

**Representative Policy Board
South Central Connecticut Regional Water District**

**May 21, 2020
Meeting Transcription**

A regular meeting of the Representative Policy Board (“RPB”) of the South Central Connecticut Regional Water District took place on Thursday, May 21, 2020, via remote access. Chairman Ricozzi presided.

PRESENT

RPB

Ansonia	Thomas P. Clifford III
Bethany	Brian Eitzer
Branford	Mario Ricozzi
Cheshire	Timothy Slocum
Derby	Frank Pepe
East Haven	Michelle Verderame
Guilford	Charles Havrda
Hamden	Stephen A. Mongillo
Killingworth	Jamie Mowat Young
Madison	Joseph Oslander
Milford	Richard Smith
New Haven	Naomi Campbell
North Branford	Peter DeSantis
North Haven	Anthony Rescigno
Orange	Jasper J. Jaser
Prospect	Robert E. Harvey, Jr.
Seymour	Michael H. Horbal
West Haven	T. Gregory Malloy
Woodbridge	Mark Levine
Governor’s Rep	Vincent M. Marino

Regional Water Authority

Anthony DiSalvo
David Borowy
Joseph A. Cermola
Kevin Curseaden
Suzanne Sack

Management

Larry L. Bingaman
Linda Discepolo
Rose Gavrilovic
Orville Kelly
Rochelle Kowalski
Beth Nesteriak
Ted Norris

Counsel

Bruce McDermott

Office of Consumer Affairs

Jeffrey M. Donofrio

Absent

Beacon Falls	Peter Betkoski
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Staff

Jennifer Slubowski

Mario:

Jennifer, if you want to start the recording, the meeting is recorded...

Jennifer:

Yeah.

Mario:

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...or being recorded if it hasn't been already and share the screen. So, we'll start with the safety moment, the COVID-19 guidance for the employees, which goes beyond just washing their hands and a bunch of other guidelines, which really affect the field people. Hi, Jeffrey.

Jeff:

Hello.

Prem:

Hi, this is Prem here. Sorry, just joined.

Mario:

Okay. Very good, Prem. Welcome. So if you'll please take a look at that, and I'm sure there's more coming out far as protection for the staff. We next have the approval of the minutes of April 16th. If we can have a motion-

Greg:

Make a motion.

Mario:

Okay, Greg second?

Naomi:

I second that.

Mario:

Okay. I saw Naomi's hand, and I heard somebody else's voice unless Naomi was throwing her voice.

Mike:

It was Mike.

Mario:

So Naomi second? Okay. Any additions, corrections, et. cetera. Hearing none. All in favor?

Multiple Speakers:

Aye.

Mario:

Opposed?

Mike:

No.

Mario:

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And abstaining? Peter?

Peter:

Sorry, abstain.

Jennifer:

He said abstaining.

Mario:

So welcome. So Peter, welcome.

Peter:

Thank you. Thank you very much.

Mario:

Glad that you were able to finally get sworn in.

Peter:

Yeah, yeah.

Mario:

You'll get a chance to meet this unruly group at some point in the not too distant future, I hope.

Rich:

When Richard Nixon was president, I was led in to meet with governor Thomas mesal at the time. It was a great honor, but despite their insistence on trying to teach us about the committee system and democracy in action myself.

Tony:

Who's got that radio going on?

Mario:

Okay. I think we're quieted down again? All right. Good. In your package, is the RPB Dashboard Quarterly Report, for your information. I don't think there was anything unusual, Tim, on that.

Tim:

Nothing unusual.

Mario:

Not yet. Not until we start to see some more information.

Tim:

Right.

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Mario:

And we do have a Nominating Committee. We've got volunteers, Naomi, Michelle, Steve, Jamie, and Tim are the five members. And I know Jennifer reached out to you to try and set up a meeting of the Nominating Committee. So if you'd get back to her with some availability. And I'd ask that you from amongst yourselves elect a chair your first meeting. I could appoint someone, but that would be...I don't want anyone to think that I'm trying to run the election.

Tim:

Okay.

