

**Representative Policy Board
South Central Connecticut Regional Water District
Consumer Affairs Committee**

**May 17, 2021
Meeting Transcription**

Stephen:

Well, it's 5:31, and we do have a quorum. So I'd like to call the May consumer affairs committee meeting to order

Tony:

Hey, Steve, excuse me.

Stephen:

Yes.

Tony:

I don't want to be rude, at 6:15 I have to get off. So I'll just disappear.

Jeff:

Just make a motion to adjourn.

Tony:

Okay.

Stephen:

Well, that's a message for Prem then, because he's got... I have the presentation and it's a lot to cover, so...

Tony:

Okay, then keep it short.

Stephen:

You get what you can get.

Stephen:

First item on the agenda is our safety moment. Very good job, Jennifer, on heat safety tips. All very good suggestions for the summer. It would be a good idea to take a look at that. Make sure you're complying with all of these reasonable suggestions.

Stephen:

Item two is approval of the minutes of our April meeting. Do I have a motion?

Naomi:

I so move.

Tony:

So moved.

Naomi:

Second.

Frank:

I second it.

Stephen:

Tony and Frank seconds it. Thank you.

Frank:

Yeah.

Stephen:

Are there any corrections, any omissions, any comments at all? Hearing none, all those in favor?

All:

Aye.

Stephen:

Any opposed? Any abstaining?

Rich:

I will abstain, Steve. I wasn't there.

Stephen:

Okay. Thank you, Rich.

Rich:

Yeah.

Stephen:

And that motion carries.

Stephen:

Our third item is the presentation on customer care realignment. Prem, are you going to start?

Prem:

Yep. I will start the presentation and try to keep it simple and quick. Please do stop if you have any questions, and we'll answer any questions as we go. We've been talking quite a bit about monthly billing. Just to set up backdrop, we've been talking a lot about customer experience, et cetera. So we wanted to kind of bring together what's going on in RWA. Where are we going in terms of our vision?

Prem:

Today's agenda is really focused on four specific areas. Looking at our customer care vision, what does it mean from our RWA customers perspective when you talk about our mission, vision and values. We'll touch upon that. We will also talk a little bit about what do we have in our RWA landscape, number of customers, how do we reorganize and things we are working on?

Prem:

That's the second area of focus, and then customer journey. We will talk a little bit about what is that journey, for example, what does customer face today? What are we trying to put in front of customers so they get a better experience, so the journey of the customer. There are various journeys, as you can imagine. One could be a [inaudible 00:04:59] complaint, for example, I think that's the example we have used, versus a customer who wants products and services from RWA. How does that look like, today versus tomorrow. And the work that's behind us, where we're actually trying to put in a roadmap perspective. So there'll be a discussion about roadmap, et cetera. And then the last but not least, what are the transformation initiatives we are trying to work on?

Prem:

These are the four ideas of a scope for today's discussion. I have two of our main team members. So Laura, she's the customer care director. She'll cover some of the discussion points here. We also have Dana Bochan, she's my transformation director who has been working on quite a bit of initiatives for us.

Prem:

Any questions on the actual agenda before we go into the details? Are we good?

Stephen:

Prem, this is Steve. I have sort of a big picture question here. With this realignment, are you trying to solve existing problems that you have with customer service or are you trying to create a vision of what you think customer service should be, or is it a combination of those two things?

Prem:

That's a great question, Steve. As a matter of fact, it's both the combination. We are solving an existing problem, at the same time, we are setting the next five years road map. So as we are trying to go into the future, what are the things we want to do for our customer? So it's a combination of both.

Stephen:

Okay.

Prem:

Okay, perfect. So let's go into the details. Jennifer, if you could please help. Again, there's a lot of words in here, I'm going to keep it really simple.

Prem:

From the perspective of a customer, we want to make sure that we would like to keep our customer interactions, the way they want to deal with us, as a simple responsive manner, and it's consistently providing a high quality of service. That's an essence of it. And if we think about what does it mean, everything we do in RWA keeps customers in mind. Customer first is a strategy and because they also get a technology hat, I call it as customer first on cloud strategy, which is where the technology and the innovation, everything is moving forward.

Prem:

That being said, a couple of things that we wanted to kind of underscore. We heard a lot about in terms of speed and quality. I know when we talked quite a bit, [inaudible 00:07:20] kind of asked a question in the past, how do you serve with quality, and how do you really kind of bring the speed? Keeping things like speed and quality in mind, we are trying to establish what we call as first contact resolution. We don't have a benchmark per se, so we are trying to figure out how do we resolve our customer issues the first time they reach out to us.

Prem:

It doesn't have to be a call because that leads into the second thing where more self-service. We are trying to drive more self-service. You heard from us quite a bit about monthly billing, some work we are doing on the non-core stuff that kind of brings in more of a functionality where the customer can opt in various products like PipeSafe or other products we offer. They're much of the self-service functionality that we are trying to drive forward.

Prem:

Obviously, I talked about the customer journey earlier, we'll catch up on that. Really kind of measuring and monitoring what are we doing, in terms of helping our customers? A good example is that we established what we call as a customer experience manager role, Laura is going to cover a bit more details later on, where we have a full focus on customer escalation. For example, every Friday we go through every customer escalations of any size. I personally chair that. And we discuss on what's going on to resolve the issues. We partner with, obviously, Jeff and [Lou 00:08:45] on the other side to make sure we are addressing things as they come. So things like that, which really matters to customers, we are very focused on.

Prem:

The other areas I would like to touch upon is proactive communications. We invested, as you know, in AMI technology, so we are trying to really put some of the perspectives there. How do we really practically notify our customers, whether it is a leak scenario, whether it is a scenario where they can look at their own consumption, for example. So we're trying to build through that whole roadmap that we can do more proactive measures. I know we are not at the best of class, but believe me, we have been doing quite a bit. As you know, more recently, we revamped our whole build redesign, where we provide graphs on the bill and customers can look in terms of how much consumption they got. So we made it more interactive for a customer.

Prem:

Increased revenue, I think we don't talk here more often, but you think about programs like PipeSafe for example, our goal, as you know, is to really bring in that revenue to offset the water rates. We keep our

water rates, as you know, below the 7%, while other water rates out there, as far as I know, they all the way up to 14 or sometimes even more. But we always have kept it lower. So really making sure that the increased revenue is helping our customers from a rate perspective.

Prem:

Now obviously, the whole resilient model that we talk about. As you know, we have an aging workforce. We talk about, if you remember, Steve, we said 50% or so of the aging workforce was going to be retiring in the next five to ten years. That's a quite a bit. So we are really looking how do we understand the single point of failures and really bringing in that resilient resource model. As you know, we are also unionized, so we want to make sure there's a path not only for management, but from a union perspective to build that relationship.

Prem:

So a lot of work that's happening behind the scenes. And obviously customer care is in the heart of everything. So those are the few touch points here, but there's a lot more. As the team goes in, you'll see more details. You can go to the next slide. Please stop me if you have any questions.

Rich:

Prem, I have a question. Going back to Steve's point, and maybe you're going to develop it in this presentation. But I think in other words, Steve said, what prompted this? Is it to solve a problem? Do we have metrics or do we have a dashboard, and did we have key objective measures that were falling behind, and this is a response to that? Or we don't have benchmarks, and we're just deciding that customer service is a good thing and we should go do better?

Prem:

I think it's a mix of a few things. That's a great question, Rich. As you see, you said KPIs and measures, right here in the slide it talks about KPIs and measures. So there are KPIs and measures we are trying to underpin because what gets measured gets done. We always say that. But in terms of the problem solving, that's the interesting question, because the customers want different things, especially now with the new customers. So there are things that we have today that we track, but we're actually trying to improve our metrics better as we go forward in terms of, let's say, multi-channel experience, et cetera.

