APWA Florida Chapter Conference Review Committee

Chair: Ron Ribaric
Members: Sam May, Rick Keeney, Russell Ketchem, Chris Evers, Chas Jordan

The charter for this committee was to review the operations of the APWA Florida Chapter for the Annual Meeting and Trade Show. This committee will provide options to improve and increase attendance to the conference. The Chapter Executive Committee will decide which if any of the options will be implemented. Please note that there have been changes implemented for the 2013 Show. The start date has been moved to Tuesday and will end on Friday after the Awards Luncheon and the Golf Tournament will not be sponsored by the Florida Chapter but by the local Branch. These changes will be reviewed after the conference to determine their success. The committee was directed not to provide any options that would reduce the quality of the education sessions of the Show.

Each Committee member supplied options and issues on changes to the Show. These were compiled and are presented below.

**MAJOR ISSUE #1 - FORMAT OF THE TRADE SHOW (HEAVY EQUIPMENT OR TABLE-TOP) EVERY OTHER YEAR**

A Table Top conference would include the normal educational sessions and conference activities without the trade show that requires large bulk spaces for equipment.

*Committee Response:* This option brought the most responses from the committee. Some of the suggestions have been tried in the past with limited success. Members of the committee discussed the table top with certain exhibitors that have bulk space. They were informed that the bulk space exhibitors were not in favor of this format. One exhibitor had downsized to a single booth last show and was not satisfied and will obtain a bulk space this year. One concern discussed was that income may decrease without the sale of the bulk space. This suggestion was made to provide an opportunity for the Branches that did not have access to a convention facility to host the conference. Another suggestion was that a tabletop may decrease conference expenses.

*Committee Recommendation:* RETAIN THE LARGE EQUIPMENT SHOW ON AN ANNUAL BASIS

*Rationale:* The large equipment show is vital to bringing attendees to the conference. This is the only large equipment show sponsored by a professional organization in Florida (in the Public Works arena). It was discussed that the committee members have experienced that at table top shows, the vendors will set up their booth and then leave with no one at their booth during the show. If this occurred, the Chapter may be charged a breakdown fee by the hotel as the vendor will not be there to take down the booth. The cost of the convention center is comparable and in many cases less than an exhibit hall at a hotel. The committee also felt that the attendance for the show would decrease with only a table top trade show. Some of the bulk vendors would not consider attending a table top show. The equipment rodeo may have to be eliminated on years a table top would be offered as vendors would not want the extra expense of moving equipment just for the rodeo.

*Additional Comments:*

- A Table Top show may reduce income. Bulk space vendors will only purchase one booth.
- A Table Top show may affect the Equipment Rodeo. Exhibitors may not want to have the extra expense to bringing in equipment just for the rodeo and not have the equipment on display at the show.
- Bulk space exhibitors may not attend if they cannot display equipment.
- Attendance may decrease at the show without the large equipment on display.
MAJOR ISSUE #2 - EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS ATTENDANCE

Committee Recommendation: REQUEST THE CHAIR OF THE TECHNICAL SESSIONS TO REFLECT THE CURRENT ISSUES WITHIN THE STATE AND STILL PROVIDE A VARIETY OF TOPICS.

The educational sessions are outstanding. The committee discussed the difficulty of "guessing " what sessions will be better attended. The committee discussed the importance of making an effort to provide a well round and interesting program for the attendees of the conferee with emphasis on current issues. Also, an Ethics Course should be on the Technical Session agenda each year.

MAJOR ISSUE #3 – INCONSISTENCY FROM YEAR TO YEAR

Committee Response: The Chapter needs to provide a system that would offer consistency for the conference to benefit from experience and decrease the strain of resources on the local branches.

Committee Recommendation: DEVELOP AN ONGOING CONFERENCE COMMITTEE WITH MEMBERS FROM THE ENTIRE STATE. THE LOCAL BRANCH AT THE LOCATION OF THE CONFERENCE WOULD HAVE POSITIONS ON THE STEERING COMMITTEE.

Rationale: The Committee felt that too much was being lost from year to year with each new Steering Committee. Technical Sessions, Sponsorships, and other aspects of the Show do not relate much anymore to the region of the state the show is being held in, and having a state-wide committee of accomplished leaders will help to consistently keep the Show top-notch. The local branch would still have many positions on the Steering Committee, namely the Committee Co-Chair (or Chairs), Exhibitors, Registration, Special Events, and so on.

Also, the conference has been held in the late Spring each year. Corporate Events, the Conference Planner, attempts to maintain this schedule as long as exhibit space and hotel rooms are available. There are challenges with a short lead time of 2 or 3 years to find sites. Many organizations plan out a minimum of 5 years to minimize conflicts with convention centers and hotels. If the conference can be scheduled out 5 to 7 years, this may help to provide reasonable costs for hotels and convention centers and provide better options for dates. A committee that would be maintained on an annual basis may decrease the repetitive work that is currently a factor in planning the conference and provide for the scheduling the conference more that 3 years out.

MAJOR ISSUE #4 – LODGING AND HOTEL SPACE AT THE CONFERENCE

Committee Response: It was discussed that we provide a secondary, less expensive hotel for the conference. The room rate at the host property is determined by room nights over the course of the entire conference. If these were reduced at the hotel, the room rates per night would increase. An additional determining factor in the room rates is the number of events that the conference holds at the hotel, events such as luncheons. A less expensive property may not have the space for other functions. The less expensive hotel may be at a distance that would require the Chapter to provide daily transportation to the sessions, adding to the cost. Increasing the registration cost of the conference was discussed but concerns were expressed that this may have a negative effect on the attendance.

Committee Recommendation: MAINTAIN ONE HOST HOTEL FOR THE CONFERENCE.

Rationale:

- Less expensive properties may not have the facilities we require for other activities.
- Less expensive hotel may be farther to the Show requiring providing transportation which would be an extra cost.
- If transportation is not provided, the cost to the attendee may increase such as paying for parking each day.
- One property provides better networking opportunities.
Additional Comments and Issues:

ISSUE #1 - MOVING THE SHOW TO THE FALL TO NOT CONFLICT WITH SIMILAR SHOWS IN SPRING

Committee Response: We would need to be cognizant of the dates for the National APWA to avoid conflict. Fall would place the Show in Hurricane Season. A threat of a hurricane at the time of the conference could be devastating to the attendance.

ISSUE #2 - SCHEDULING SHOW FIVE YEARS OUT

Committee Response: This is necessary for keeping pricing consistent and cost effective. However, there will be a challenge to find Branches that will commit this far in advance.

ISSUE #3 – INCREASE COST OF REGISTRATION TO HELP COVER EXPENSES

Committee Response: Increasing the cost of the Show registration would assist in covering costs. Current fees do not cover all costs. The committee recommends that we should review our fees to compare to registrations of similar organizations. However, higher registration costs may reduce attendance. The committee feels that if this is reviewed, it should be full delegates and not daily or two day rates which is the bulk of our attendance.

ISSUE #4 – CONSISTENCY OF LOCATION

Committee Response: The Committee felt that keeping the show to a consistent set of locations (as is planned for the next few years) of locations that can hold a large equipment show, and keeping a consistent rotation will assist in building Trade Show attendance. The current rotation of Jacksonville, Miami/Fort Lauderdale, Orlando, and Tampa Bay is good due to their central nature and large space. This could include a location in the panhandle every cycle, or one in Southwest Florida to bring the show to all areas of the state.

I would like to thank the committee members for their participation and input.