

Washington State Geologist Licensing Board meeting transcript – September 12, 2024

Carla Brock (00:09):

All right. It's 10:01 AM on September 12th, 2024, and I'm calling this regular board meeting of the Geologist Licensing Board to order. The Board will provide an opportunity for public comment during the meeting. As a courtesy, we encourage participants to mute their mics, or your phone if you called in on your phone, when you're not speaking to reduce background noise. Please remember to unmute your mic or your phone when you're speaking. For Board members, to help us capture information correctly, please state your name when making comments. Sydney, please go ahead and take the roll call.

Sydney Muhle (00:54):

Chair Brock?

Carla Brock (00:55):

Present.

Sydney Muhle (00:57):

Vice chair Gillum?

Carrie Gillum (00:59):

Here.

Sydney Muhle (01:01):

Board Member Halbert?

Bill Halbert (01:08):

Here.

Sydney Muhle (01:11):

Board member Hanell?

Casey Hanell (01:13):

Present.

Sydney Muhle (01:15):

And Board Member Dudley?

Noah Dudley (01:17):

Present.

Sydney Muhle (01:18):

All right. And Board Member Struthers notified me he would not be able to attend today.

Carla Brock (01:28):

All right, we have a quorum. The first thing on our agenda to do is to approve the agenda for the meeting today. Did everyone get a chance to review the agenda and is there any reason to discuss or revise the agenda for today's meeting? Okay. If not, can I have a motion for approval?

Casey Hanell (02:03):

This is Board Member Hanell. I move to approve the agenda.

Carla Brock (02:11):

And a second?

Bill Halbert (02:12):

Halbert seconds it.

Carla Brock (02:15):

All right. All those in favor of approving the agenda as provided, please say aye.

Bill Halbert (02:21):

Aye.

Casey Hanell (02:21):

Aye.

Carla Brock (02:28):

Any nays or any further discussion? Okay, the agenda is approved as provided. Next on the agenda is to approve the meeting minutes from the September 14th board meeting. We were provided those with the original licensing board meeting package two weeks ago, I think. Is there any discussion of the meeting minutes before we vote on accepting them? Okay. If not, can I have a motion for approval of the September meeting minute? Oh, the June. Should be the June 2024 meeting minutes is what we are approving.

Sydney Muhle (03:26):

That's correct. I apologize.

Carla Brock (03:29):

Not the September 2023 minutes.

Sydney Muhle (03:31):

I'm just jumping into the future. Or I guess in the past.

Carla Brock (03:36):

Way back into the past.

Sydney Muhle (03:39):

Yep.

Noah Dudley (03:40):

This is Board Member Dudley. I move to approve the June 2024 meeting minutes.

Carla Brock (03:47):

Thank you. Is there a second?

Bill Halbert (03:50):

Board Member Halbert seconds that motion.

Carla Brock (03:54):

Okay. Any further discussion? All right, all those in favor of approving the June 2024 meeting minutes, please say aye.

Bill Halbert (04:02):

Aye.

Group (04:08):

Aye.

Carla Brock (04:08):

Any opposed? Okay, the June 2024 meeting minutes are approved. All right, moving on to old business. Sydney, throw it back to you.

Sydney Muhle (04:27):

All right, so this is our standing agenda item for our outreach update and discussion. On the staff side of things, unfortunately, we don't have anything new to report this quarter. Coming out of summer, our universities and all of our other outreach partners have been out enjoying their summers and are just getting back into the swing of things. So this is usually about the time of year that we start hearing from the colleges and universities seeking board members to participate in webinars or to attend events at the universities. So as we have that contact, we'll be reaching out to them as well but usually they beat us to the punch. And so as we have that contact we'll be reaching out to board members, seeing who would be available to participate in those items. But the Board has kind of had this as a standing agenda item, so wanted to see if anyone had any additional ideas for outreach opportunities or other things that they would like to pursue.

Bill Halbert (05:46):

I do have a question.

Sydney Muhle (05:48):

Okay.

Bill Halbert (05:48):

So as these opportunities arise, and this is Board Member Halbert, are we notified via email distribution?

Sydney Muhle (06:01):

Yes. Usually we'll send an email out to our Board to see who they would like to or who would be available to participate. Sometimes we'll have requests for board members who may have a specialty license. For example, the most recent outreach event was the hydrogeology symposium and so it made sense to have our hydrogeologists participate in that. But so in that instance, we'll just reach out to the board members who have those particular specialty licenses. But otherwise, we'll send it out to the entire Board and see who's available to attend or participate.