Mario:

Items for consideration and action. We have the final decision on the Branford Hill Service Area Improvements Application, which we approved last month. But now we have the to formalize that. So Jamie, are you there? Are you there Jamie? Are you muted?

Jennifer:

I don't think Jamie's here.

Mario:

Okay. Very good.

Jennifer:

I can screen share it, if somebody else wants to do it.

Mike:

I will make a motion to approve the Branford Hill Service Area Improvements Application.

Mario:

Okay. And that includes the Findings of Fact.

Mike:

Yes.

Mario:

Would you share it, Jennifer, since he hasn't been able to read through it?

Jennifer:

Sure.

Mario:

Thank you. Just to make sure everybody...so the Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and the Final Decision, that was in the form of a motion.

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Greg:

I second it.

Mario:

Okay. Any discussion? All in favor?

Multiple Speakers:

Aye.

Mario:

Opposed? And abstentions?

Peter:

I will abstain.

Mario:

Okay. I believe that was Peter. So, that passes. And then we have a proposed resolution. Tim, if I could call on you on the FY 2021 capital and operating budgets.

Tim:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We do have a motion, and I will read it. This is the Representative Policy Board of the South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority proposed resolution dated May 21, 2020 regarding the FY 2021 Capital and Operating Budgets. Whereas, the Regional Water Authority requested the Representative Policy Board to review the Authority's FY 2021 proposed Capital and Operating Budgets. And whereas, the RPB held workshops on April 20th, 2020 and April 22, 2020, at which time management and the Authority presented and proposed projects and responded to questions in a professional and concise and articulate, way.

Tim:

And whereas the RPB has a duty to review the budgets and to comment, but has no other statutory obligations or authority now, therefore be it resolved that the RPB wishes to express its appreciation to the management and the Authority for the professionalism of their presentation and express its overall support for the FY 2021 proposed budgets; and further resolve that the RPB also agrees with the recommendation contained in the OCA's budget review letter dated May, 1 2020 and further resolved that the RPB consensus regarding the proposed budgets is that they are reasonable and supported; further resolved that the RPB believes that the authority's overall financial plan provides for stable finances at an unprecedented and uncertain times during the COVID-19 pandemic and the essential funding of capital projects and the flexibility of reduced operating expenses will support the steps necessary to address financial obstacles during the fiscal year. Here is the resolution.

Jay:

I second that, Mr. Chairman. I'll second it, Mr. Chairman.

Mario:

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Yes. Any discussion on the resolution?

Tim:

Well, just speaking for the resolution I do think it is self-explanatory. There clearly were the two hearings that were mentioned, and I think we had a broad consensus among the group. And I think we had most everyone able to attend. So I'll certainly be supporting the motion.

Mario:

Any other discussion? I know this was a very difficult time to try and put together a budget. I'm sure all our towns have experienced the same thing. And anyone else? I want to thank the Authority and the management, and we'll call for a vote. All in favor of the resolution?

Multiple Speakers:

Aye.

Mario:

Opposed? Abstaining?

Peter:

Abstain.

Mario:

Very good. Thank you all.

Mario:

That brings us to our reports. And the first one is the Finance Committee, Tim.

Tim:

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Essentially in the two meetings that took place the first on April 22nd, right after our last RPB meeting and the meeting of May 11th, which the minutes were sent out to all. Essentially discussed the budget considerations that were advanced by the authority and management. And they were attended, as I said, widely. And we thought the OC's letter was very supportive and helpful. And that led to tonight's advancement of the resolution, which was just passed. That's essentially my report. And thank you.

Mario:

Any questions of Tim? Hearing none. Mark Levine for the Land Use Committee.

Mark:

How you doing? We met on May 13th, and we had a very nice presentation by Mr. Amendola and Mr. Tracy, from the invasive species and our forester who talked about the Japanese Stiltgrass on RWA properties, which included overall goals of them, the methodology, the control methods, the conclusions, and the next steps. It was very interesting. They're going to come back to us again and probably if we ever get out of this problem, we're going to go out and take a look at it.