Prem:

So it's really two fold. One is there is no underlying problem. If you're thinking, "Wait, is there a problem to solve?" Well, there's not a problem that we're trying to solve that we have a dire need for, but that being said, customer want more. Customer needs more, and we have to have a strategy where we're going to address that. And obviously, we are trying to build to reduce our costs, for example. The monthly billing product that we're doing, we are putting ourselves [inaudible 00:12:33] such as e-bill, 42% e-bill to drive more sales so that it reduces cost. There are strategies behind for us to reduce some of the cost leavers.

Prem:

And then I talked with first contact resolution. As you know, a lot of customers today talk about "Okay, we call and we get a service." But we have repeat customers that are calling us again and again. We do

have a metric that we track. So we are setting a baseline for that. And obviously, 15% of them will get resolved. So things like that. So it's a mix of both the things.

Prem:

There was a call for really making sure that we have a future in terms of the customer experience. And that's exactly what we're trying to do here. Hopefully that answers the question in both sides. Some problems to solve some, some to actually get in much better. That's the idea there.

Rich:

Thank you.

Prem:

Again, I don't want to go through all the details in here, I think I touched up on much of it here, but what I really want to make point in here for this slide is that the customer first. That's exactly what every one of us are thinking. Not just from a customer care perspective, but field services, field ops, everybody that actually walks out to go, let's say, fix a problem with the customer, they're all thinking the same thing. So that's been a constant theme across the company now.

Prem:

Again, I put some KPIs here, not to read through everything in details here, but there are metrics that we directly derived off of our... what we call as the business cases, like the 42% e-bill, 20% ACA, those are directly coming off of our business cases that we either said or we are actually saying to implement. Like the whole thing on monthly billing, those are the metrics there. AMI deployment, we talked about it quite a bit. We had at a 99.6... I may be a little bit off there, but 99.6% AMI deployed. We want to get that, hopefully, at 100%. So we have a capital project. I think about 600,000 to wrap up the project. There are direct metrics coming after we track every day so we can actually get things done. That's in essence what we're trying to accomplish for this area.

Stephen:

Prem, this is Steve. How are you determining what customers want?

Prem:

So we do a couple of things, Steve. One of the things, as you know, we do is a survey. It's an annual survey, for example. As a matter of fact, we're changing that now. We are trying to not only do annual survey, but we're also doing transactional surveys. So Great Blue is helping us on that. We haven't yet put it in place, but this year we are trying to track.

Prem:

So basically, every time a customer deals with us, we're going to have that transactional survey for them to tell us what do they want, how did they feel about their experience. That's a good example, to really learn from our customer, what are they really trying to get from us.

Prem:

The other examples, Steve, is that this multi-channel experience. I know we're still working through that roadmap this year, but we are deploying a portal, mobile application where we are trying to cater to all

customer segmentation. Because in the past, as you know, customers always just called us. Now we are trying to open up. Again, I don't want to say that there was no website presences, we do have all those things, but it is not at a point where it's measuring the experience. Those are the things we're trying to put in place, Steve. Obviously more to come along those lines, but those are some examples. Hopefully that helps.

Stephen:

Okay. Yep

Rich:

And, Prem, one more question. These KPIs are goals, not current numbers, correct?

Prem:

That's correct. You're absolutely right, yeah.

Prem:

Again, I know Laura is here and she can probably chime in later on in a little bit more details. These are best in class for our size. So that comparison, the baseline data is what are others doing? So it's not just something that'd be made up of. We're trying to make the best in class goals that's out there for our size and making sure we are hitting those goals and kind of improving upon.

Prem:

A good example is, Aquarion, for example. When you talk to them, they have a 40% e-bill, for example. And we are trying to compare and achieve more than what they have for instance. Then a call volume reduction, with the multi-channel, one of our goals is to reduce 20 to 30% of call volume. Today we have 115,000 calls that we have. In 2019 we had 115,000. And then obviously in 2020 with the COVID, we have a reduced number of calls. We'll talk about that when Laura goes through the details, but that's the idea, Rich. So these are all set for high standards.

Laura:

If I could just jump in a minute. On the two, on the e-bill enrollment and the AMI deployment, those being goals, right now, we have done an incentive of \$5 to our customers. We've launched some emails, and we're going to be monitoring where customers are able to hopefully enroll. We've been seeing a drive up. It's not as fast as we'd like, but we're heading in the right direction. And it's to have customers participate with the \$5 incentive.

Laura:

In regards to the AMI deployment, again, we have 3000 trust remaining. And we are now sending out certified letters there. The tone is a little stronger. We're getting some response there, about 30% response on that. So we're expecting to finish off this project. Then for those that remain would ultimately be charged the rate of reading. So there are things that we're doing presently to get to the 100% and also to drive adoption on e-bills.

Stephen:

Prem, Steve again. Is there a simple answer to why we can't get a lot more than 15% on first contact resolution?

Prem:

That's a good question. That's the baseline, Steve. We don't have a metric today. That's the first time we're putting it on the table for this year, but eventually, we'll drive that up. We don't have baseline, that's why.

Stephen:

The second question related is, are there more calls coming in than the current staff can handle per day?

Prem:

No, it's not, right?

Laura:

No.

Prem:

No, it's not. It's an interesting question that you asked. As you know, we have held back all the shuts. So we are not doing any shuts now. So the day we open up the shuts, it's going to start driving the calls. Because as you know, 40% of our calls are related to the payment and the shuts. So we are monitoring that. Of course, along the lines of what [Pura 00:19:02] is doing now, what Jeff and other teams are suggesting of what's going on in industry. So we constantly are looking at that.

Prem:

Once you open that gate, I believe the cost will go up. But to be honest, we are getting prepared for that. So we do have a couple of positions we posted. We are looking to hire to make sure that there's no service level impacts. I would say for the past six months we have been coming out green on also is levels so far.

Stephen:

Okay.

Prem:

Hopefully that's a simple answer there. Let's go to the next slide [inaudible 00:19:32]

Rich:

Prem, one more, I think I missed something. There was no baseline for first call resolution. If there's no baseline, then how do we measure improving it by 15% if we don't have a baseline.

Prem:

That's a good question. Now, the first contact resolution does not have a baseline, Rich. But we do have other things, for example, average speed of answer. We have other baselines that we're trying to compare to. And based off of those baseline, and we do measure, we at like 70 seconds that we need to

finish up the call. There are other things that we track on operational KPIs. Based on that, and since we don't have a baseline, we actually had to take this number as to what others did, other companies did. Based off of that, we picked this number.

Prem:

But to be honest with you. I wouldn't be surprised if the numbers are pretty high in terms of being able to achieve. But once we set that up, and then we'll start increasing it on hear. So that's the basis. To be honest, there's no science behind it. It's based on industry, based on what we are doing for other KPIs. That's how we came up with the number.

Rich:

I guess my question is, how will you know if you made 15% if there's no number to start with?

Prem:

I think let's say you shot tracking... The way I think about in simple terms, you're going to start tracking, you're tracking all the calls today. And then once you start tracking on how many calls are coming in... Like I said, we have something on repeat callers, so we know exactly how many people are calling us again. Now we can trace back off that and say, "Okay, how much of that did we reduce?"

Rich:

I see.

Prem:

You see what I say?

Rich:

Yeah.

Prem:

That was the logic behind. I know it's not a science but...

Rich:

Okay. So we're good. Thank you.

Prem:

Welcome, yeah. So I will hand over to you, Laura. I know there's a lot in here. Hopefully you can fly through this.

Laura:

Yes, and good evening everybody. It's good to be with you again. What we're talking about here, and Prem touched on quite a few of these, we have 150,000 and those are not calls at this point, their interactions, transactions. They could be calls, they could be mail and the web and so forth. Customers are reaching us in very, very many ways although not to the level that they had in the past. Our call volume has in fact decreased significantly, but our customers are reaching us on a daily basis. There are

still opportunities for automation. There is still quite a bit of manual effort in the customer care environment. But we are looking at that in the number of projects that we'll be talking about in little bit.