Bill Halbert (06:42):

Thank you.

Sydney Muhle (06:52):

We will keep you all posted on outreach as it comes up.

Carla Brock (07:02):

Thanks, Sydney. I think the next item is also on your list and that's the ASBOG annual meeting update.

Sydney Muhle (07:10):

It is. I think that's going to be the case for most of these items today. So just wanted to provide an update on the ASBOG annual meeting and fall COE. As the Board is aware, Chair Brock is going to be attending on your behalf this year as our subject matter expert for the COE and as the voting delegate and representative for the meeting. We really haven't gotten a big packet of information out yet other than just the general schedule of events. Looks like it's going to be a very good meeting for Chair Brock to attend, but we did include some additional information in your packet that I wanted to make sure the Board saw, in particular for the annual meeting because there is a virtual attendance option for that and that is how I will be participating this year.

(08:05):

ASBOG does a really, really fantastic job with their hybrid meetings and ensures really great public participation both in person and virtually. There's a lot of good discussion that happens on both sides. And so if you have the opportunity to attend virtually, I wanted to highly encourage everybody to at least mark that day on their calendars to at very least listen in and hear the discussion. There's always really great presentations and a lot of good information that's shared. There was a ton last year shared about the background for our psychometricians that have put together the ASBOG examination- excuse me, ASBOG examinations and all of the work that goes into that. It was incredibly fascinating for me as a staff member.

(08:51):

Also understanding all of the, not just the geology exams, two of which are owned and proctored by the Board so those are facilitated by staff, but also we have licensing exams for all of the professions on the regulatory board side. And it was really, really incredibly fascinating learning everything that goes into those and even down to things like the colors that they use on the charts are very specifically designed to help people who are colorblind. And so just really being as inclusive as they can be, making sure that we're setting applicants up for success as best possible. So really good information if you are able to attend virtually. Once that information is available for virtual attendance, I will share that out with all of you as well. They just have not shared that with us yet, but wanted to make sure you had it all on your calendars.

Carla Brock (09:50):

And it's typically an all-day meeting, but they will publish an agenda ahead of time. So if there are things that are especially interesting to you or not, you can choose to kind of pop in and out. They also publish the annual meeting guide or annual meeting... I don't know. It's a big book of information, usually. Sydney, did we provide a state update for the annual meeting summary?

Sydney Muhle (10:27):

I'm working on that right now. I just got it from ASBOG. All the standard forms to fill out for formatting, I just received those last Friday. So I'm working on it right now.

Carla Brock (10:37):

Okay, great.

Sydney Muhle (10:43):

All right, well, as additional information comes out, please watch for that in your inboxes.

Carla Brock (10:53):

Any question on that before we move on to new business from the Board members? All right. Sydney, give us the new business.

Sydney Muhle (11:04):

All right. So moving into our fall exam update, and let me pull up my packet just so I get everything right. It would help if I had pulled up the right packet. Give me just one second. I promise this is the last meeting you guys have me on my own and I will not be quite so discombobulated going in. All right. So for our fall examination we do have 58 candidates who are pre-registered to take the ASBOG exams. 46 of those are for the fundamentals of geology and 12 are for the practice of geology. There are a number of candidates continuing to work on completing their application requirements for their examinations. So we could have a total of up to 100 ASBOG examinees.

(12:00):

That's what we're currently showing in ASBOG's system, but the total number of that generally is a little bit less the closer we get to exams. And so just as a reminder, all of the ASBOG examinations are computer-based now and are proctored at a number of testing facilities around the state. So we'll keep the board posted on those as we move through the testing cycle. I think last year there were a couple of minor issues at testing facilities that did cause

some delays. So I believe ASBOG has worked really hard with the testing facilities in the lead-up, too, to make sure that we don't have those again this year. But I do know that was something that the Board was hearing about last spring.

(12:51):

For our specialty exams, which are hosted by the Department of Licensing, so this is going to be for the engineering geologist and hydrogeologist specialty exams. As of August 30th, we had six candidates who were registered to take the engineering geologist exam and 11 candidates who were registered to take the hydrogeologist exam. So all of these exams will be given on Friday, October 4th. The ASBOG times are sent directly to the candidates and those start times are different depending on the testing location. I know we've had some that start right at 8:00 AM, some that start at 9:00. It just depends on the testing site. And then for the exams that we give in-house, we will be giving the hydrogeologist exam beginning promptly at 8 o'clock in the morning on the fourth and then the engineering geologist exam be in the afternoon beginning at 1:00 PM. And I'm happy to answer any questions.

