

**Representative Policy Board Consumer Affairs Committee
South Central Connecticut Regional Water District
March 15, 2021
Meeting Transcription**

Stephen:

Now that you're here, we can call the meeting to order, the March consumer affairs meeting to order. And the first item on the agenda is our safety moment. Jennifer, you want to put that up?

Jennifer:

Yeah.

Stephen:

It's tips on mold prevention in the house. All good ideas, all things I hope we've been kind of doing regularly. So you sure take a look at that. Second item is approval of the minutes of the February meeting. Dean Durnin was at our meeting. And do I have a motion on that?

Naomi:

I [crosstalk 00:01:25].

Tony:

I make a motion.

Stephen:

Thanks Frank. Second?

Naomi:

Second.

Stephen:

Thank you Naomi. Are there any corrections, any additions, permissions to the minutes? If none, I'll call for a vote. All those in favor?

Naomi:

Aye.

Tony:

Aye.

Stephen:

Any opposed? Any abstentions? The minutes pass unanimously. And today we have Dan Doyle. Dan, thanks again for coming, who is going to explain a little bit about his role with the towns and interfacing with RWA. So Dan, I'll turn it over to you.

Dan:

Sure. And I'm going to share a PowerPoint. But thank you all for having me today.

Stephen:

Dan, how long have you been with the water authority?

Dan:

It's three years about 14 days ago. It was March 1st, 2018.

Stephen:

Okay. So and you're corporate communications?

Dan:

That's correct. Yes.

Stephen:

Now the other people are not in communications that are also liaisons the towns?

Dan:

Oh yeah, they're all in the communications department.

Stephen:

Okay.

Dan:

And I'll mention them when I get to that part.

Stephen:

Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt. Go ahead.

Dan:

No, no, you're good. You're good. Absolutely. So yeah, as you were saying, we haven't met before. My name is Dan Doyle. I'm the manager of corporate communications for the Regional Water Authority. And I'm here to talk to you just briefly about the Community Liaison Program that we launched this past fall. So as a bit of background before that three years ago, we were talking about when I joined the RWA, I worked in politics and government. And in those roles, one of the things that was the most important thing that we had was our list of liaisons. These were the people who worked at different government departments or some different companies. And their role was to be the person who we could contact to get information.

Dan:

And if there was a question from a legislator or a constituent, we knew we could call our liaison, they would be available to us, get back to us quickly with the information we needed. And with this program, that's essentially what we're trying to create at the RWA. As I say here, we're trying to build those relationships and establish communications and then help work together a little bit better. Because if a mayor or municipal official, fire chief, has a question or a concern, we don't want them to have to try and figure out who they're supposed to call or call the main line, and wait to get ahold of someone. We want them to call their liaison right away and be able to get a resolution to whatever they're looking for information on. And over time building communications like that, how with build relationships that can be very beneficial and helpful when we have issues arise that might require the town and the RWA to work together.

Dan:

I mean, I know when we were over the summer encouraging our customers to decrease their water use because of the drought affecting Connecticut, we reached out to some of our municipal partners and requested they help us get the word out. And because of the relationships that we had and that we're building, we had some reverse nine one one messages go out, messages posted to website. And it sort of helped us spread that message of wise water use through the relationships we had with the towns. Now, as I was mentioning, this is not just me. It's myself, Kate Reynor and Laurie [Vitagliano 00:05:03] on the communications department, our liaisons. And you can see here how we have split up the talent in our service district into the three of us. The way we did this was we tried to work based on pre-existing relationships or for example, I live in New Haven. That's why New Haven's one of my towns.

Dan:

I know some folks who work at the city of Milford. And so that's why it's one of my towns, Laura lives in East Haven, that's why it's one of hers. Because we're trying to build relationships that might already be there and we're not necessarily trying to replace something. So for the same time, and I think I talked about this in our meetings last fall, for those of you who were there, we're not necessarily trying to replace something that works either. If, for example, someone who works in the city of Brantford has had a contact at the RWA they've been working with for 20 years and that's been going great for them? We're not saying "Don't call them. You have to call your liaison now," but we want to build relationships where there weren't any before or strengthen those that we already have.