Laura:

Prem indicated that there's been some change. And he introduced the customer experience manager. Some on the call have actually interacted with her. Her name is Louise Damico. She has over 25 years of experience in the organization. So she's very well versed in our regulations and our statutes and utility practices and our customer. So she is the voice of the customer. She brings to us things. Someone in the previous slide asked about, how do we know what the customer wants? Well, we have an opportunity with her to really get our hands around that. She is the voice of the customer. She's engaged in a lot of our initiatives, therefore, she'll bring back to us not only what the future holds, but what's going on, some of the challenges that she sees as she's dealing with customers-

Laura:

It's going on. Some of the challenges that she sees as she's dealing with customers or the IVR and our staff and so forth. So she is, it's relatively new, but it's an exciting time for us to really keep our pulse on what the customer feels. The other things we do have is front office staff. These are our agents handling the calls as well as doing property closings. As we mentioned in other meetings, that's high volume continues to be at a level of about 500 a month. That is still work that's done by the customer care area, as well as work that's done in regards to billing and billing exceptions, for example, and those exceptions have come down significantly as a result of the AMI deployment, and the fact that we're getting a very high rate of actual reads, which reduces estimates. We've seen the benefits there.

Laura:

Some of the front office and the office staff. We are an 8-5 shop Monday thru Friday, again, a union shop, predominantly doing the work. A lot of experience here, a lot of longevity, we utilized a translation service. We do not have a bilingual call center, but we do have the services that would allow us to serve non English speaking customers.

Laura:

Again, as mentioned our ASA we do have metrics that we, that we look at, at 70 seconds as our metrics for how long a customer close on average to be served. We are outperforming that number by more than half. The abandonment rate is set to 5%, and again, so far this year where we're under that. We're about a 4% at this point. First call resolution is a key measure in call centers, and we are developing that, trying to extract the data from our system in order to devote the reports that we will need as we move into the next fiscal period. On the collection and the billing side, we do have, again, they handle the exceptions. any outsourced. They are ensuring that these bills get out the door in a timely manner. They also are looking at collection activities.

Laura:

We do have a collection master plan in place that includes an outbound campaign. That's looking at aging reports. We call it the top 100 aging reports and these individuals will actually pick up the phone and make calls. This initiative started in October and today this physical year, we gained over a million dollars by making calls, whether they be to call the authorities, thereby by account fast, we've gotten a significant payment from towns, from residential customers. It could be sometimes it's not a matter of not having the funds to pay. It's a matter of being sure that bill gets to the right place and so forth.

They've been really excited about that the team is engaged. It's a back office team, and again, a lot of experience in that group. We've also done the lean process. We've done an enhancement there, we can go a place over a hundred liens a month, for example.

Laura:

We were able to bring in quite a bit of work in that regard. Some of that with seeing right away, we've placed 237 liens with almost a million dollar value where in the past we were sending a handful on a monthly basis. This has also been quite a strong collection effort. Services provided we have over 225,000 customers. Although we really have about 116, 17,000 utility. What are utility customers? We do have other customers involved in pipe, pipe states, recreational customers, lab, and so forth. We are serving quite a few customers. The level of property closings, continuous, and there's more and more coming into Connecticut every day. In billing our goal we touched upon it a little while ago, we have sent out a mailing and we'll continue to monitor that, to see how much more we can get customers to adapt e-billing. We're looking forward to more customers taking advantage of that.

Rich:

Ask a question. How do you determine the right number of contexts that are personnel? If we're doing over 100,000 inbound calls a year, that's about conservatively, about 8,400 a month. It comes out to maybe 260 a day per person. Is there a number that you know is the right number of people on the phones?

Laura:

Your math is good because right now we're meeting our goals because, we're about half the level. On Average, let's say in a call center, it all depends. We're always talking averages, but we're talking about, 60 calls an agent, would be without causing a lot of stress without sacrificing service levels would be a goal that we would meet. We are working at this point. We haven't had normal in a while. We are just staffing up to two CSR's. We believe that this would help us based on the history that I've seen at the water company to keep us to the service levels we're delivering today. We haven't seen collections in a while, the arrearage have grown, so there are different challenges in our service areas, meaning people losing their jobs, so their calls can become longer in duration. That's something that we'll have to keep an eye on, but in our normal, I would say calls are being handled about 60 calls per agent per day.

Prem:

I think that's a classic question. How do you really measure how many you need? I think when you look at industry standard for the typical size that we are, it can range from 8,000 calls, 130,000 calls, if you think about some calls are very long, some are pretty short. There's a lot of other dynamics that plays into it. I think we got to really about the cause. That's we start tracking some of these metrics we talked about, how do you reduce the call volume? That's where we were introducing other customer segmentation channels. This way we can actually reduce the number of calls. Otherwise, typically this just increases based on the services that you provide and you need a bigger contact center.

Prem:

That's the counter strategy there. There's not a right or wrong answer for the site, 80,000 130,000 is typically the standard. Based on all the different dynamics there, we are trying to be best in class. We've got a 100,000 calls now. We're going to go monthly billing. Bills and stuff for you got 12 payments. Calls are going to increase. They have to have a counter strategy and that this was a counter strategy. That's

why we have multi-channel experience and other things we are bringing in play. I'll just stop there. Hopefully that answers your question.

Naomi:

Before we move on, when someone calls, does every single customer speak to a representative does any of this go right into automation?

Prem:

You want to take the load or you want me to take it?

Laura:

I'll take it. The IVR is aimed to serve our customers also. We do have options over the IVR where customers are able to make a payment and so forth. A lot of our flaws are actually related to payments. Those customers are served through the IVR. They don't have to speak to an agent. They can also get transferred for example, to a pipe safe for handling if they were interested in a pipe safe. The IVR serves customers that way. Otherwise, if they want to hold on for an agent, then they do. That's where our customer service agent would be able to set up a new account. For example, maybe talk about tenant landlord issues or a high bill complaint. Those calls would be then handled by an agent.

Naomi:

Do you know how long this takes? I just had a recent experience myself and I had to call, and my question was very simple, but it was something that the automation was not able to answer. I had to push all these buttons before I finally got someone. It was very annoying because, the subjects just didn't pertain to what I wanted. Is it like five different channels they have to go through, or could you just hit the zero and go right to someone speaking, or do you have to go through every single step?

Laura:

There's right now, five options over the IVR. Your first option, you have to make a payment. It's the very first option or a billing matter. If you press that and you can actually make a payment or you can stay and wait for an agent, it would then route you to the agent. The second one would be pipe sakes. So most of our falls are coming into those two top choices. The other one is about general information. A directory for example, is available a corporate directory. The most of our calls, if you want to be served through billing, they're going to come through the first option.

Naomi:

Okay. Thank you. [crosstalk 00:33:19]

Prem:

Sorry, go ahead.

Stephen:

I have a few questions just because, I'm trying to understand the current operation in order to understand this presentation. I'm interested in knowing if calls are directed to people who specialize in the area of expertise to get a code resolved quickly, for instance, does the lab handle their own calls, and how many calls are relatively easy? Do you have a breakdown of the calls by type? For instance, if

somebody calls in and says, I have no water service, can someone say to them immediately- there's a break in your area, it's being resolved now, you'll get a notice or something. That's over in 10 seconds. Can you do that or do you have to take time to get back to them? How does it how's that work?

Laura:

No, typically you don't have to take time to get back to them. Let's say we get a call. We don't have a dedicated to your first question. Do we have dedicated agents for different types of calls that would be called, like routing the calls by skillset? For example, we don't have that because of the size of our call center. That is something that we don't have, but all the representatives are trained to be able to handle all calls. If a call came in and let's say to your example, can it go to the lab? It doesn't go to the lab necessarily, because they would talk to us and then be transmitted to the lab if it was that. If it's pipe safe, a customer can either be transferred to pipe safe because they know that product well, or the customer can choose to go to pipe safe directly via the IVR. That's two ways for them to get to different areas of expertise that way. I thought you asked something else. [crosstalk 00:35:28]

Stephen:

Naomi's experience as well, calling someplace and none of the options were relevant to what my question was. It's really frustrating not to be able to get someone on the phone.