Casey Hanell (13:55):

Hey, Sydney. This is Board Member Hanell. Are there any pending reviews or approvals for either of the specialty licenses?

Sydney Muhle (14:05):

Not that I am aware of. The review committee did meet last week and cleared up the final two that we were waiting to hear on. So we did have a number of applicants who were in the hopper and either were able to meet all of their examination requirements without needing to move into a review by the committee or others who have deferred to next spring.

Casey Hanell (14:40):

Thank you.

Sydney Muhle (14:40):

Of course. Thank you. We'll keep you guys posted on any issues that do come up around the exams. That way you guys are not hearing about them well after the fact. And then we'll be providing an update post cycle at the December meeting.

Carla Brock (15:21):

All right. I don't know if I need to keep asking you to move on to the next item, but let's move on to the next item.

Sydney Muhle (15:28):

If you tell me just to take over, I can do that.

Carla Brock (15:31):

You could do that.

Sydney Muhle (15:33):

All right. Well, unfortunately our committee and task force reports are going to be very short and that is 100% due to me and my team being short-handed this quarter. I just did not have the capacity to get the additional committee meetings scheduled. And so I apologize that a lot of this work has been on hold for an additional quarter, but as I said at the start of the meeting this is the last week that you have me all on my own. We have help arriving on Monday. So with the engineering geologist exam review committee, that group has had some movement but it's been completely in the background. We do have a date scheduled for the joint review with Oregon and that will be on Monday, September 30th. So we are working on finalizing the details of what that is going to look like, but as of right now Board Member Hanell and Board Member Struthers are scheduled to meet with them on September 30th.

(16:36):

It'll be an all day thing for them. So really appreciate them making space in their schedules. I know that is not an easy thing for any of you and Jim and Casey in particular. So really appreciate them making that space and helping us out in that way. Hydrogeologist exam review committee, I've got to get with Board Member Halbert who was added to that committee at the last meeting, get him up to speed, and then we'll be moving forward on finalizing that review this fall. The application requirements verification committee has met a couple of times this past quarter. They've really dug in on a number of applications as opposed to last exam cycle where we were really diving in on the particulars of individual applicants. Most of their work this past quarter has been on experience verifiers, which is what the committee was originally set up to do.

(17:41):

And so it's been really great having their experience and their knowledge, helping us understand and see the different changes that are happening within the industry and how we're getting so many questions on our experience verifiers. So they are already beginning to formulate some really good recommendations for outreach and for website updates that we can share out with our applicants to let them know ahead of time these are what the requirements are going to be for your experience verifiers. Please make sure that your verifiers do meet these requirements and starting to get some additional knowledge out there. I think that's what we're seeing is kind of the shortfall at the moment. So Vice Chair Gillum, I don't know if you had anything to add?

Carrie Gillum (18:39):

No, I don't have anything. You covered it.

Sydney Muhle (18:42):

All right. The working titles committee, I know they have not met at all. And I think I'm going to meet with Jim this upcoming quarter and see if maybe we need to bring that back at the next meeting as if there's a different way that we can bring that back at the next meeting and get some additional Board input. Because I know we are getting questions on working titles into Board staff, but it's just with the changeover with previous Board Member Tom Tabb leaving and it's just kind of shifted that priority a little bit. He was really the champion for that. So we'll bring that back and see how the Board wants to proceed. And then the WAC review committee, our newest one, we have not had a chance to meet yet. I'm really hoping to get to finalize the

exam reviews before we take on that WAC review, but we are going to at least have a couple of preliminary meetings this quarter and just start outlining what the WAC review is going to look like.

(19:52):

So any questions on any of those before I move on? Okay. All right, so I am going to cover our central investigations and audits unit report. For this round, we have had two complaints this year. I'm showing one in management review with Vice Chair Gillum, but I think that one may have already been completed and just hasn't caught up in the system yet. And then I'm showing one in management review with Board Member Hanell. And then two that, one is still an investigation and one is in a legal review. So we have a grand total of four that are pending, but it looks like two of those came in last calendar year. So are there any questions on that? Okay. All right. And then I will turn it over to Tanya Hessler to give the licensee count report.

