

MINUTES

**MEMBER SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING
MARIN COUNTY EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT ASSOCIATION**

**Retirement Board Conference Room
One McInnis Parkway, 1st Floor
San Rafael, CA**

July 21, 2009 2:00 P.M.

EVENT CALENDAR 2 P.M. Member Services Committee meeting

CALL TO ORDER Chair Wofford called the meeting to order at 2:08 P.M.

ROLL CALL Present: Hufford, Phillips, Smith, Webb, Wofford
 Absent: None

A. OLD BUSINESS
None

B. NEW BUSINESS

1. Committee Organization and Procedures
Discuss Charter, meeting schedule, procedures, etc.

Trustee Hufford commented that the Committee Charter should include a formal complaint procedure. The Committee agreed that the Charter should be amended to note that member complaints may be submitted in writing through a Committee member. The Committee discussed further procedures to include in the Charter to insure that staff had sufficient time to review and respond to specific complaints before they were considered by the Committee. A few other non-material wording changes were agreed upon. Hearing no other proposed amendments, the Chair requested that the Administrator make the requested changes to the Committee Charter to be recommended for approval by the Board.

The Administrator requested that the Committee review the proposed meeting schedule submitted at the last regular board meeting. Chair Wofford stated that she and Trustee Smith had discussed setting different meeting times to accommodate members such as lunchtime or evening meetings. The Administrator reported that meeting dates will be posted to the website and printed in the MCERA newsletter. Trustee Sweet, commenting as a member of the public, suggested that discussion of future meeting dates be postponed until the end of the meeting.

The Committee discussed additional procedures for considering complaints, beyond those that were recommended for inclusion in the Charter. Trustee Smith suggested that a customer feedback complaint form be developed. Chair Wofford suggested that a postcard

form of soliciting feedback may be developed. The Committee and staff decided to continue to discuss various options.

The Committee and staff also discussed the types of complaints that MCERA receives and ways in which to address those complaints proactively. The Committee discussed the value of the pre-retirement presentation to educating the membership and discussed possible development of a focused disability retirement seminar in the future. The Committee also discussed the value of staff training on member communications to ensure that questions were properly directed to the correct staff member. Trustee Hufford recommended that the committee establish service standards so as to handle all inquiries in as efficient a manner as possible, and noted that if a problem cannot be resolved by staff it can be brought to the committee, and emphasized the need to continue to work with staff and the Board's professional advisors.

The Committee then began discussion of Proposed Member Communication Enhancements (agenda item 3).

Trustee Smith asked when the MCERA newsletter would be published. Administrator Benner stated that an updated draft would be ready for review in two weeks. The Committee and staff discussed reasons for delays in production of the newsletter and discussion ensued regarding benefits and drawbacks of producing the newsletter in-house or through an outside contractor. Benner noted that no funds were available in the FY09-10 budget to produce the newsletter with an outside contractor. The Committee and staff then discussed competing priorities of staff and costs incurred with respect to different types of communication-oriented activities, including committee work. Trustee Phillips stated that although the implementation of board committees was bogging down the system, they were beneficial in the near term. A determination as to their value added vs. staffing impact will be made at a later date.

Administrator Benner stated that member communication had improved greatly with the introduction of pre-retirement seminars, but that they had also resulted in a significant increase in the number of estimate requests received, and the number of reciprocity requests and pre-retirement divorce/dissolution documents that required processing. She stated that in the future mid-level staff will present the presentation, but until the presentation is finalized, senior staff were appropriate due to the complexity of the material. The Chair suggested the Committee discuss how to achieve better results with fewer resources.

In response to a question regarding fiduciary duties and member communications, Counsel Dunning noted that the board could fulfill its duty regarding communication with the membership in various ways, including, among other things, posting information on the MCERA website. She added that in various sectors hard copy newsletters have gone out of favor in the last few years due to the speed at which information changes. The Chair suggested that priorities be established. Trustee Hufford suggested it might be more effective to hire a webmaster than to continue producing a hard copy newsletter. Sweet noted that some members do not have computers.

Trustee Hufford was excused from the meeting at 3:14 PM.