Prem:

I think that's a great question. We are looking at our call flows. What you're just mentioning, the five options that Laura described, those are all call flows. Right. We are looking at constantly improving that. here are certain ways that customers are, let's say you don't face anybody, then you get to that customer agent versus folks pressing a button and then they try to make a payment. They're not able to go to the IVR system. There are things in them call where it says you tried twice, you're not going through, and you get redirected to the customer agent. Things like that. We take it as very good feedback. We need to go back and see what are the improvements we can make on some of these call flows.

Prem:

We covered the hype, for example breaks, like you said if a pipe breaks. Those were actually the main things that are in the top of the list. Maybe there's improvement and just add something that's going to directly take them to an agent. That being said again, remember we said more self-service. If you call Uber, you call everybody else. There's not even a number to call. They just do everything on operationally on a phone. That's more self-service and they're saving costs. In our perspective, I always tell the team, if the customer is not able to get through what they want, get them onto an agent. That's how seamless the calls should be. That's where we are trying to improve upon this, Naomi. Right. I'm pretty sure all of you are having some experiences like that, but believe me, this roadmap is going to fix the problem. That's what we are trying to do.

Naomi:

One other question before we move on. You'll have here that there was 237 lanes placed. Were any of those commercial businesses or are they all residential?

Laura:

They could be commercial also, there's a mix. They're not limited to residential.

Naomi:

Is there a percentage of the 237 that were businesses that were placed?

Laura:

I can get to that, but I don't know it offhand.

Naomi:

Okay.

Frank:

I have a question for Prem. Where are the calls going to be routed to? In New Haven at the main office, or are you going somewhere else with these calls?

Prem:

The new Haven office, Frank. All the calls going to our contact center. The only exception you would see is if you call off hours, it goes to an Edwards answering service. [inaudible 00:38:07]. I'm sorry, you're breaking up.

Frank:

Where is your contact center?

Prem:

It's in New Haven.

Frank:

It's at the main office? [crosstalk 00:38:16]

Prem:

Yes. The only exception is if you call after hours, nobody's going to pick up the call unless it's an emergency. That call, would get directed into an Edwards answering service, but we answer the calls right back in the morning because there's a whole process behind it. Maybe take the calls and then we call the customer back if it's after hours and not an emergency. Anything else on this one?

Laura:

Any questions for me?

Dana:

This is my cue. This is my slide. I know I haven't had an opportunity to meet some of you. I'm Dana Bochan, director of transformation Prem introduced me earlier. Talking about the customer journey and the roadmap, Laura and Prem have been talking a lot about self-service and how we improve some of our current operations. A lot of the questions that you guys are asking are all in that vein of how we're actually looking to get more insight from our IVR, and more information about the reasons customers are calling. This side, and what we're talking about here is sort of how we're looking to take that to the next level. How can we can improve some of those basic services and operations that we have, but what

we're looking at, as well is how we can change that customer journey. How we can be more proactive, anticipate, and prevent some of those calls, giving them their information in a quicker, easier to access fashion.

Dana:

What we're looking at on this slide here is an example of a customer who might experience a high bill. the top row is going to talk about what we're doing today, which is essentially an example might be that in January, we have some cold weather, maybe there's a small leak or break in the customer's pipes, And they end up with a high bill come April. We bill quarterly. it's going to take three months before that customer really knows that they even had potentially a problem. that's really frustrating for the customer. They get the bill in the mail, they've got to call us, we have to research it. It's a very prolonged and frustrating process when for the customer when they get this high bill. What we'd really like to do is change that as you said, to be something more proactive. We're working on a customer portal and a mobile app for our customers that will allow us to do things to be more proactive.

Dana:

When we see these breaks and leaks, what we're calling continuous consumption in our AMI system. how do we use our technology better? AMI will tell us when consumption never goes to zero. If it's continuous and that's an unusual pattern, it should stop in the middle of the night while we're sleeping. We can get these alerts and more proactively notify the customer that there's some unusual consumption. If you keep using at this rate, you're probably going to have a high bill when it comes out. We're trying to give you some insight. Do you want some information to help you find these possible leaks? There are questions that our CSRs will ask a customer as a result of a high bill. What we're trying to do is introduce automation and self-service so that customers can walk through some of those very basic steps themselves and try to get those questions, answered, resolving, and ideally preventing that high bill when it comes to the April timeline.

Dana:

The idea is to give customers some of that information at hand when they want it, when they need it, when it's most relevant. Some of the other options that we're looking for from our mobile app and new self-service is to how we could use it to also grow participation in certain programs. Whether it's the ability to introduce budget payments or, levelized payment plans for customers where it might make sense, promoting some of our new non-core products and growth in those areas, allowing customers to report, incidents they see in the near vicinity, a hydrant that needs maintenance, leaking water in the street. We really want to create more of that engagement factor so that we're not always the place that customers go when there's a problem. We want to create a positive relationship with them as well. This ability to do some proactive and self-directed on the customer's part engagement is what we're after with our future roadmap and journey.

Dana:

Any questions or thoughts about that?

Prem:

We can go to the next one.

Dana:

I'll take this one. I know we didn't get a cue cards who's next. The milestones and our customer care roadmap, I think you guys are very familiar with the bill print and bill presentment projects. We redesigned our bill. We had a great successful launch in April, where that bill started going out to our customers. We've got in a variety of feedback from both customers and employees, a couple small tweaks around making it easier to find the account number on the bill and creating some bolding and attention to some of those things or, introducing some different use of white space. We're really kind of working on all of those things with our vendor and loving the feedback and reaction that we're getting from customers. That was a really successful outreach.

Dana:

We're still working closely with the vendor we're in, what's called the warranty period, where we're really kind of have hyper care and hypersensitivity around what's happening with this program. It's all been going very well. We actually had in the middle of the customer portal, as I mentioned, this is the solution that will bring us some new non-core functionality. It will bring us a mobile app and some new self-service options for our customers again, on the web and on their phone. The first release of the customer portal is we actually got the official go decision made today, so that will be released to production this weekend. We're doing what we're calling sort of a soft launch, where we're making it available to customers who are also employees. This is kind of our trial period. Put it through its paces, make sure that this is good and working, you know, we've done all the technical, we've done all the user testing within the project and past that, but we really kind of want to get it in the hands of users and really see what happens when customers are using this tool.

Dana:

Our employees are going to give us great feedback. They did it when we launched Waterwatch for the first time as well. We know we can rely on them as a good gauge for what our customers will experience. We'll be doing that this weekend. We'll go live and we'll start working with our employee customers next week. Additionally, we're building the non-core billing solution. This is some additional SAP functionality where we're partnering with Vertex one. They are a CIS specialist implementer who is building this non-core solution product, where we're able to advance and simplify some of the billing that we do for programs like pipe safe or allowing us to the whole idea is that they're creating a solution that will allow us to more quickly and easily introduce not only new products where today that's a little bit challenging and time consuming and quite expensive, And the structures we have, they're going to allow that to happen, but we're also going to be able to do much.

Dana:

They're going to allow that to happen, but we're also going to be able to do much more effective marketing, product bundling, targeting of particular customers and be able to expand and grow the participation even outside of our existing territory. So we're really excited about the opportunities for those commercial enterprise options that we're looking at there.