Tanya Hessler (20:55):

Good morning, everyone. The licensee counts. We'll start by age and status through August 14th of '24. So from the age groups of 25, or excuse me, under 25 up to 65 and above, we have 1,802 active geologists, 279 geologists in training, and 754 specialty endorsements within those age ranges. From 2021, the total number of licenses for all the license types from 2021, we were at 873 and into 2024 we are at 754. That's the next slide I think, Sydney. And then the next one. Here's the list of the new licensees since the last Board meeting and then the breakdown from January of '24 to July of '24. We have processed 1,031 renewals, 81 new applications, and five new specialty endorsements. Thank you.

Sydney Muhle (22:19):

All right, were there any questions for Tanya before I move on? Okay. And I'll cover this in the next piece, but while we're on this one, at the last meeting the Board had requested that we dive in a little bit on the overall licensing numbers with a year-over-year comparison and see if we... The report as of the last meeting was showing a little bit of a decline and the Board had asked us to dig in on that. I have requested that staff hold off on doing that deep dive until next quarter to make sure that we're getting a little bit more of that full year review to see if it was a true dip or if we just happened to be in a heavier renewal cycle that showed that slight decline while everybody was in pending renewal status. So that way you guys are getting a more complete picture. So we'll bring that back at the next meeting.

(23:18):

All right, and so [inaudible 00:23:20] reviewing our master action item list. Our exam reviews are ongoing, same with our charter review. That has taken a little bit of a slight turn and that's coming with direction from the attorney general's office on some different requirements that they feel should be in there and some things that should not. So we're working through what that needs to look like across all of our boards and we'll bring that back as soon as we're able. The frequency for administering our specialty exams, I will probably be bringing that back at the next board meeting once we're through another exam cycle and having that discussion with the Board to see if that is still something that the Board would still like to take a look at. And I'll be including the cost for administering and the impact to the budget at that point.

(24:15):

The outreach strategic plan, student outreach best practices, is all still ongoing. The hydrogeology scope of practice, that was Tom Tabb and Jim who were taking that on. And again, we'll be taking a look at what that's going to look like and potentially bring that back at the next meeting to see how the Board wants to approach that. I did reach out to California some months ago and never heard back regarding their hydrogeology specialty so I'll reach back out and I apologize that that fell off of my radar to follow up on. Working on scheduling the WAC review committee as we've already discussed. And then same thing with the licensee count data, we've already discussed that. So are there any questions? Well, if not, Madame Chair, I believe it is back to you.

Carla Brock (25:10):

Okay. This is the point in the meeting where the public may address the Board on matters within the Board's jurisdiction, either verbally during the meeting or by submitting written comments in advance. Sydney, do we have any written comments today?

Sydney Muhle (25:26):

No.

Carla Brock (25:27):

Okay. Verbal comments are limited to one three-minute comment. In response to all public comments, the Board is limited to requesting that the matter be added to a future agenda for discussion or directing staff to study the matter further. Inflammatory comments and language will not be permitted. So at this time I will open it up to the public and please raise your hand or say something if you wish to address the Board. Sydney, I don't think we have any public comments today.

Sydney Muhle (26:18):

I don't believe we do.

Carla Brock (26:22):

Wow. This is maybe the fastest board meeting in history. All right, we will go ahead and wrap it up. Are there any board members that have announcements that they would like to share with us today?

Sydney Muhle (26:41):

So I've kind of already been mentioning one. We do have a new team member who will be joining us on Monday and it is somebody most of you have interacted with previously. Our former administrative assistant, Alyssa Woods, who temporarily left us for another agency, we've managed to win her back and so she will be joining us filling Susan's previous role as our program specialist three. So she'll be joining us on Monday. So very excited to have her back and look for communications beginning to come from her, but very excited to get her introduced to our new board members as well.

Carla Brock (27:24):

Great. Thank you. All right. Last chance for board member announcements. Going, going, gone. Do any board members have items that they would like to request be put on the next board meeting agenda?

Casey Hanell (27:46):

This is Board Member Hanell. It's already kind of part of the conversation we're having and I think we're making really good progress with the committee review of both qualifications for people that are applying for specialty exams and then qualifications of reviewers. I'd like to keep that on the agenda and kind of keep refining that process because I continue to get occasional feedback that that's a really cumbersome process that takes a lot of time. And some of the specialty applicants don't know whether they need to be studying or not because they don't know whether they're going to be approved to sit for the exam or not or whether their verifiers are going to be approved.

(28:29):

And I understand on our end the complications with that process as well. But as much as we can continue to refine the information we're putting out for applicants, our internal processes for reviewing and lining those up with exam dates and getting that feedback back significantly before those exam dates so candidates know whether they need to be studying or not, I think that will really help to people in our profession and avoid some frustrations of people that are attempting to get these specialty licenses.