Dan:

And we've had a great response to that so far, particularly a lot of our towns who've said "We didn't know who to call before, and we're happy to know that we have this liaison that we can reach out to." So as you see here, these are the three of us are split up and these are the towns. I know, I think most of you probably met with your liaison at some point in the past, or talked to us on the phone, Steve, I know you and I talked at the last meeting. Don't hesitate to reach out. And if you need their contact information, you can certainly get ahold of me. I'd be happy to pass along to you.

Dan:

So the next thing I want to talk about is how we're going to do all this, or how we are doing all this. So, the real value as I mentioned of this program is those unexpected or unscheduled times that we have to talk to someone. If there's a main break or there's some issue that arises and a municipal official needs to know who to reach out to with the RWA. But you can't build a relationship during emergencies. You

need to build those in advance so that when bad things occur, when events occur, we all know each other and able to work together to respond.

Dan:

So, to put this all together, I reached out to some contacts I have in government, asked them, "What would work best for you? What would you like to see from the RWA?" And in general, what I heard was they liked the idea very much of knowing who their contact should be, their liaison should be at the RWA. They didn't want to have ledgers, they didn't want to have very long meetings where we would bring them in for four hours and go over a lot of different details because they were busy and had other things they needed to do. So what we did is we put together a schedule of shorter touch points that take place throughout the year. The first of those was the meetings, the bi-annual meetings, the first we've launched this past fall.

Dan:

I know some of you participated in those, and Naomi I remember you were on my New Haven meeting, and at those meetings, we meet over Zoom like this in the times we're in now, and we'll provide some general high level updates on different projects the RWA is working on, both across our systems and locally. For example, if there is a major capital pipe program that's going on in a particular town, we'll want to discuss that with the officials, just let them know about it. They generally know already, but it helps to give them an update. And in addition to the updates we provide them with, we are creating a platform and we ask them "Is there anything that you need from us that you want to know from the RWA?" And I could tell from that first series of meetings, there was quite a few instances in which someone said "I've had a question that I've been wondering about for years. And I just didn't know who to contact. And I'm just glad to have this opportunity to speak with someone at the RWA. Here's what my question is."

Dan:

Or other towns that didn't necessarily have a question, but as I mentioned before, said they weren't always sure who to reach out to the RWA and were happy to now know who that person is and had that opportunity to speak with us directly. So we had those meetings this past fall, the first round of them, we're planning on having another round late spring, early summer. So you'll receive invitations for those when they go out. But in addition to that, we have to sort of stay in touch with people without overwhelming them with meetings, we send out or are sending out email updates.

Dan:

Some of those actually went out last week. So you likely all or should have all received them. And those are similar content. It's just a general update of work going on system wide or company wide at the RWA, and then some specific information on towns if it's available. Again, just trying to create that opportunity to let them know we're here, provide our contact information again and ask that they provide us any questions they might have.

Dan:

In addition, so beyond the scheduled things communications we have, if there are events that come up like major snowstorms when this happened, or I know in Hampden when there was a tornado that went through the town this late summer, early fall, we'll reach out and let them know first off that RWA services were not interrupted, assuming that's the case. And also ask if there's any requests they have of

us or anything we can do to be helpful with. For example, I know during some power outages this past fall, we sent our water wagon out to one of the towns that was affected, had a lot of well water customers. We want to know what we can do to be good community partners. And those check-ins after emergency events, when the towns may be scrambling with their response, and we want them to know that, first off they don't need to worry about the RWA, but we're also here to help if there's anything we can do to be of assistance.

Dan:

And then finally, at the very bottom of this is before we really even launched this program, one of the first things that we did was contact the talents throughout the RWA's district and ask about sharing information on their websites. And we've had different sort of responses with this. It's been positive and it's been everything from sharing contact information, like "Here's the phone number for the RWA," to providing a place for us to share critical updates that we might want to get out to the people who are our customers and their constituents. And that brings me kind of the screenshot of having the right here. I know it's not huge, I'm not sure how well you can read it, but on the right, I've got highlighted a little link that is a result of emails we sent out last week.

