South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority
Strategic Planning Committee

November 18, 2021
Meeting Transcription

[STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING BEGINS AT 1:30 P.M.]

David:	Now we're as strategic planning. So hand over to the very capable chairman and we'll move on to approval of the minutes who would like to move that?
Suzanne:	I'll do that.
David:	Okay. I heard Suzanne. Thank you almost in favor sign divide by saying I.
	I heard all five I. Okay, we passed unanimously moving on to the main topic of our committee and that is the internal business improvements update. And Larry, you gonna to do a preview on that or do we hand it right to Prem?
Larry:	I'll make a few opening comments and one of the slides, and then we'll turn it over to Prem. So, if Jennifer, you could go to the next slide. Yes. So we'll review with you the fiscal 22 key performance indicators, which are tracked quarterly and all of them, except one are on target at this point. And we took a little different approach to the KPIs. In the past. We had some very detailed KPIs that measure quite frankly, departmental level activity, like call answer speed, for instance, and collections activity and things like that. And we thought that it was more appropriate to raise our KPIs to a bit of a higher level. So we'll review with you what those are for this year. The departments are still tracking those previous key performance indicators, but they are appropriate to be at the departmental level.
	We have a number of internal business process improvements that Prem is working on as part of our strategic plan, along with his team. And he'll review four of those today, which have an emphasis on customer and employee experience. And we're making good progress in that area. And finally, Prem will talk about some of the critical project initiatives that we have going on for the commercial business to help us further expand that particular area. And again, more customer experience activities for having a customer portal and a mobile app deployment, which will be soon. And then monthly billing, which will start in January is being worked on executed as planned. So with that as executive summary, we'll flip to the next slide, which is the actual key performance indicators. So column on the left, where it says KPI there, those are the ones listed, and we have 10 of those I believe.
	And those that are in bold, those are the global metrics. And we've not that those were important enough to the organization that they should quite frankly be used as key performance indicators as well. So you've seen those KPIs before and have approved them earlier on. So we are continuing to use those, but we have added two. One of them is water system needs, which is the fourth one down. And that was to specifically

have a KPI that could let us focus on how the core utility business was doing. And in that particular category, we have reviewing five existing effective practice guidelines, which is something that Jim has been working on. Which is sort of the next generation of standard operating procedures. So he is going to review five of those and then develop three for operations and three for water treatment. So that'll be six new EPGS that will be developed in the operations area in this coming year.

And those are the most deemed the most critical and important, which will help us to further track the health of the utility business. The other new one is cybersecurity. And we have made four improvements to our cybersecurity plans, and Prem will be working on that. And we'll be talking about that a little bit later. So those are the KPIs that we would be tracking that you'll see on a quarterly basis coming up again, seven of those or eight of those are existing global metrics that you had previously approved. So with that, unless there's any questions, I'll turn it over to Prem who can talk about in detail, some of the internal business process improvement.

Prem: Thank you, Larry. So the way we wanted to approach today was to keep it a high level, right? So if you have any questions, please do stop me as I go through some of the details. So we wanted to categorize these into two sections, one focus on customer experience, another focus on employee experience. So we have two unique tracks running, and then we also wanted to emphasis on the fact of the ones that have been accomplished as we are working through a fiscal 22 and the ones that are in progress right now, which are planned to be accomplished by end of fiscal 22. So, that's how we can approach this process improvements. So, on the customer experience side, if you remember, we actually a little bit about a standard operating procedure for we even made the changes to rules and regs for continuous consumption.

So what that really means is that we actually out track with AMI technology in place, basically one cubic feed of water being used per hour for continuously 72 hours. For example, we track all of those and actually have proactively reached out to the customers. So for example, just within a one month of rollout that we did, we had close to 3,200 outbound calls, emails, and letters that were sent out. I'm happy to report that out of those letters and communication that we did 432 customers have taken advantage of it. So what that means is, as we track this, country's consumption happening 432 customers have acted upon to really take action, whether it's fixing something in terms of leak or making some improvements on the way that they're consuming water on their side. So we see a result of those being stopped, right?

