**MPCA MAPE Meet and Confer  
Friday, October 30, 2020, 2:30 – 4:00 pm**

**Attendees –**

**MAPE: Chair Hannah Field, Claudia Hochstein, Kristin Kirchoff-Franklin, Mel Markert, Anne Morris, Brett Nagle, Joel Peck, Shanna Schmitt, Melissa Wenzel, Dave Kamper (MAPE Business Agent)**

**MPCA: Commissioner Laura Bishop, Kellie McNamara, Reena Solheid, Peter Tester**

* Introductions, listening session overview (Hannah)
  + MPCA MAPE listening sessions took place in August – we asked members what they love about the MPCA and what could be improved upon
  + MPCA staff love their passionate, smart co-workers, the work they do on behalf of Minnesotans, and the work-life balance
* Introduction/discussion of topics MPCA MAPE members would like the MPCA Meet and Confer Committee to work on with agency Leadership
  + Gender-neutral facilities (Hannah)
    - There is a need to made our facilities more inclusive to gender-neutral staff at MPCA
    - MAPE members would like to see the St. Paul office basement showers remodeled to be more inclusive of gender-neutral staff, and for more privacy and comfort (perhaps single-stall bathrooms)
    - Remodel shower facilities at regional offices to be gender-inclusive, where applicable
    - There is one set of gender-neutral bathrooms on 3rd floor, would like to see more in St. Paul and regional offices (correction: there are gender-neutral bathrooms in the St. Paul office on the 1st, 3rd, and 5th floors)
  + Student loan reimbursements (Joel)
    - This issue is new to MAPE bargaining agreements
    - Most of the employees that work at MPCA have higher degrees, which can mean more student loans
    - Stats from the 2018 bargaining survey - 55% of MPCA staff have student loan debt, 20% have little/no confidence they will be able to pay off the debt, 30% still have the same debt as when they began employment, staff hired after 2002 reported student loan debt at the 75% level, staff hired prior to 2002 have very little student debt (not just new employees, also long-term employees)
    - Question to Leadership: Was the student loan reimbursement program considered in the proposed budget most recently submitted to the Governor’s office?
      * Laura’s response: The budget is still under discussion with the Governor’s office. It came back and they asked us to look at reductions in the general fund – restrictive on what we could ask for. We have not asked for it, but we have discussed it.
      * Kellie: Thanks for percentage of membership that has student loans. Do you think members are aware of the federal student loan forgiveness program?
        + Joel: One component of the federal program is that it needs to be a qualifying repayment plan – which is income-based and is a very tough program to be in as a parent.
    - Question to Leadership: What further information is needed/what could we do to make this a higher priority in the budget?
      * Laura: I appreciate the numbers and understand the difficulties of paying off student loans. I don’t know what it will take to make this a priority. It’d be great if we could facilitate a discussion about this at the MMB-level rather than agency by agency.
        + Joel: We aren’t expecting an answer right now, we can provide information as needed.
        + Laura: We need that information to make a good case. Right now we do not want to make cuts to our employee base. We’re getting very little money from general fund. We need to think about trade-offs. How do we tie this into retention? We have a need to retain employees, especially as it relates to diversity.
        + Reena: I am empathetic to the situation, I just paid off my student loans recently using the federal student loan forgiveness program.
        + Hannah: Some members have been denied any reimbursements from the federal student loan forgiveness program. I have heard from staff who have tried to take advantage of it and have not been able to.
        + Melissa: We just want to get the conversation started and relay what is important to our members.
  + Phased retirement (Anne)
    - Anne is the MAPE Local 301 Treasurer. Local 301 donates $900 a month to community charities in lieu of Local monthly lunches – our Local members are generous.
    - We are losing valuable knowledge at the agency as people retire (gave examples from the Remediation Division).
    - Phased retirements can keep seasoned staff from leaving abruptly, and it allows the retiring staff to transfer their knowledge.