Dan:

One went to East Haven, and one of the pieces of information we shared in this email was that the RWA is planning on rolling out on new design to our bill. And we want to let just, we've told customers, we've told folks about that. We just want to make sure that, put that additional reminder out there, let the towns know it's coming in case they received any questions, it's better that they know from us first. And East Haven was good enough to share a bit on their website, to help get the information out to their customers. And it's a small thing, but I'm sharing it because it's, I think in my opinion, a really great example of what we're trying to do here. This is, the town's constituents and the RWA's customers are the same people.

Dan:

And it's very much to our best interest for us to be working together and sharing information to keep all of our customers and constituents prized at what's going on and happy with their water service. And it's just, whether it's big things like us working together on a major infrastructure project or smaller things like sharing a link on their website, the RWA and its towns should be partners. And that's largely, that's really what this program is all about. And like I said, we've had a great response so far and we're going to continue doing it. You'll continue to see more of us from us in the coming months. So, that's what I have to overview of the program. I want to put it out, if there's any questions for the members here?

Stephen:

Sure. Go ahead, anyone.

Tony:

Hey Dan, this is Tony Rescigno, representing the town of North Haven. Where does Phil [Visee 00:12:46] sit in your structure?

Dan:

Phil is not part of the communication department anymore. He's part of Larry's team.

Tony:

Okay. All right. I was just curious about that.

Stephen:

Dan, I would imagine that the police departments would appreciate this kind of program in terms of, they're out there every day and when things happen, they need to know kind of what you're doing. So have you had feedback in that regard?

Dan:

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, one of the earlier things we did on this is we reached out to all the towns and asked, as any of you mostly or all have seen, whenever there's a main break or some sort of short service interruption, we send an email out to town, letting them know "Here's where the break occurred. Here's how many customers are [inaudible 00:13:40]." Those are the lists that we're using for these liaison contacts. And on those, we have fire departments, we have health departments. We have yourselves, town officials and police departments. And so we reached out to the towns earlier this fall, before we put our first meeting and asked, generally the chief elected official, the mayor, or selectman, whoever it would be, just is there anyone else who should be added to these? We want to make sure that, police are great example. That if there's anyone who should be hearing these regular communications from the RWA, we want to make sure they're getting them.

Stephen:

Yeah. I would imagine before this, you might notify the mayor's office, but internally they may not share it, you know?

Dan:

Exactly. And why have that delay when we can send it directly to the fire chief, the police chief, the health department? It's like an email. So yeah, we make sure that all those groups are included and then we try and regularly, if we know there's update of, there's for example, the mayor changes an election, we'll make that change ourselves, but we try and solicit those requests from the towns of, is there anyone who should be getting these updates who isn't already? Because we may not always know if, for example, the police chief changes.

Stephen:

Yep. No, I'm glad they have that conduit for the other way around for information coming in to the water authority. So, in a very timely and direct way they can access that.

Dan:

I mean, that's what this is all about, is sort of creating that conduit and frankly, another benefit of it is as we meet with folks, and myself, Kate, and Laurie, meet with people in these meetings or share these communications back and forth with them, we're also getting to know the towns better. And so, if we want to reach out to someone in a particular city hall, we have a better idea of who to contact. So it works either way as well. If the RWA needs to work with the town on something, like earlier I mentioned those communications that went out this past summer talking about water conservation during the drought, we know who to contact. It just makes collaboration much easier when you know who to call.

Stephen:

Yeah. I think the relationships are really important to build ahead of time.

Dan:

Absolutely.

Stephen:

As far as the website is concerned, that link is, is that the same sort of information for all the towns? Every website gets the same information? Do you have a page on their website, or how does that work or do you pull them into yours?

Dan:

It depends. So that one, they control their websites. We don't control what goes on their website. In that instance, they shared some brief information, provided a link to our website where we provide graphics and more. We reach out to all the towns and talk to them and ask what would be available for us to do. Like I said, in some instances, it's just "This is the Regional Water Authority's phone number and email address. Here's how to get ahold of them if you have questions about your water service." I know there was a couple of instances in which there was more information provided or more options, like a small page that have more links, graphics, or other more RWA dedicated information.