So that kind of tells us a story that it's working, right? So it's just this beginning of the process improvement there. So more to come on, that. We are looking at larger, if you will, leaks that we have some of the, we remember the days of when Linda mentioned about the basement's getting flood in 72 hours, if there's a huge, massive leak. So we are trying to improve the process to get to that bigger issues if you will. So great start there. The second one we did was there was a lot of recommendation from RPB way back when, when we discussed about customer escalations and you heard from Kevin today and obviously with Jeff Donofrio, we actually had put a process in place for

customer escalation. And the reason for us not having so many escalation going to OCA is because we now track customer escalations by type whether it's a billing issue or a collection issue, or customer experience issue, or a water service issue.

So there's a whole tracking with customer experience manager, looking at it on a daily basis pretty much. And we have weekly meetings where we discuss all the escalation and get it resolved before it becomes a bigger issue for us. So great stuff there. And overall, so far throughout the year we had 20 escalations in terms of metrics. We only have one open, 29 of them have been closed. On average, we spend around five, 5.3 days to actually resolve an escalation as it comes through. So we are kind of tracking that. You probably remember my comments that we are trying to do a baseline for first contact resolution for fiscal 23. So we are going to use all of this data to baseline ourselves and start having a metric where a customer has an issue.

How many of them are we getting resolved in the first contact itself, right? So, that's the idea there. So some great improvements there. Going in progress in terms of customer experience, transactional survey, as you remember, we do an annual survey for our customers to ask them how we are doing a survey, that kind of reaches out on our experience with them, et cetera, but now going one step further based on this practice and standard, we are actually looking to launch a transactional survey. So what that means is every time a customer contacts us for, for any reason, we actually have a transaction survey. So they go out to them, which means they can tell us immediately, how did we do rather than waiting for a year, right? So that's the idea behind the scenes. And we did put in certain budget numbers, and this is going to be looked at starting from February.

So a lot of good improvements coming along the way for that. We have engaged with Greatblue. So Greatblue is going to be helping us as they help us with other surveys that we do so more to come on that. AMI remote shots, as you know, we have implemented our technology with AMI. As you remember, when we implemented our business case, more focused on making sure or that we do the meter rating remotely. So we can now actually have more efficiencies come in, in terms of meter readers, if you remember the whole business case there. So now going one step further. The team is actually looking to prototype where we actually are looking for meters, it's called alley meters as part of what meter sense provides us, where this is now going to help us to kind of monitor the pressure flow, if you will.

We can actually, I know what some of our members had asked about how do we control some of the pressure flows, especially in the high pressure areas. So there are meters that actually could help us with that. There also help us with temp temperatures. So it also controls temperatures in monitors and reports back on temperatures. So the team is working through five meters. We handpicked five meters of different site. I think it was five, eight inch. So we are kind of working to put those in play to see how we can actually help ourselves in terms of reduced pressure flow, if you will. And also use it as a collection strategy for tough customers, when we are actually struggled to collect

monies, right? So that's actually happening. And our goal is to get it completed by end of this fiscal year.

And we'll be ready with that technology in place. Flushing innovations. You remember the whole new notice process went out to really do flushing innovations in the sense, with the notice trucks, we actually did a good prototype. This happened between May and September, this year. We actually ran through eight and a half miles worth of flushing activity. We went one step further, basically took samples before, during and after, if you will, in terms of the bacterial, problems, if you will, if it's there. So we actually went through a whole process of not only flushing, but also doing some water quality testing.

So overall I think it was successful in terms of a project. So the team is now looking into actually acquiring and notice truck. We did put in monies in the budget for fiscal 23. So that's some good news right there. So this is going to help us typically, if you will, it takes us even to do, half a mile of flushing takes us, many of our crew members working the entire day. So this is going to bring a lot of efficiency for us. So we're kind of putting in play for that as well. So I'll take a pause there, with all the customer experience, are there any questions from our members before we go on the employee side?