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Mark:

But it was a very interesting discussion around the different things they use, the vinegar. They use the form of Roundup, different degrees of percentage of different percentage. And so it was very interesting, and they're keeping track of how it's coming along. So while we're making some advancement the invasive species under attack.

Mark:

And our water this current year was 99%. Previous year was 99% historical averages is 94%. Anybody have any questions? Thank you.

Mario:

Okay. Very good. Consumer Affairs Committee. Steve, are you out there?

Stephen:

I'm here. Good evening, everyone.

Mario:

Thank you.

Stephen:

Consumer Affairs Committee met on Monday. Tom Barger was here, our RWA's water quality manager to provide an overview of the water quality report. That report is always well done and understandable to the average person. He was especially concerned to report to us a notation about a manganese test that exceeded other tests and not in the same range as that source previously or other tests.

Stephen:

So upon investigation, it was determined that the manganese level was elevated due to sampling issue. In this case, the sample was collected probably too quickly, scoured the inside of the pipe and resulted in an elevated manganese. RWA chose to include it in report for full disclosure. All of these samples have to be taken according to the standard method and carefully to not affect the results. And that's done with kind of just an amazing technique as we see over the year. So all of these results are in line in this report. So not only is the report good from a presentation point of view, more importantly, the RWA maintains quality water in terms of all the testing requirements.

Stephen:

Tom, of course, being a very conscientious and competent person, went back to review the test methods without staff and also putting through retraining so that hopefully this doesn't happen again. Let me go back to the excellent results.

Stephen:

They did offer [inaudible 00:14:25] OC reported had been working on the budget letter in a memorandum to the RPB regarding the upcoming public hearing for the North Sleeping Giant Wellfield. He reported on one consumer complaint. We had a customer that had a leaking toilet, resulted in quite a large bill. And that person has been offered a leak adjustment, and they're in the stage of negotiating

that investment with the customer, expect it to be resolved. Other than that, Mr. Rescigno volunteered to attend the member Authority meeting in June, and he will be the person from CAC, and that was our meeting on Monday.

Mario:

Okay, good. Any questions for Steve? No? Okay. We'll move on to Authority and management, Mr. DiSalvo.

Tony:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We met as usual today and in the interest of time, the three committees that met briefly reviewed work plans and the comp, and made one change to the pension plan that was a boilerplate kind of activity. Other than that Mr. Bingaman will share with you the rest of the important stuff. Mr. Bingaman?

Larry:

Got you. This is Larry Bingaman. I will have Beth give a high level overview of the COVID situation at the RWA, and then I'll touch on a couple of matters following that. So, Beth?

Beth:

Sure. Good evening, everyone. Just a quick update on where we are with COVID. Since the beginning of March, we've had two employees test positive, two employees tested negative, and we've had three employees who had exhibited symptoms but were unable to get a test. And that was back in the March timeframe when there was less access to tests. We have had series of employees isolate over the time. But the good news is, is that we've had relatively few employees test positive for COVID. In terms of supplies, we're continuing monitoring our supplies with not only our PPE, but also our chemical deliveries. So I'm happy to report, we've had no real interruption in any supplies.

Beth:

In terms of 90 Sargent Drive, obviously the building still remains closed to the public. We are doing some visitors by appointment. We do have RWA police manning the front parking lot. That's to allow to direct not only deliveries, but in some cases we have had people show up and be lost looking for the COVID testing site. So we have been maintaining a presence just to make sure people are headed the right way.

Beth:

In terms of operations and back office functions, we're operational we have instituted and still institute some split shifts to help with staff isolation. We've increased cleaning at our treatment plants as well as 90 Sargent. So a lot of work has gone in to kind of maintain social distancing and allow us to keep a high level precaution around the spread of this virus.

Beth:

The newest addition to my report is that we've started to work on our reopening plan. Janine Reckdenwald and I are heading that activity. We're looking at a phased approach, slow and steady, where we have people working remotely and working remotely effectively. Those will be the last to return to the building. But it is something that we've been shifted our focus on to in the next couple of weeks. Is there any questions?