Stephen:

Yeah. I mean, you want to pull them into your website so that they have access to a lot of other information that they may not have known was there, correct?

Dan:

Exactly. And I mean that's why that can be so helpful, is it's another way to direct them to something that we want to make sure they're able to find on our website.

Stephen:

So have all of you connected with all of the towns so far?

Dan:

Yes. We have.

Stephen:

Yeah, you've done that. And Jennifer, I think that the RWA already got a list of those folks and which towns they cover, is that correct?

Jennifer:

Yes. Yep.

Stephen:

Okay.

Jennifer:

That went out. I can resend it if you'd like.

Stephen:

Might not be a bad idea to remind everybody.

Jennifer:

Okay. Jeff had a question. I saw his hand raised.

Dan:

Yeah, I saw a hand go up.

Jeff:

Yeah. If I could, Steve two questions through here? The first is Dan, thank you for the information. I'm interested in knowing whether you find the towns to be generally responsive and receptive to the relationships that you're trying to build in terms of timely communication.

Dan:

Generally, yes. I think there's, some of our towns already have relationships and know who to talk to. And so this, it doesn't bring necessarily as much new to the table, but it does create a good opportunity for them to communicate back and forth with us. So they're certainly receptive and appreciate it. The ones, what we found is that there was the towns that maybe didn't know who to contact. I know Kate was telling me, Kate Reynor mentioned because Seymour's one of her towns, that she had a very positive response from Seymour because they said they just weren't sure who to reach out to in the past. So they were very happy to receive this.

Jeff:

And what about your relationship with the COG, the South Central Connecticut Regional Council of Governments that I think has a stake in every town except the Valley that you serve?

Dan:

Yeah. They're not parts of these communications, but I know Laurie Vitagliano, who is our government liaison to the legislature and also participates in the COG and other groups. So she regularly attends those meetings. So in that way, we're able to stay in touch with those larger groups.

Jeff:

Got it. Thank you very much.

Dan:

The goal with this is we want to try as much as possible to be specific to these individual towns, rather than having conversations with all of them. We don't want them to feel lost in a large group.

Jeff:

Understood,

Stephen:

Hey, Jeff, this is Steve. You know, there's two different things. I mean, as representatives, we are on the board and we also handle particular issues as the town's representative, but what they, I don't know if they call it a service or communication provides is a direct communication so that somebody doesn't have to call me and I have to get it secondhand and transmit it back. They can call the RWA. I don't know about main breaks.

Jeff:

Right.

Stephen:

I could get that kind of information, but this is a better role for that.

Jeff:

Right.

Stephen:

A better model for it.

Jeff:

Absolutely.

Naomi:

And Dan, I just want to say, thank you for all your help. You've been very helpful with me in the city.

Dan:

That's what we're here for, happy to do it. Like I said, I live here in the city, so I want to help as well.

Naomi:

Thank you.

Prem:

Hey Steve, Prem here, right? And I think, and obviously Dan is doing a wonderful job, right? He's trying to build the relationship and everything, right? But as we think about more on the strategic line, I just wanted to comment, right? Dan is also working on things like strategic projects, where we have a communication plan for monthly billing that's coming in, right? So kind of reaching out to the people who are responsible and their [inaudible 00:20:40] to kind of educate them more. And also when I started reflecting on some of the strategic goals we have, Larry and the rest of the [inaudible 00:20:48] team, we talked about that whole constituent support, right? So it's one of our strategic goal. It directly ties into that. So we are really making sure that these communications are not just at an operational level, but at a strategic level, right?

Prem:

To make sure that we're having a two way conversation and a very exciting infrastructure action plan we are trying to put forward, right? And we talk about RWA applications, for example. They're trying to build that communication relationship to make sure that we can address both sides of the half, right? So this is a starting point. So it is really strategic as well, right? So I just want to add that. So Dan has been doing a wonderful job on that as well.

Stephen:

Okay. While you're on, I wanted to ask you, is there any sort of danger or issue with the website sharing?