Perfect. Thank you. So moving on to the employee, as you're aware, COVID was a great medium for us to learn new things. So if you remember, we put in a remote telecom policy in place, believe it or not a lot of our employee, escalations and flexibility issues. I'm sure Janine and rest of the team appreciated here. We kind of created work life balance if you will. So this has been helping us quite a bit. Personally myself, I've seen a lot of those flexibility issues have been resolved, right? So the teams are more productive and we are able to move forward in terms of getting our outcomes done. So, that's a great one. We put a put in place records, retention. I know we had a discussion now, way back then, and I just wanted to report back on some of the statistics there.

So Peter has been heading that initiative as a champion. And we have identified way back when we, if you remember we had around 2044 boxes, physical boxes that we actually worked with the iron mountain. So we went into the process from customer service, I think they had around 166 boxes. We archived all of them, right? So it's been converted into a digital document if you will. Technology has done that piece of it as well. We are now in progress of doing some level of finance and we are identifying a couple of the departments that we can kind of tag along. But the goal is that we are going to be looking at digitalizing much of that. We are retaining important documents. For example, lab is a great example in terms of the compliance requirements.

We do have the documentation that has to be permanently kept. So we are close to 591 boxes of those documents that we are kind of tracking now. Finance has similar one for compliance requirements. So, we are kind of threading along, making sure we are spending the right dollars and moving forward on digitalizing it at the same time, maintaining those digital footprints, right? So some great news there. In terms of progress, in progress items for employee experience, capital planning and budgeting

improvements. So, one of the key things we are looking to do is standardizing some of the cost estimates. So the team is trying to put in place of standardized cost estimate templates for the projects, especially in construction. Before we get moving on, on the projects, this way we have better estimates. We are also looking at certain processes on the budgeting side, as you, as you can imagine, we have a KPI, as Larry had mentioned earlier, 96 person KPI that we track on capital-

Prem: A 96% KPI that we track on capital expenditures. We are looking to not only put a capital improvement process in place for that KPI, but at the same time, making sure that we look at the overall end-to-end process. For example, managing our vendors in terms of payment invoices, we're sanitizing some of that as well.

From a budget and planning perspective, we are looking to improve our budgeting process. And as you can imagine, and you just saw a huge schedule that Rochelle had put up in terms of a budgeting process. We are looking at making it better in terms of the handoffs and crunching the time. And to be honest, even to look at putting a budgeting tool in place, because we do much of that in spreadsheets today. So that's something coming along the line.

You probably heard of our central procurement initiative, but not to tread along the whole big initiative, but we are looking to put together a e-requisition process. Kind of the whole RWA following one process way of creating requisitions. This way you can track all the way from requisition to PO, to the payments, like a three-way match if you will. So we are making some progress there.

There's more stuff to be done. I know team, especially Peter's team is helping us putting this process in place. It is expected to be completed by end of this fiscal year.

Last but not least, we have employee onboarding and offboarding improvements. I won't talk about the safety staffs with me. You heard from Amanda and then Janine. So, some great improvements are happening as part of onboarding process, making safety as a culture, et cetera.

But along the lines, we also have a lot of tasks that we perform, all the way from human resource, police, IT, purchasing, all of these are being tracked, and there are handoffs that happens for onboarding and onboarding process. So we are trying to make sure that we streamline all of that process. The team is looking at potentially using an internal tool, Smartsheet that we have, so they could be a good handoff, so there is no drop.

There's also a good auditing trail on that, in terms of how we engage in the employees, all the way from the time we decide to hire them. The same way, during the termination process or the retirement process as well. So more to come on that. It's going to be more tracking, more workflows in place. The team is looking at it. I know me and Janine talked about it quite a bit. We don't want to take the whole gamut of things. We want

to take small pieces of it and really make sure we improve that and then we can build up on that. So, that's the idea there.

So those are all the I would say high level process improvements on the employee side. I'll take a pass there. If there are any questions on employee experience.

David: Any questions, some follow-up? All right.