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Stephen:

Hi, Beth. This is Steve Mongillo. Related to COVID, I think it was a Land Use meeting, we were talking about considerable increase in the recreation passes that have been generated. Because people are looking for something to do. So I don't know if that was mentioned before at any of our RPB meetings.

Beth:

Yeah. I'll let Larry handle that. I know he has some statistics on that.

Stephen:

Oh, okay.

Larry:

Yeah. I'll touch on that. Steve, when I do my report. Any more questions for Beth?

Frank:

I was out on Sargent Drive on Tuesday, it seems like you've got it under control. I picked up some material, and you don't see nobody or talk to nobody or nothing. Everything is very well put out with your name on it and everything.

Beth:

Good.

Frank:

I liked that. I went to get a meter pit and it has the address and you don't even talk to the guy in the fork lift. He says, "Over there, and here's the address." I think it's very nice the way you got that situated there.

Beth:

Great. Well, we're definitely trying to focus on a contactless pickups.

Frank:

Yeah.

Beth:

So hopefully it's an improvement. We can keep moving forward in terms of the ease of it for our customers.

Frank:

Yeah. So it was very nice the way it was set up. Thank you.

Beth:

Great.

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Larry:

Great, thank you. In terms of the financial results. After 11 months, our operating revenues are under budget by about \$978,000, which is less than 1%. That's due to total water revenues being under budget by about a million six primarily due to lower than anticipated water billings. But our other revenues are over budget by about \$598,000 due to our non-core activities, primarily the lab and pipe safe.

Larry:

Operating and maintenance expenses are under budget by about \$6 million, approximately 11%. And of that \$6 million permanent or deferred is a \$4 million. And then, of course, timing is the other two. The good news is that we are projecting coverage of 116% with no draw compared to a budgeted draw of \$829,000, which is the favorable coverage is due to a lower debt service, which as well as due to the refinancing and DWRS, lower O&M and lower PILOT and those under runs largely offset the lower than budget water revenue projection, and incorporating an estimated impact of the COVID-19.

Larry:

So we're doing well so far on the financial side, even though we are putting in place plans for something a little bit more drastic. And our current water supply situation as of Monday, we are at 98% compared to a long-term average of 94% for this time of the year. Mark's a little update there.

Mark:

Thank you very much.

Larry:

And then in terms of other items that I reported on in terms of the recreation permit, we have had an increase in permit holders. So at the beginning of March, our communications team launched a digital billboard on I-95 heading west right there by CarMax. And on that, there is a 2020 fishing season and recreation program promotion called Go Fish 20. And if you put Go Fish 20 into your application for a fishing permit, you get 20% off. And we've been honoring those coupons ranging from 5 to 20 per day.

Larry:

And even though the billboards going to terminate on May 25, but we'll continue to have the 20% discount promotion on our website. So we've increased the number of permit holders. So as of April of 20, we have 4,479 permit holders. And that compares to April of 19 of 4,045. And net sales as of April of 20, was \$24,690 compared to April 2019 of \$11,780. So I think between people having cabin fever due to COVID-19 and the promotion there, we have picked up more permit holders. So that's really exciting cause that was one of our goals this year is to increase the number of individuals that take advantage of the recreation permit program.

Larry:

In other news, I reported today that on April 29th, we paved the last half-acre adjacent to the former Hamden Middle School building. And we are now in kind of completed all of the remediation work required under the Connecticut DEEP consent order assigned to RWA concerning the cleanup of the Hamden Middle School property. And that's after six years of work. So there was a reason to celebrate for that as well.

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Prem:

That's awesome.

Mark:

And I hope they got the spider there. Paved it right to his death.

Larry:

Yeah, they do, Mark.

Mark:

I'll never forget that spider ever in my life.

Larry:

And then just one other thing, Rochelle reported on our change in our affordability program that we'll be making temporarily. So we're going to be increasing the income eligibility cutoff from 175% of the federal minimum income to a 250%. And that would increase for a family of four that would increase the level of income from \$45,850 to \$65,500 to participate in our customer assistance program. And that is a maximum grant of about \$175, which is equal to a one quarter bill, a bill for one quarter. And we're also looking at expanding that to small commercial and industrial customers. And they would get a \$200 grant for that, which is equal to about a quarterly water bill for a small commercial or industrial site. So, and that will be temporary as long as the COVID-19 lasts, which would be right now, I think going through January at this point. So that's all the news that's fit to print.