Prem:

No, I think Dan kind of clarified. So it works the way we don't control the content stream, right? From a town's perspective. But what Dan is saying is that we can provide a link, which pretty much not just our towns, anybody can take that and make that as part of their website, for example, right? That can direct them to certain information. I don't see it as a direct threat. We do have all the filtering and everything else in place. So there's no challenge there. Again, to Dan's point everybody's situation might be different in terms of their needs, right? By the town. So we have to probably make sure that we capture the information that is relevant to them rather than just generalizing the whole thing, right? So, but I think that's the piece that Dan works with and the team works with, right? To make sure that they're providing that information, the link, and there's no challenge, there's no security issue. There's nothing like that.

Stephen:

Okay.

Prem:

Yep.

Stephen:

Any other questions from board members?

Tony:

No, it's good to know this is happening.

Naomi:

Yeah, Dan, were you able to get anyone at the city to link into their website?

Dan:

I think New Haven was one of the ones where they have a database of contacts and they put us up there, which, it's not its own page, but I think that's also very helpful because if someone is new to the city, particularly if they are a renter and don't pay a water bill, they don't necessarily know who their water company is right away. And they can go on the municipal website and they can find "Okay, I get my water from the Regional Water Authority. Here's a contact for them."

Naomi:

Okay.

Dan:

So they were able to set up for us. I think that's certainly very beneficial.

Naomi:

Okay.

Kevin:

Hey, Steve, it's Kevin, do you mind if I make a comment?

Stephen:

No, not at all.

Kevin:

Yeah, thanks. So I sat in on a meeting a couple of months ago with Dan and the city of Milford. And I think it was good to have, I think that, I haven't talked to any of the town officials about it, but I know that they like being kept informed. And it's a process. I think a few of them were probably like "Why are we having this meeting? We haven't had this meeting before and what's going on and what is Dan going to tell us?" So it was a good meeting. I haven't had the opportunity, for a lot of different reasons to speak with anyone in the town about it, but I applaud the program and I think it'll take some time to, but you'll eventually really see some big benefits because as a former RPB member, when I first came on the board, there was a lot of miscommunication with the public works people and the water company and the sewer line project.

Kevin:

And it caused a lot of animosity and issues. So I think by being proactive and putting the time in now, the dividends are going to be paid later for the towns and for the RPB members and for the water authority. So I think it's a great idea. And I wouldn't get discouraged if you don't get a lot of feedback, because I think the feedback will come later on. Thanks.

Dan:

And I actually, I reached out to, I know someone well who works at city hall there and actually was in that meeting and I reached out to ask how they thought it went. And he said they were very busy that day, where they were happy to hear the information. And that is one of those towns where I do feel like we do have a very good connection to. They can get ahold of us, we can get ahold of them.

Kevin:

Yeah, I think it's great. Thanks.

Stephen:

Dan, I want to thank you for including me and copying me on all the communications as well, and I'm sure you were copying other RPB members because it keeps us in the loop as well, and kind of knowing what's happening more on a day-to-day basis with the towns.

Dan:

Absolutely. Yeah. You're part of the team on this as well. So we want to make sure you all know what's going on. So very important to have you on those.

Stephen:

Very good. Any other questions? We can let Dan go then. Thank you for coming today. We really appreciate it.

Dan:

Oh, happy to have you. Happy to be here, thank you for having me.

Stephen:

Thank you.

Larry:

Thanks Dan.

Jeff:

Thanks Dan.

Stephen:

Our next item on the agenda is the report of the OCA. Jeffrey?

Jeff:

I just have one consumer matter to report on. You may recall at the February meeting that I briefly told you that we had just, I think it was that day, received a referral from RPB member, consumer affairs committee member, Rich Smith. A Milford resident who owns a rental property in West Haven had reached out to Rich concerning a billing question. And we finally heard back from the customer, there was a little bit of delay in the customer responding to our initial inquiry, talked to the customer, got the information about what his issue is, shared that with the authority. And now we're waiting for the authority to provide us with responsive information based on its internal investigation and research.

Jeff:

So what the crux of the complaint basically is that the customer, like I said, owns a rental property in West Haven. He had a tenant that moved out in 2017. He had a new tenant that moved in in 2020. When the new tenant moved in, he found about several years' worth of bills, which he then told us he paid, close to a thousand dollars in bills. And then in September of 2020, found out that there's apparently another \$1,300 that's owed. So we've asked the authority to investigate this account. Once we have the full picture, we'll be able to share with the customer what that balance, if there is in fact \$1,300 balance, what comprises that balance. And we'll go from there.