Dana:

Then later this year, we'll actually be expanding and enhancing the web and mobile app functionality by fully incorporating all of our Kubra functionality. So the first launch will be a lot of ability to see payments made on the accounts, your current balance, your water consumption, a lot of marketing and communication preferences and information. But the third launch in December will get us all of that full view picture of making payments, signing up for e-bill, viewing your e-bill. So we're going to incorporate

all of that electronic e-bill, e-pay functionality, which will be a huge advantage for our customers there as well. Again, it's a much simpler interface, it's a much cleaner interface and easier to sign in with one username and password, as opposed to today, Kubra has its own password if you want to do e-bill, e-pay, Waterwatch has a different login and password if you want to do that. So we're really making this a very seamless experience for the customer moving forward.

Dana:

Any questions on those two?

Dana:

The monthly billing conversion, we've actually been talking about this for a little while. This is actually an outcropping of the AMI project. If you recall, this was sort of one of the drivers for moving into AMI. That conversion, we've been doing workshops. Again, we've partnered with VertexOne. They've been a great partner for us as we've been trying to look at some of these customer solutions, and we've been doing workshops with them getting in some of our requirements, collections requirements and system requirements, route design requirements, moving everything into 12 monthly cycles is a challenge. We're trying to be conscious of geography, impact on the back office, levelizing the revenue, making sure that really all aspects of the business are captured and have a seamless conversion into the monthly billing. So we're on track to go live effective January of next year. So we're really, again, working through those workshops now.

Dana:

And then the CIS roadmap. I know it's come up now and again, but we're really back looking fully at the options of our CIS. So SAP as our customer information system is where we are. And we're really trying to look and understand some of the upcoming expenses we have related to required upgrades. We have some opportunity to perhaps look at other paths that will allow us to actually save a couple of million dollars. It's a little bit of now and then, much, much more to come on that. It's very premature for me probably to even throw out a number like that. Prem's probably going to kill me. No, don't kill me.

Dana:

So we're really working on what that means and what that looks like. I know we've come to you guys with the CIS RFP in the past. We put that aside due to some priorities around infrastructure that were arising at the time, but we've got some technology imperatives that we need to assess relative to that. And we'll be looking to probably go through our RFP later this summer, hopefully going to the full board in the winter, maybe January at the latest. That's kind of our intent, which would allow us to do this timeline where we're hopefully have a new CIS in June of '23. But much more to come on that. But we wanted to make you aware that those are some of the strategic paths that we're looking at.

Dana:

Any thoughts or questions on the slide?

Prem:

Okay. Let's go to the next one.

Dana:

This one is a busy one. I think back to some of the earlier stuff. There's just a lot of ways that customers are getting serviced, if they look at other utilities, if they look at other industries. If you want to know where your Amazon package is. It tells you it's 10 stops away. And if you want to know exactly where they are. These are the mentalities that customers are coming with when they're dealing with their utilities. And we really want to try to step up those options, offering new channels. Again, mobile apps, social media, web enhancements, giving them more self-service and really trying to incorporate some of the new tools that create a lot of efficiency around machine learning, artificial intelligence.

Dana:

These are kinds of the things even you'll see if you go out to someone's website. It'll say, "Hi, I'm so-and-so chat bot. Can I help you with something today?" Right? These are artificial intelligence tools that really can help customers find what they want, quickly resolve what they need and get their questions answered. Again, preventing phone calls, preventing follow-up, it's a very cost-effective way to try to address customer concerns. So this kind of gets into what all of those different types of tools and systems could be. These are some of the ones that we're looking at. Both what we're offering today with the [great check mark 00:51:38], as well as what we're looking for in the future.

Rich:

Question for you. Reduced costs, do we have some kind of a total operational cost per year of customer service? And do we have a goal of what our costs will be reduced as a result of these initiatives?

Prem:

So maybe I'll take that question. So we do have the cost average. So maybe Laura has got all the details, I don't have it in front of me now. But when you look at the 30% call volume reduction, and then when you look at monthly e-bill endowment, et cetera, every one of those pieces are part of a business case. So we look at the cost, the current cost versus what are the efficiencies that we are getting through the life of the project or the asset. So we are trying to aggregate that. We can share it as a follow-up if you want to have it and look at that, but in terms of the metrics that we are driving, those are actually driving to reduce that cost.

Prem:

So we do have the cost information. We are driving based on those metrics. And if you ask me what that goal is looking like, we take into consideration not just the capital projects, we're also looking at our O&M. Whether it's a head counts, for example, we looked at the realignment in terms of 27 or so heads that we had. We then characterize based on what do we need for now and future, we cut down the head count to 25. So there are things like that as part of the metrics. So we actually track all of that. So we do have information, and we could share if needed. Yeah.

Stephen:

Hey, Prem, this is Steve. Relative to our earlier question, I have a similar question and concern that this is very admirable, very comprehensive, very complex, so when we implement this, this is going to be a lot of resources to maintain this. And are we really saving anything? And what is it that we need, and what is it that we want here? Can we break this up or change it if we need to, depending upon how these things may or may not be used and in what timeframe?

Prem:

Yeah. No, I think this is a five year... That's a great question, Steve. This whole detail that you see is for the next five years, not like we're doing it next year. But at the same time, when you start thinking of the cost, we are well under... If you remember the capital plan, we had put in some small dollars to do the work. What's amazing with this whole thing is it's trying to address the technology obsolescence. All of you would have heard about SAP. We haven't done anything for the past 12 years. The asset is dying. Literally next year, we got to do something about it, otherwise the system will stop working. So there are things like that.

Prem:

And to be honest with you, we are looking at opportunities when things like that come in place. So now we have to replace or we have to upgrade SAP, et cetera, we are... That's what Dana talked about. We're looking at a business case that compliments. So as an example, when we talk about the replacement, the understanding and assumption is that we are now going to incrementally increase our O&M costs. So that should be a music to our ears. So we take into account into a... What are the costs we spend on technology, whether it is data center, professional services, et cetera? We are trying to account all of that with no increment of cost. Then way back when I think when we talked about technology like SAP, the numbers that were provided were bigger, but now fast forward four years, as you know, technology changes every day. So we are looking at a lot of different model. This whole cloud model is totally different. We're able to look at some of the costs that is literally to the level where you could talk about a tier two application.

Prem:

So things like that they're taking into account, and that's why we want to come forward in terms of the RPB application. We'll talk about it. What are the pros and cons? What different options we've got. And we're really addressing based on needs. There is nothing in here that's good to have. It looks like it's all good to have, but the reality is that these are basic things. While you're replacing the basic things, we're getting what's best in the market, in the technology space, and we are putting that in play. And the cost as an implication, we don't actually have anything in the capital plan that are nice-to-haves. To be honest with you, on that side we looked at everything, and we are trying to make use of that opportunity to put this in play.

Prem:

So I mean, certain things like, for example, automation, you see RPA, et cetera, those are all part of our process. It feels like there's a lot going on. It is true. But at the same time, not from a capital perspective. We are trying to keep it less capital-intensive and put what we really need in technology. So that's how we are approaching it.

Prem:

So I mean, if you look at the RPB applications, Steve, you'll kind of recognize when the time comes right, we're going to talk about it. And you're going to see what are the options we've got and how are we trying to approach it. So lowest cost is one of the biggest levers we've got. Yeah.

Stephen:

Yeah. All of these initiatives are millions of dollars. SAP is outdated, we're going to pay for SAP for another 10 years, right? At least.

Prem:

Yeah, so now-

Stephen:

For an outdated technology. I mean, it just goes on and on. AMI, \$25 million, plus.

Prem:

Yep. No, I think that's a good question, Steve. To be honest with you, I guess when we look at whether SAP... That's why the RPB application, we talked about the RFP doing. We are bringing an AAC to look at our options, SAP, non-SAP, everything else. We are trying to put that in a perspective of saying, how much do we really need to operate the system, for example. If you remember way back when we did this whole RFP, I think it was close to \$16 million. Fast forward four years now, things have changed quite a bit. We are looking for \$60 million while we have all infrastructure needs. As you remember, we're building dams and the things we need to do. We have put out very cost effective solution.