    - 36% of members are over age 50; 15% are over age 60
    - We’d like to see employees who have reached the age of 55 and have 10 years of service given the phased retirement option.
      * Melissa: This was a topic of the last MPCA Meet and Confer Team. Staff still struggle with the transfer of knowledge.
      * Laura: Knowledge transfer is a concern. Do you have any research on how many staff are close to retirement?
      * Anne: Half of those over 60 expressed interest in phased retirement (2018 survey).
      * Melissa: Newer/younger staff also showed support for phased retirement in the 2018 survey.
      * Shanna: One person in the Remediation Division took a Voluntary Reduction in Hours. They went to 75% time for 2 years and are retiring soon. That’s the closest we’ve come to phased retirement.
  + Improve the reallocation process (Melissa)
    - Through her work as a steward, Melissa has lots of experience with the reallocation process.
    - Current member example: a new member wanted to pursue reallocation (and had the support of their supervisor), but was told by HR to wait to submit the paperwork until the member had been at their job for a year and half. This is not a requirement of being reallocated.
    - Another member example: a member was told it would be 6-18 months minimum before any reallocation would take affect (after approval from Supervisor and Manager and the paperwork is submitted to HR).
    - We understand that staff may have to wait for reallocation based on their work, but the process seems to be based on timeframes. As a result, members are looking for other opportunities instead of waiting for reallocations.
      * Kellie: What are we expecting to see? How would you like to see it improved? HR has a Tableau report that shows the average time it takes to approve a reallocation, which is based on when HR receives the paperwork. Reallocation language is in the MAPE contract. Retroactive pay is given if it takes longer than two weeks in HR.
        + Melissa: We would like HR to provide more clarity to staff and management. It’s the time before it gets into HR that is frustrating. Many staff don’t know what the procedure is. Some do, but it would be helpful to have a reasonable, established timeline and a more transparent process. Currently, information is not shared with staff.
        + Hannah: We received feedback from members that it took 9-12 months to get the reallocation approved by HR, measured from when the Supervisor approves a reallocation. Members have described the process as a “black hole”. Improved communication of timeline, process, and responsibility would be helpful.
        + Kellie: HR makes the determination on classification. Loss of pay is given after two weeks from when it gets to HR.
        + Melissa: The Supervisor gets the paperwork going but members feel that it is taking a long time to get it done.
        + Kellie: It sounds like more communication and training on the management side is needed. We have a process map and some data to start working on this.
        + Melissa: Can we get that information by end of the year?
        + Kellie: Yes, we should be able to do that.
  + Career advancement opportunities (Melissa)
    - We’d like more information to be provided to members about career opportunities – what it takes to get to different positions. We would like to see the career advancement information on the Lorax revised and promoted to staff.
      * Shanna: A few of links aren’t working anymore.
      * Reena: This is my first time seeing this document.
      * Melissa: We’d like a document that lists every MAPE position at the MPCA (work being done in those positions, qualifications, etc.) as a one-stop shop for positions in MAPE at the MPCA. When the Career Planning document was first developed, there was a lot of excitement around it. We’d like to figure out what to do next with these resources.
      * Hannah: One easy step could be to put it in the PCA Today to let folks that it exists.
      * Melissa: This would celebrate work already done.
      * Kellie: I don’t know if the document is entirely accessible. We made it with MAPE first because MAPE asked for it. When we advertise it, we’ll hear from other unions questioning why they don’t have something similar. Putting something like this together is a resource-intensive process. I’m hesitant to promote it before we have a chance to review it and make it more accessible. We need to figure out how to find the resources to update it and draft similar documents for other unions.
  + Improve transparency and consistency in management decision-making (Mel)
    - We heard from several members that there are gaps in communication – it feels like decisions could include more detail. Examples included COVID, time tracking, attention to our mission, data practices, and Supervisor-dependent decisions.
    - Consideration to have members receive uniform messages from leadership to help them feel more informed about the reasons behind decision – we’d like to see agency/division-wide messages, which would allow everyone to receive the same information at the same time – transparent communication about decision-making would increase trust and reduce confusion.
