Director Hayford discussed that proposed bonus scheduled was modeled from the one currently offered by the City of Okeechobee. There was a brief discussion, this item to be discussed at the board meeting on May 21, 2024.

**Vice Chairperson Gilliland addressed Agenda Item No. 8 ‘Uniform Allowance’** Executive Director Hayford discussed that currently the OUA provides up to \$300.00 per year, per eligible employee for the cost of uniforms. Executive Director Hayford discussed a proposed change to the Uniform Allowance. The change states that the OUA shall pay to each current employee on October 1<sup>st</sup>, \$450.00 towards uniform expenses to meet requirements. All new hires will be required to wait 60 days before they will receive their uniform allowance. Executive Director Hayford discussed that this change does not specifically address footwear (safety boots) or the wearing of other safety related attire. Board Member Moldenhauer asks if the uniform allowance was reviewed by Evergreen as part of the benefits package. There was a brief discussion, this item to be discussed at the board meeting on May 21, 2024.

**Vice Chairperson Gilliland addressed Agenda Item No. 9 ‘Employee Licensing’** Executive Director Hayford discussed that current OUA policy is to have the necessary licenses to meet FDEP regulatory requirements for each of the facilities. Executive Director Hayford discussed that to obtain an FDEP license, the basic requirements are the same: accredited high school diploma or State of Florida approved Ged, pass the FDEP exam and complete the necessary on the job training hours. Executive Director Hayford discussed that each license has a higher hourly rate of pay. Executive Director Hayford discussed that direction provided by the OUA Board was to eliminate the restriction on licensing and to allow employees to obtain the highest license they want. Executive Director Hayford discussed that while to OUA will benefit in the additional knowledge gained by employees, staff need to consider the financial

burden this will add to the OUA. Executive Director Hayford reviews the cost that will be incurred assuming all employees make the minimum for their current FDEP permit and that they will make one step up for FY24. The net total hourly increase for these new license holders is \$18.85 per hour, which equates to an annual multiplied labor cost of approximately \$40,000. This item to be discussed at the board meeting on May 21, 2024.

**Vice Chairperson Gilliland addressed Agenda Item No. 10 Elimination of Single Person Shift'**

Executive Director Hayford discussed that currently the OUA utilizes single person shifts at the treatment plants for nights, weekends and holiday schedules. The Board had directed staff to look into the elimination of single person shifts. Executive Director Hayford discussed that the elimination of single person shifts will require another person to be present, however they would not necessarily need to be a licensed operator. Executive Director Hayford discussed that this person could be a non-certified operator, trainee or other classification. Executive Director Hayford discussed the costs associated for each of the treatment plants. Executive Director Hayford discussed that OUA administrative staff will investigate shift day time personnel to night/weekend duties to eliminate the immediate need for hiring the eleven additional staff needed. Staff intends to hire on new staff in incremental elements to minimize training on existing staff. The cost the cost to eliminate the single shifts is projected to be approximately \$409,000. Executive Director Hayford discussed that the projected sick, vacation or holiday time coverage would be approximately \$300,000. Board Member Trent asks if staff have discussed with other utilities if they have single person shifts and if so, what safety factors are in place. Executive Director Hayford states staff can reach out to other utilities to discuss.

**Vice Chairperson Gilliland addressed Agenda Item No. 11 'Public Comments'** There were none.

**There being no other business, meeting adjourned at 3:57 P.M.**

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE AND BE ADVISED that if a person decided to appeal any decision made by the Okeechobee Utility Authority with respect to any matter considered at this meeting, he/she may need to ensure that verbatim record of the proceeding is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. A CD recording of this meeting is on file in the Executive Director's office.

  
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Chairperson

  
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Executive Director (Secretary)