Prem:

And we actually are looking at some cost avoidance. Like upgrading a system for two and a half million dollars, that was in our budget, capital budget, et cetera. We are trying to make use of what we've got and really keep the system up for the money that we've got and really put that business case to help us. So that's what we're trying to do, but more to come. I don't want to put all these numbers in play until we see the actual business case, but we'll talk more details. But we are very cognizant of the fact that we're not putting technology just for the sake of putting technology. And we have to take care of our revenue system too. So that's the perspective.

Stephen:

Okay. Yeah. Half the bill is not water, half the bill is administrative and all of these services, so it's something to keep an eye on. It's a different subject, so I don't want to get off track here.

Prem:

Yep. Yep.

Stephen:

So we can move on. Thank you.

Prem:

Okay. Sounds good. Yeah. Anything else, Dana, from your end? Any other questions, by the way?

Naomi:

Well, I want to say something. The little emojis, I guess, for sake of another word, I really like them because we deal with the Epic system, and everything basically is about pictures. And it has really proved to be something that has really taken the United States by storm because every big business that... Especially the healthcare system, everyone's switching into Epic, even the City of New Haven has gone to Epic because pictures are worth a thousand words. And people tend to see this and people know what to reach for, what to do because the pictures say it all. That's all.

Prem:

Thank you. Thank you, Naomi. I mean, that's a great perspective. I agree with you a 100%, yeah.

Prem:

Okay. So what else we have? Hopefully... This isn't our last slide, Dana?

Dana:

I think we have one more. And actually, this one kind of... Where earlier we were looking at sort of the customer journey using a mobile application, this is just highlighting a little bit more about the customer portal and the options that we're introducing with it for our own solution. Again, the journey mapping and thinking about how a customer progresses through certain types of transactions is one way to look at it. This is just sort of an image to help you understand some of the cool things that we think customers will really appreciate and use.

Dana:

Again, this is being driven off of our own web analytics that show the most frequent types of transactions customers are doing or searching for while they're there, e-bill, e-pay, creating that single sign-on component, using marketing and communication tools to help drive growth of our non-core solutions and market offerings. So this just gets into that a little bit more from a bullet list of some of the items that will be coming with the mobile app.

Dana:

So if you don't have any questions or any... Or if you do, I'll answer them, but that is our last slide.

Stephen:

Okay. Thank you.

Dana:

Thank you.

Prem:

Thank you, Steve. Yep.

Dana:

Prem, yeah, I want to thank you, Laura, Dana for a very excellent presentation, very comprehensive and complex. So it's a lot for us to think about. Do you plan to present this presentation to any other committees?

Prem:

I think the plan was we are going to present this in the consumer affairs and AMI was in the finance I think, and some of folks here were part of that presentation. We hadn't planned, but again, that being said, we can present, Steve, if there's other [crosstalk 01:01:22]

Stephen:

Yeah. I think it's good for the RPB members to be aware of all of this, for sure.

Prem:

Okay.

Stephen:

I mean, it certainly affects customer service directly, but it touches on a lot of parts of the organization and accesses them all moving forward.

Prem:

Sure. Yeah. No, I'll take that with Jennifer, and we'll plan for a presentation in another committee, as well. Thank you. Thanks for the feedback.

Mark:

I have a question.

Prem:

Yes, Mark.

Mark:

Because of what's happened recently with this oil thing, I mean, has anybody... I might've got here a little late. I don't know. How vulnerable are we to such an attack?

Prem:

That's a good question. I can tell you this, that we are not vulnerable at all. In the sense, one of the key things that happened, Mark, with the Colonial Pipeline, that's what happened there, where their business network was impacted. And they actually took down their distribution network based off of that attack. Then they want to really make sure before they start up the work on the distribution side. So from our perspective, the way we are protected, I would say our security system, the distribution system is totally off the network. It has no functioning internet DNS, we call it. It's not on the internet.

Prem:

And obviously an attack of the [inaudible 01:02:44] requires the attacker, the hacker to go through all of support software, servers, hardware. We do not have that in our mix. So we keep ourselves up. We also have a weekly... Department of Homeland Security does a weekly scan on our network. So we keep up with all of that. So something of that magnitude-

Mark:

Where was their mistake? Their mistake was they were out there, they didn't have protection, or...

Prem:

Exactly. Now, their mistake was... The way I would say it is, their business network, not the distribution network., they actually had software on their PCs. And I think through an intern or so, they got vulnerable where they actually got hold of their system, because that was exposed to the internet.

That's why one of the key things we are to keep in mind is the operating system. Again, I don't want to go too technical here but-

Mark:

Really, I won't understand it.

Prem:

So we've got to make sure that our systems are up and running and it's up to date. I think that's where usually the hackers-

Stephen:

We keep all our information, as I understand in, in iCloud someplace in Minnesota or something that, right? Did they not keep their stuff away from their... In other words, have another...

Prem:

[crosstalk 01:03:56]. You mean a backup and disaster recovery?

Stephen:

Yeah.

Prem:

Yeah. I think, again, this is through my network, FBI and DHS, they don't tend to share those information, Mark, but I would think that they would have similar network and a data center in place. Again, it's just that one vulnerability that gets exposed. Like I said, in their case, it's a little different than ours because we keep up our software upgrades on time, we have two antiviruses in place. Again, like I said, from a perspective of our security system, it is totally isolated, nobody can access it from the outside. So those are some of the measures that we have that probably [crosstalk 01:04:37]

Mark:

Our distribution too is totally not around too? I mean to send the water one way and water another way?

Prem:

Yeah. No, I think, again, I'm pretty sure you guys know. The distribution network, what I was trying to say before was that for somebody to get access to it, they usually come through the internet, right?

Mark:

Yeah.

Prem:

What we have done is that we haven't put that on the internet at all. There's no internet. You can't go through the internet to our distribution network, so that's why I feel it's more secure.

Mark:

Okay.

Prem:

So that's the critical piece. And again, we talk to our partners in DHS and SISA, et cetera, where we really make sure that we take their guidelines. We do a lot of critical asset protection assessments and all that.

Mark:

Good.

Prem:

So we take care of that. Yeah.

Stephen:

So they made a big boo-boo. They were hanging out there.

Prem:

You can say that.

Stephen:

It was like an apple on a tree.

Prem:

You could say that, but I don't want to comment anything on what they did, but that's what probably happened, yeah.

Rich:

Steve, if I could ask one more question before we move on from the presentation.

Stephen:

Sure.

Rich:

Just so I can kind of sum it up in my own mind. I have to put this out there just because it sounds wrong, but our customers... We're not in a competitive industry, right? And so they have nowhere else to go. Is there a calculation that shows expected return on investment over some time horizon? I know we've alluded to it in pieces and in different business cases, but at the macro level, if we're talking about customer experience, we know what it costs today, do we have a target goal and we're able to say through cost avoidance and cost savings that this makes business sense? Customer retention isn't one of our issues, right? So it's customer satisfaction, and how that monetizes, I'm not sure. So where do we realize cost savings and cost avoidance through this investment?

Prem:

So I think that's a great question, Rich. I'll just make it in simple terms. So if you think about what we have today, whether it's in our own personal, the dollars that we spend on operational costs, whether

it's technology or the process we build and the partners we work with, et cetera, we have a track of all of that. So you said it right, you have a business case to invest in or change your technology, or you're trying to do some new process improvements, et cetera, that business case should handles in terms of what efficiencies are. So you keep up your O&M cost lower, because you don't want to increase your O&M costs just like that, because the customer pays for it. Similar thing applies on the capital side.