    - Time set aside by management for their staff is increasingly important, especially during this time of COVID
      * Laura – communication is important to me and I’m always open to questions or concerns about communications and decisions – I feel like we have a good process in place at the higher level – transparency is key, over-communicating is key – I’m open to suggestions – keeping people open and connected – decision making on the Director’s piece – interesting concept of transparency piece – Directors are committed to carrying similar commitment to their leadership
      * Peter – appreciates differences and personas within Divisions – the Commissioner’s Office didn’t want to change what worked well and had created a culture that people enjoyed – we have an open-door policy – email Laura or me and we will get back to you – ideas for better communicating are welcome and we need to know subject matter where a consistent message would be helpful
      * Reena – Kudos to this leadership team – the Senior Management Team (SMT) has weekly meetings, all Division leadership teams have weekly meetings, and we hold all-agency monthly managers’ meetings. The Commissioner holds periodic all-agency leadership (sups and above) Touchbase meetings too. MAPE can help by referring members to the GovDelivery messages, COVID email inbox, COVID update Lorax site – credits the agency for all the forms of communication – it’s a two-way street
      * Mel – we agree, there are good opportunities for dialogue and for members to feel like they are being heard
  + Clarify position classifications, add an ES 5 position (Shanna)
    - We heard in listening sessions that members are frustrated with the Environmental Specialist (ES) series ending at ES4 and the Hydrologist series ending at Hydro 3. Members want career path information about the next step/where can they go. Can the Agency add an ES5 position? We heard from members that when they reach the ES4 level they have to figure out where to go next. Some leave the agency. Updating and publicizing the Career Planning document would be very helpful here.
    - There are frustrations within classifications when staff see their co-workers getting reallocated and they aren’t and they do the same work. We believe modifying or re-writing classifications with more specifics would be helpful. Let us know if specific data would be helpful here and we can help gather that information.
      * Kellie: In regards to modifying classifications in the ES series, this is doable, as MPCA owns the classification (it’s not used statewide). Establishing a new position classification altogether requires a formal process with Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB).
        + Comments from Kellie in a follow up email after the meeting: Major changes to any class spec would require a Hay evaluation. My response to the ES5 class was that we already establish an Environmental Consultant class. That is likely the class we would use for positions with duties surpassing an ES4 class. We specifically did not title the Environmental Consultant as an ES5 because it is not a progression.
      * Melissa: There are Hydro 4/Hydro 5 positions in other agencies.
      * Kellie: Hydro 4/Hydro 5 are Supervisors in other agencies. The MPCA uses Pollution Control Specialist Principal (PCSP) for Supervisors.
  + Centering equity and environmental justice in our work (Claudia)
    - We heard from members that would like EJ at the center of all of our work, instead of as its own, separate thing.
    - We appreciate the agency’s work around the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity in Action (IDEA) program credits. Members want to go beyond and incorporate accountability of staff.
    - We’ve heard concerns from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) members and their view of the agency.
      * Laura: This is really important and we need to bring back this topic at the next meet and confer. All four of us are very invested in this. By hiring Joy Kluttz-Horton and Carolyn Kammeyer, we’ve been able to do more than just talking about it—it’s action.
      * Laura: We’re rolling out a new agency-wide EJ policy soon that has requirements for staff to sign off on and directives for Division Directors to incorporate EJ into program plans. There are 3 main themes: protections in place to retain employees, focus on climate change, and focus on EJ. There are also some operational improvements – we asked for money over and above the general fund for climate change work, because climate change and EJ go hand in hand – we should have more discussion on this in the next meeting.
* Next steps
  + Hannah: We would like to create specific teams to work on the loftier items. We will follow-up with specific action items.
  + Laura: I wish the gender-neutral shower issue was easier. There are significant cost barriers, including ADA-compliance, that add complexity and cost.
* Adjourn