Mario:

Okay, very good.

Tim:

Tim Slocum with a question for Larry, if I may? Has there been an appreciable change in service calls? For example, I know a lot of businesses have obviously been closed, but pipes still break underground and you have other service issues. Has there been a decrease, or is it about the state the same in last month or so, or even longer?

Larry:

Let's see. Linda, do you have a number on that?

Linda:

Yeah, I don't have an exact number, but there are not very many every week because we usually have field ops go out if there's a dig. But there's been a couple pipe safe breaks that the field ops department are going out on, but our field service guys are only going on an emergency situation, and there have not been very many emergencies at all.

Tim:

Okay, okay.

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Linda:

But also what we did requires an emergency. If somebody is a seasonal customer, we consider that an emergency and we'll go out and turn them on. But there haven't been very many at all. Most of the field service guys are out there looking at meters that aren't operating-

Tim:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Linda:

...or things like that.

Tim:

And that's normal routine, basically? Not an up or a down, that's just typical traffic-

Linda:

Correct.

Tim:

...with the meter stuff? Okay, great. Thank you.

Stephen:

All right. This is Steve Mongillo. I have two questions. Do you happen to know the percentage of recreation passes that were generated by the sign as noted by the percent off or? And my second question is, does the draft continue to be down by the same amount as the last period, the last month?

Larry:

So far for the first 20 days of May, we're only down 1% compared to last year.

Stephen:

Okay.

Larry:

So, not sure how that's going to stack up to the rest of the month, but we're only down less than a percent compared to last year at this time and roughly about the same decline compared to budget.

Stephen:

Okay.

Frank:

Larry, Frank Pepe. I had a question. What happened to all the vehicles in West Haven over there on Route 34?

Ted:

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Larry, I can take that.

Larry:

Okay.

Ted:

Yep. Sorry. We had some vandalism done to the vehicles over there, so we brought them back to the yard. [crosstalk 00:29:11] The rash of people taking the catalytic converters, not in our area but throughout the region and selling them. And that's what happened over there. So I brought them back to 90 Sargent, but I have to protect them.

Frank:

Okay. All right. I didn't know if they had the auction. It was like they were all stacked up on the side of the road. And then all of a sudden, they were gone.

Ted:

Yes. We got the auction planned for the next month or two.

Greg:

Okay. Thanks. I'm sure they're not from West Haven.

Ted:

Thank you Greg.

Larry:

So Dave and Steve, I don't have the percentage that's been generated by the sign. But just to give you a comparison in April of '20, we sold 492 new permit and about 150 renewals. In April of 2019, we only had 172 new permits, but 160 renewals. So renewals year over year are about the same, but we had more than double new permits.

Stephen:

Yeah, no, that's fine. I was just curious.

Mario:

Good. Yes. Any other questions?

Brian:

Sorry. This is Brian. I had a question. I saw the thing about the worries about water being turned back on after a long off period. And I was curious if we've gotten a bunch of calls from consumers or users about those items as people are going back in now with phase one?

Beth:

Brian, this is Beth. I can take that. So yeah, part of that was our press about making sure people are flushing for office buildings that might have been vacant for a long period of time. We also distributed

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that to the town health directors and been trying to keep them in the loop, in terms of some of the concerns. I have to say, I'm not aware that we've gotten any customer inquiries about that.

Brian:

Good. Well, as a water person, I know that that's an issue. And I was curious if it actually was happening and getting customers worried about it.

Linda:

And I can say that the customer service representatives have not received questions with respect to that, either.

Mario:

Good. Very good. Any other questions? Hearing none. We've reached seven o'clock. So I'd like to see if there's a motion to adjourn our meeting, and we're going to go into a public hearing.

Mark:

Make a motion to adjourn.

Frank:

I second.

Mario:

All in favor.

Multiple Speakers:

Aye.