Prem: Thank you. So moving on to the next slide, this is the exciting part. In terms of the product, if you remember, we talked about providing a flexibility to our customers for PipeSafe program. As you could imagine, a customer would want to have a home plumbing repair as a program, but the system was constrained in a fashion where they could only avail that if they sign up for PipeSafe wall and sewer. There were certain constraints on the system side.

So, finally what we did was we looked at the overall solution and we also wanted to include WellSafe, as you could imagine. WellSafe is being looked at the launch as well by end of November. So basically between the technology challenges we had and the customer improvements, we officially have launched the PipeSafe flexibility model, and the system had just gone live last weekend. A lot of tremendous work from the team. So we had put all that in place.

So now the customers have the flexibility, but more importantly, we also identified on the WellSafe side, for example, we are targeting two areas of focus. One is our own footprint in the Regional Water Authority's 15 towns. We have collected data and then used our own technology that we have in place, AI, I would just call it. We identified close to 18,000 customers who potentially are well customers.

So what we are trying to do there is we are taking a pilot launch end of this November, where we are looking to send letters, direct mail for 6,000 of the customers, educating them on different products as part of the WellSafe. And then we also are taking advantage for our Roche footprint, as you can imagine. We have looked at around 2,000 customers. Of the overall customer base that we have there, we're launching the program for them.

So now between 9th, we are looking to launch a soft launch for these 8,000 customers overall, who can actually avail and who can sign up for a WellSafe product as well. If you remember, we actually talked about different product lines. I don't want to go into all the details unless there's any question there, but the idea was that it's going to have three levels of products and service.

One, it's going to be the basic where a customer can get their water quality tested in the well. The second one was a program that focuses on maintenance. So we could go out there, take a look at on an annual basis as to how the wells are performing. And then there's a discount on that. The last one is a PipeSafe complete program. So that was the idea. And now we are looking to launch, do a soft launch for that.

All that is happening as we speak now. The idea is that this will be available for our customers, and then our potential new customers for the end of November.

Moving on to the next one is the mobile app. So to Larry's comment earlier, piggybacking on the availability and providing another channel for our customers who are more potentially web savvy, I would just call it that way. So they can actually download our mobile app that will be launched and they actually can avail services. Not just new products and services, but also if you remember, we have a Water Watch we call it, where the customers can go and look at their consumption. We also have a e-Bill, e-pay from KUBRA. We are trying to bring all of that under one umbrella. So it's a single point of contact for customer, so they don't have to go to different channels.

So once the mobile app is deployed, they can do all the business in one place. So this is going to improve their experience. At the same time, this is going to improve, be offering them new services. That was the idea there. And this will include WellSafe, PipeSafe and everything else.

And then last but not least, our famous monthly billing, we'll be looking to go live with monthly billing project. A lot of work is happening. And if you remember, we also are putting together the new rate case that's been recently approved. So the rate change will also be happening in the beginning of the year.

So the teams are working through putting the new rate changes in place and then going live with our monthly billing project. So quite a bit of work in the last quarter. A lot of work has been happening throughout the entire year so far, the calendar year. So far so good.

I think in terms of data conversion, there's been no issues. The teams have been working to really resolve issues as they come, and we are trying to approach in an agile fashion. So far the go lives have been going pretty well. I'll take a pause there. It's a lot to absorb on the projects and the initiatives. There's any question on any of these topics?

Suzanne: No, I'm just happy to see the progression of the bundling on the PipeSafe and others. That's good.

Prem: Thank you. Thanks Suzanne. Perfect. That's all I had for today and I don't think there's anything else to cover here, so I'll give it back to you, David.

David: Thank you. And any other last minute, I'm just trying to flip through everybody's photo here, see if anybody else has any questions. I think we don't. All right. Very good. So then I will ask that we adjourn the [inaudible] committee and reconvene as the authority. Who would like to move that?

Kevin: So moved.

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David: So moved by Kevin, seconded by Catherine. All those in favor, signify by saying aye. Aye.

Group: Aye.

David: Pass is unanimous.

[STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE ADJOURNS AT 1:53 P.M.]