Stephen:

Hey Jeff, who's getting the bills? Was the renter getting the bills?

Jeff:

The tenant, the tenant. Yep.

Stephen:

And so that the landlord paid it, the first one? He thought he was responsible for it?

Jeff:

When the new tenant brought to the landlord's attention that there were several unpaid bills. He told us he paid those bills.

Stephen:

Hmm, okay.

Speaker 10:

And Jeff... I'm sorry, go ahead.

Stephen:

No I was just wondering who's responsible. It is the responsibility of that tenant, correct?

Jeff:

Well, that's between the landlord and the tenant under their lease. Ultimately it's the landlord's responsibility as the owner of the property, because if he doesn't pay, the ramifications are for him.

Frank:

Jeff, don't we have a policy in effect, I think with a landlord tenant thing, even though the tenant doesn't pay, that the owner of the property is responsible with regional water?

Jeff:

Yep.

Laura:

Yes.

Frank:

Don't we have a bylaw in effect or something like that, or a rule?

Jeff:

Well, just as a matter of law, the customer, if you will, is the owner of the property that the meter is attached to.

Frank:

Yeah. And he was having a tenant paying the bill, right?

Jeff:

Apparently under his lease arrangement, that's... but like I said, that's between the landlord and the tenant. As far as we're concerned, the landlord's the customer.

Frank:

Correct. Yeah. That's Willow street, right?

Jeff:

Yes it is.

Laura:

Yes.

Frank:

Thank you.

Laura:

And I apologize. I was on mute and speaking on mute Jeffrey, just to confirm what you were saying. We are working on the account, that is being handled by the escalation, the manager of customer escalation right now. It involves a couple of people, that was a sale so it's a property closing and quite a bit going on in the account. But we are working on that account, but Louise did reach out to [inaudible 00:29:44], it's taking us a little longer, but we will have a resolution to this shortly.

Jeff:

Great.

Stephen:

Thanks Laura.

Laura:

Okay.

Stephen:

So that's your one issue, Jeff?

Jeff:

That's it. Nice and clean.

Frank:

Jeff, I have a question. How's Sunset Hill? Is that all resolved?

Jeff:

Sunset Hill? It's not ringing any bells with me. Sunset Hill?

Frank:

Branford customer, Sunset Hill.

Prem:

Hey Frank? This is Prem here. Yeah, it's resolved. I just got a confirmation today that the customer is all set. So that's all set as of today.

Frank:

It's all set? Thank you Prem.

Prem:

Yeah it's all set, yep.

Stephen:

Okay. Moving on to item five, which is approval of the February invoice. For 16 87 50. Do we have a motion on that?

Frank:

I make a motion we pay in full.

Stephen:

Great, thank you. A second?

Naomi:

Second.

Tony:

Second.

Stephen:

Thanks, Naomi. And any questions for Jeff on the bill? Hearing none. All those in favor?

Tony:

Aye.

Naomi:

Aye.

Stephen:

Any opposed? Thank you. That motion carries. Item six is notice of our next meeting in April, which will be the special joint meeting with land use committee to go over the budget with management. I remember when Jennifer proposed us thinking "Well, that's a long ways off." And here we are, pretty

quick. So even though that's our meeting, I mean, would anybody have an opportunity to go to the finance committee meeting if they wanted to for the same topic? Jennifer?

Jennifer:

Yeah. RPB members can go to either meeting.

Stephen:

Either one.

Jennifer:

Yeah.

Stephen:

Well, if they happen to miss it, there is another.

Jennifer:

Yes, that's correct.

Stephen:

Okay. Thank you. Last item is if there's any comments, any new business? Members? If not, okay, the motion to adjourn?

Frank:

I make a motion to adjourn, Steve.

Stephen:

Thank you, Frank. And a second?

Tony:

Second.

Stephen:

Thanks Tony. Thank you everyone. Have a good evening, appreciate you.