Prem:

So when we address in our business case, even the monthly billing business case, if you remember, we talked about how much over the period of time... Let's say we have a status quo and we don't do anything, versus we actually implement this. And the first product that went live recently with the bill presentment. So we used to print our bills, we used to mail, there's a cost associated to it. But eventually, we gave that functions back into Kubra for bill printing, bill printing and the mailing, et cetera. We saved dollars. That was in the business case for monthly billing and the bill presentment project. So you kind of think about along those lines.

Prem:

But net, when you think about your incremental cost, as far as you do not have any incremental costs, in simple language. So I don't have incremental costs for, let's say, [inaudible 01:08:16], et cetera, and then try to save on dollars. And as you know, a lot of times you think about, in simple terms, you have to keep up with technology because, like I think you said, Naomi said, customer satisfaction, where is it going? We have to make sure we keep up with that and still have our O&M costs lower. That's where the key is. It's not just that we want to put all this technology and all that. So we put business sense in there.

Prem:

I'll just give a very simple example of, let's say we talk about SAP, where we spend money for hosting SAP, we spend money on putting the servers in place, we spend money on putting the professional services in place. All of that cost. And then when you look at it in terms of what you're trying to put in a business case, if you're able to match that...

Prem:

... Look at in terms of what you're trying to put in a business case. If you're able to match that, or even have a break on that in terms of what you're providing, you're keeping up with customer expectations, then you still have a win-win, right. You're not incrementally putting a lot of costs on the customer. So that's one simple way of thinking, but your point, where does this all align? That's part of the whole work that we do on our O&M cost. As you know, we go through our O&M budgets, our capital. We look at all of those pieces to really make sense. So we don't put an incremental cost, right.

Prem:

Even the comment I made about 27 people on the customer care side, now we are exhibiting the same function at 25 now we got some, two headcount efficient, right?

Prem:

Because we are trying to automate systems. We are trying to automate some processes, things like that are all part of that function. And when you look at some of these pieces in our own embedded care, it's a reflection of that, right? Now we can take it as a feedback from you guys. And we're going to come back, how are these things helping? And then we can relay back to you and see if it makes sense for you.

Right. So, but that's what the Laura does. That's what the Dana does. You know, we make sure that we look at everything and Rochelle does a great job on keeping up with our O&M and capital budgets. That's exactly what we do. And I do agree with you. It's pieces of all the business cases, but we do gel it all together and our budgets. That's what we do.

Rich:

So let me leave you with this, then. If I look at this presentation as a project unto itself, and I was running this, I would want to know what is my one, three, five year ROI, total not spread out in a whole bunch of different business cases where we can point, but we, we pull it together and then say, this effort's going to return X number of dollars in cost savings and or cost avoidance. And that's what I'm kind of grasping for here, is what is that?

Prem:

Yeah, no, I think I'll take that as a feedback. And you know, we can play it back to the team here. We can come back and our discussion, but that's exactly a simple example was that cost avoidance, you may just mention. We have to avail a SAP system next year, right? So I just said two and a half million dollars' worth of investment. Now, as part of the cost avoidance, we are challenging to say, "Do we have to do an upgrade, or should we really look at putting a system in play that probably is going to cost us or the period of time, 10 years, X, millions of dollars." If you remember that \$16 million number that you probably heard from the past, we are trying to put a spin on St. Kenny, avoid the cost of two and a half million dollars next year.

Prem:

Right. And we are trying to come up with an answer. So that's what he was going to be saying, but I take it from your Rich, right. And that's exactly, I keep asking the team to, what are we trying to do here in terms of the business, not technology as a take of technology, but really, the return on investment. But I would say this to you also, because we have to keep up with the technology. We have to invest, the dollars that we need to like AMI our business case that we talked about was we had to replace our meters.

Prem:

And then it was the life of the asset. We had to do what you do. And we pick the latest technology that can help us and get some efficiency, like meter readers, for example, we don't have those meter readers anymore. All the meter reading comes through. Right. So we were trying to do things like that to make sure that our efficiency is in there, but we'll come back to you now, you're going to see that reflection on the technology when you go to the RPB application, but I get it from you. Technology has a cost and of course, security as a cost, right. If we have to make sure you're able to keep up with that.

Rich:

Right. Those that's kind of capital expenditure, that's investment in the business; as opposed to discretionary investment, when we're through discretion, we're investing because we're looking for an opportunity for return on that investment. So we can tease those two numbers apart.

Prem:

Yep. I like that. Yep. And that's exactly what we'd be doing with our RPB application, though. That's a great feedback. Yeah.

Rich:

Thank you.

Stephen:

Hey, Prem. One last question here. Are you, are you analyzing the calls to see what issues you can resolve so that those calls diminish, and you're not actually getting that number a call anymore?

Prem:

Yes. You want to take that Laura?

Laura:

Sure. We've done a lot of analysis now looking at interaction records, meaning, okay, what, what are our calls? What are our customers calling us on? And again, the majority of the calls have to do with payments, and it's a changes behavior, but we're looking to see why else are they calling us? And why are they calling us multiple times? The new role that, that we talked about, the customer manager, we'll also be able to dedicate time to that. What was happening is where she was actually responsible prior to this for customer service, to full center and collections and so forth. But now in her role, she can actually I'll look at cause why are customers calling based on cost, and based on interaction record. Every call we take requires an interaction record. So we could do the analysis on that, as we move forward. At this point, the biggest driver has been payments, but there are other reasons that, that they may be calling us. And what can we do about that to either eliminate the call or minimize repeat costs is something else that we're looking at.

Stephen:

Okay. Is the new bill and say monthly billing, was there any of the goals of that to reduce calls?

Laura:

The new bill was actually to serve the customer better, clearer. And you know, we do present now graphical information with customers are able to perhaps serve themselves before making that call. So, sometimes the customer will call, why is it's a higher than we have conversations with, with an agent, as opposed to, they might see the graph and realize, oh, this happened last year too. You know, when I filled the pool or when I watered the lawn, and things like that. So that is an expectation and a benefit that we're expecting as we continue to build up the graphs. So yes, that was some something that we're hoping for.

Stephen:

Okay. Thank you.

Naomi:

Pram. Just one question, that's goes back to what Mark was speaking of. Are we looking at, since we're outside of the organization, are you looking at doing any of the new FMA things for us, because we're outside getting into this, coming into your system.

Prem:

I'm sorry. You were breaking up one sec [crosstalk 01:15:39].

Naomi:

Because we go onto the zoom and get all of our information from the organization. Have they thought about doing any the F of the, I'm sorry, the MFA things, as far as we're concerned?

Prem:

You mean like a multifactor authentication.

Naomi:

Authentication, right.

Prem:

Yeah. No, I think that, that's a good question. We do actually have multifactor authentication, Naomi, today, right? That's the good news there, but I think Dana made this point where we have multiple input points, like Waterwatch and Culebra and other things, so that's part of the roadmap this year. Maybe consolidate all of that and you know, so this way customer does not have to go through multiple channels. They can come all in single sign-on. Right. So that's the idea there. So we are working on that.

Laura:

Okay. Cause I'm thinking about not necessarily the customer, but us, because we're going into information that could be confidential, or whatever. So that's what my other, and my other question is this, when the hydrants are put on in the city of New Haven, who does that get billed to?

Prem:

Is it...public or private? I think there's the two.

Laura:

Oh, so the hydrants are owned by the public and private?

Prem:

Yeah. There are actually different they're based on the town. You know what I mean? We were actually dealing with what was the street, Laura, if you can correct me. The one that we just sent for the private hydrants. So there are actually a mix of hydras, Naomi, right? So you got public and private, so based on the town, so I'm not sure how many are out there. I'm pretty sure, Laura can get the data points there, but it gets billed to the town. If it's a public. If it's not, if it's private, it goes to the actual customer owner. So in this case, yeah. So that's what we do here. So basically, I mean, more recently, as you know, we have new constructions and things come up and it's an association owner or something that starts off there and eventually it gets rolled into the customer. We have all the process in place, but we have a mix of both. Yeah.