Carla Brock (29:11):

Sydney, do you know if part of that is because we're kind of saving up those reviews for committee meetings? Does that delay things a little bit?

Sydney Muhle (29:22):

That has happened once or twice, but that's generally been as the result of multiple factors and not really the intended saving it up. There have been occasions where we've had scheduling issues, but we've also had a lot of staff turnover in the team that is reviewing those applications. And so there have been a few delays as they've worked through some training and some internal processes. But we can certainly bring back an item outlining what that internal process is and explaining why there is definitely some length of time involved in those reviews. Even when everything is humming along and all of the staff are fully trained and all of the background knowledge in the world, there is still a little bit of time to that process. So we can bring back a report and a presentation on what that internal process looks like and provide a little bit more of that insight and knowledge so our applicants understand why those can take a little bit longer and also some of the delays that we're running into in particular with our verifiers.

Carla Brock (30:41):

Yeah, that would be good. And maybe if Board staff have any ideas on ways that the Board could support removing some of those obstacles that cause delays.

Sydney Muhle (30:56):

Absolutely. I think- oh. Go ahead.

Noah Dudley (31:00):

I'm sorry. Oh, Board Member Dudley here. I don't recall seeing this on the Department of Licensing website, but do we have any examples of maybe redacted experience, or good examples of how to catalog that experience and what would be a template that applicants could use for these specialty exams? Because when I applied, I don't really recall there being a clear way to present that information.

Sydney Muhle (31:32):

I know that we have some very basic information on the website and the committee has already identified that as a need to increase the information that's available on there. And I think what we're seeing, and Vice Chair Gillum can correct me if I'm wrong, but I think we're seeing a large chunk of traditional applicants and then we're also seeing an influx of nontraditional. And the biggest thing that I've been noticing is kind of a change within the industry on how supervision is happening. And so we're really seeing a need to just increase in awareness of what level of supervision is expected for applicants who are trying to gain experience in these fields.

(32:25):

And we're seeing, in particular, a really big increase in a lot of that supervision is being done by engineers. But it's really the engineers are acting in more of a project management role and they're more the ones signing the time cards and making sure the HR policies are being followed, but they're not actually supervising the geology-specific work. And that seems to kind of be where the break is right now is applicants feeling or submitting that, "Yeah, this is the person that signed my time card. They were my supervisor." And it's, "No, we need the person who was supervising the geology work and making sure that the geology work was safe for the public." And that seems to be where the disconnect is right now.

Noah Dudley (33:12):

I see. Thank you.

Carrie Gillum (33:17):

This is Vice Chair Gillum. Just to kind of add on to that, I think our big thing, like we've said, is we need to get more information out, especially at the entry level as people are coming out of college to know what they need to look for. Because I do feel for these applicants that they're like, "I've been working under this person who I thought was the professional I'd be working under for the last four or five years to gain this experience only to find out it's not."

(33:43):

So I think that if anything, if we're able to get more communication out, build up the website like Sydney talked about, that would be extremely helpful because it does put everybody in this kind of really tough position when you've got somebody who isn't the traditional path that we expect. They are basically working under a licensed geologist or a licensed specialty geologist. So we are trying to see where we can, because we have that ability, to take somebody in who doesn't have that as being a verifier. But it does make it very difficult because we're seeing a lot of cross between disciplines that maybe doesn't necessarily apply.

Sydney Muhle (34:31):

Yes. We will bring back a more thorough presentation and report on that. But just to reiterate, the committee is aware of that need and is already working on what that will look like for the next exam cycle.

Carla Brock (34:52):

And I think this was part of the intent of revisiting the WAC, right, was to see if there were ways that we could clarify some of those requirements in rule, not just in guidance, so.

Sydney Muhle (35:04):

Yep. Absolutely.

Carla Brock (35:08):

No, no, no. Okay. Let's go ahead and review the action items for the next meeting.

Sydney Muhle (35:15):

So the only two that we captured are continuing to share out the ASBOG annual meeting information, particularly for virtual attendance as it's available. And then just keeping moving on all of that committee work. And then at the next meeting we'll also have the fall exam results to report out on and we'll add the agenda item from Board Member Hanell on that [inaudible 00:35:43].

Carla Brock (35:53):

Great. Is there anything else before we adjourn? All right. The time is 10:36 and this board meeting is officially adjourned. Thanks, everybody.

Sydney Muhle (36:11):

Thank you.