Sweet suggested polling members to determine how they preferred to receive information. Benner reported that since the fixed cost of printing was high, the cost per issue could rise in response to reducing the number of copies printed. The committee suggested the newsletter be printed in house in black and white. Benner cautioned that the quality of the newsletter contributed appreciably to the communication value and that pursuing low cost alternatives could send a negative message to members. She stated that the current printer submitted the least costly bid among competitors polled. Trustee Webb stated that publication of the newsletter was a priority. The Committee and staff agreed.

2. Review of FY08-09 Grand Jury Report Findings

Discuss aspects of the report related to member services and proposed responses.

The Chair recommended discussing the Grand Jury report, with a focus on Findings 5 and 6, and Recommendation 3. Counsel Dunning advised the committee on the legal parameters for responding to the Grand Jury report's Findings as agree, disagree partially, or disagree, with reasons provided for disagreements.

In response to Finding 5, Wofford requested information on the size of the staff required to respond to requests. The Administrator replied that the department has received approximately 6,000 phone calls since February 2008, and that that number did not reflect calls to other extensions, which could raise the number of incoming calls in the last 19 months to about 10,000. Benner stated that there were 175 requests for calculation remaining at the end of May, 2009, and that that figure included 91 new requests that had been received between December and May. The Committee and Administrator discussed staffing needs of MCERA and work flow issues at different times of the year, as well as training of staff regarding the calculation of benefits, as described in the Finding. Benner stated that current staffing levels were comparable to systems of similar size, that MCERA was a significantly more complex system than those other systems, and that work content would be altered by the CPAS implementation. Trustee Webb suggested that defining terms for the Grand Jury in response to each of the Findings would be helpful. Committee members concurred. The Committee engaged in further substantial discussion of Finding 5 and decided that it disagreed partially with the Finding, focusing on the evolution of MCERA staffing needs, the CPAS implementation, and MCERA's current organizational chart.

The Committee then discussed Finding 6, and determined that it agreed with the Finding as it related to "service audits," and that service audits should be defined in the response to the Grand Jury so as to educate the Grand Jury on that part of MCERA's business.

Regarding Recommendation #3, the Committee discussed describing the manner in which MCERA already is implementing the Recommendation and to reference the response to Finding #5.

The Committee directed Counsel and the Administrator to prepare draft responses in light of the Committee's discussion and to circulate the responses to the Committee members. The Committee decided that if any Committee member believes another meeting is necessary to discuss the draft responses after they are circulated, one would then be agendaized. If not, the recommendations could be presented to the Board. Counsel
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reminded committee members not to discuss the draft among themselves outside of a noticed meeting to avoid a potential Brown Act violation.

3. Proposed Member Communication Enhancements

Administrator's report on proposed enhancements to member communications

The Administrator presented customizable form letters that the department will use to enhance communication with members requesting calculations, explaining that the most frequent complaint is associated with the uncertainty that a request has been received, and that this concern would be addressed by the first letter. The second letter would be issued when the file was initially reviewed, and would inform the member whether additional information was required and if not, approximately when the member could expect a response. The third letter informs members who have not provided the information necessary to process after several requests that their submission would be removed from the log and that they could submit a new request at a later date. If staff is not sure what the request is, the letter will also be sent. Chair Wofford said she thought the letters were great and would address a number of current problems.

The Committee and Administrator discussed the nature of many member communications with MCERA staff, including the correction of errors that were found in the calculation of some members' benefit estimates. There was discussion about whether the new data system would correct these errors. Benner replied that the answer depended on the quality of the data. There was also discussion regarding "estimates" versus "final figures" provided after a service audit is completed. There was a discussion of staff morale with respect to member services issues. The Committee also discussed the possibility of including the Member Services Committee at the end of the draft calculation process flow chart that staff is preparing. The Administrator stated that the staff was working hard to address member complaints during the calculation process. The Chair stated that she felt that the new letters would address many of the problems.

The Committee then discussed possible dates for its next meeting.

C. OPEN TIME FOR PUBLIC EXPRESSION

None.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:06 P.M.

Karen Wofford, Chair

Attest: Charnel Benner, Administrator