Naomi:

Is there any way I could get the information for New Haven?

Frank:

The New Haven Fire Department maintains all the fire hydrants. They rebuild them and everything else there. They do it at the fire trading school where the mechanics are. They install, they maintain all the fire hydrants in New Haven. The fire department does.

Naomi:

No, but what I'm saying is he's saying some are and some are private. Are fire hydrants in New Haven public?

Frank:

They're owned by the city and they're maintained by the city. Every time it's different. Some towns pay the water company a flat fee per hydrant, but New Haven, they maintain their own and they care of their own fire hydrants. It's all done at the fire school.

Naomi:

Okay.

Prem:

Thank you, Frank.

Stephen:

Okay.

Prem:

Any other questions? I think we are way over here.

Stephen:

We have a long presentation. Thank you so much.

Frank:

Thank you Prem.

Prem:

Thank you everyone.

Dana:

Bye.

Stephen:

Okay. We're going to move on to item four on the agenda, which is reporting the OCA. Jeff.

Jeff:

I had reported the last few meetings to you on one consumer matter that had been pending involving 15 Willow street in West Haven, which was a rental property owned by a Milford resident. Representative Smith had put the Milford resident in contact with me because he had reached out to Representative

Smith. And I'm happy to report that the matter has been resolved to the customer's satisfaction, it was a little bit convoluted because the tenant had made some payments on the account and vacated the property. The property was sold and the customer received estimated bills because the authority had been unable to access the property.

Jeff:

And once they were able to access the property prior to closing, they updated the estimated bills. And there was a little bit of a, a sticker shock. And unfortunately, the attempts to notify the customer because they had been mailed to the property and the tenant didn't provide those notices to him, left him in the dark. So the compromise that was reached was to basically split the bill with the customer. So the customer paid the \$419.18 And the authority ate the \$419.18. So they split the baby, so to speak. Customer was satisfied with that. The authority was relatively satisfied with it. And the OCA of, since the customer was satisfied, is, is happy with the outcome. Other than that, one consumer matter, there's nothing else going on at the OCA level, you all receive my budget letter. And that was discussed at a finance committee meeting with the authority, and that's my report.

Rich:

So Jeff, I'm concerned that if they take all these measures to proactively reach out to customers with, for high bills that may end up impacting your billable hours, because you're not going to have as many complaints. I mean, we need to consider that in that presentation.

Jeff:

Now that's a good thing, I think. The business case analysis to be performed, obviously, to make a determination about the level of resources that should be committed. I mean, the authority and its mission, the ROI doesn't always add up some of the investments that are made on on the technology side, go beyond the core mission, but are necessary as a public utility. So, we have to look at the business case analysis and have a real good discussion about that. That thought that the discussion that the committee had tonight with the authority was right spot on. I looked at the presentation when it was emailed by Jennifer last week.

Jeff:

And you know, some of this stuff, it's time, it's hard to quantify, and we looked at the AMI application, we looked at the SAP application. It was the same kind of conversation as we're investing tens of millions of dollars in something that doesn't affect water quality, but does it affect the customer experience? And you know, what does the customer expect by way of service? When the products we provide is water and it's essentially in the districts that the authority serves. It's essentially a regulated monopoly. So, you know, I thought that was a good discussion to have. And it's something we got away look at in the context of the customer experience.

Stephen:

I'm sure there's a few people out there that are looking to make Jeff's life interesting, always.

Jeff:

Yeah. I mean, we really don't get a lot of complaints. There's a half a dozen a year. That's pretty much it, and that's the way we like it. I'd much rather spend my time reading budgets and reading applications and dealing with that, than dealing with the customer compliance because every customer complaint's

important. But when you look at the ROI, the amount of time the OCA spends on it, versus the dollars involved, it's always upside down.

Stephen:

Yeah. I think good point, Jeff, I've been with the organization many years and is very few things that really elevate to our committee. The customer service has always done a great job.

Jeff:

Absolutely. Thank you,

Stephen:

Jeff. I have a question for you

Mark:

Just in regards to Willow Street or, or landlord tenant situation, here. Okay. I thought the regional water had a contract with the landlord. And if the tenant did not pay the bill on that property, it would be referred to the homeowner or landowner, homeowner would be responsible.

Jeff:

Correct.

Mark:

Right. Is that we have a contract that if they want them to send the bill to the tenant?

Jeff:

Right. Look, it's the property owner's responsibility ultimately, because that's where the lien rights are.

Prem:

That's right.

Mark:

Yeah. So moving forward, I know this caught this guy off guard, and everything else, the tenant just moved out and stuff and we did our best foot moving forward. I think we should go ahead and enforce the contract that the regional water has with the billing system.

Jeff:

I think by and large that's what happens. This situation is somewhat convoluted. You know, the authority Louise Damico did a lot of research on this, and the customer, did try in good faith to make his account current, as well as his tenant's account by paying what he thought at the time was the balance due. He was not aware, according to the authorities research, that another bill based on consumption would be issued, as the bill that he paid of almost a thousand dollars was for estimated billings.

Jeff:

So this was a lot more involved than just saying, "Hey, I didn't know about it." He made payments based on what he thought was the amount owed. And there was a little bit of a communication issue. There was a labor intensive review of the accounts that was conducted at our request because we want to make sure we're not giving away anything. That's not appropriate. We wouldn't recommend it because every dollar that gets written off is something that has to be paid by the rest of the consumer base. So, we were satisfied, as was the authority, that this \$416 write-off was appropriate, given the factual record for this particular property.

Mark:

Hey, one more question. On the billing, do they state on the actual bill that it's an estimated cost? So the homeowner or the owner would notify the water company and let them in and get an actual reading. Does it state on the bill estimated?

Prem:

It does.

Jeff:

It does indicate that it's an estimate of bell.

Mark:

It does? Okay. Thank you, Jeff.

Jeff:

Yep. Yep.

Stephen:

Okay. Any other questions for Jeff? We'll move on to item five, which is the approval of his invoice for April for \$3,305. Do I have a motion?

Mark:

I make a motion. We pay it.

Naomi:

I second it.

Stephen:

Naomi seconds it. Any questions for Jeff on the bill? We can see all the time he put into Willow Street. All those in favor, any opposed? Any abstaining? Okay. That motion carries. Item six is volunteers for authority meetings, coming up June, July, August, and September. Is anyone available, or so what about this? To this point? Know that they might be able to do it? Please get us started for June.

Naomi:

I'll take July.

Mark:

I'll take June.

Stephen:

Thanks, Mark.

Mark:

You got to be on Zoom?

Jennifer:

Yeah, I think it's going to be on Zoom.

Stephen:

I believe so.

Mark:

Okay, cool. I'll do it.

Stephen:

You're doing June, Naomi July. August, and September, anyone possibly can do it, or interested?

Rich:

Steve, what are we talking about?

Stephen:

Attending the five member authority meeting, during the day.

Rich:

And the day is tough.

Stephen:

Yeah, I think, I don't know. Suzanne's on, do we plan on doing the zoom meetings through September?

Laura:

You know, I don't know the answer to that. I know that certainly this month, and next month, we're planning to zoom, but after that, I don't know what the plan is.

Stephen:

Okay. Cause it really is, you can attend parts of it, sort of. If there are, sometimes there's executive sessions, and things, so you don't have to be there the whole time. But we've got a couple of people to start it, and we'll take it up.

Mark:

You put it on your phone, you can do it in your car or right in your office. Put it on your smartphone.

Stephen:

Yeah.

Mark:

If it's a zoom meeting, that's why I was asking.

Stephen:

Yeah. Okay.

Jennifer:

Thank you.

Stephen:

We'll look at it again. And our next meeting is June 21st, 5:30 PM. Do I have a motion to adjourn?

Mark:

I motion to adjourn, Steve.

Stephen:

Thank you. Second?

Rich:

Second.

Stephen:

Thank you.