

South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority
January 27, 2022
Meeting Transcription

David:

All right. Well then, I will call this meeting of the Regional Water Authority for January to order at 12:30. And we will note that we have the safety moment first. And Larry, are you passing that along.

Larry:

That's correct. Paul Joseph, our interim VP will be doing that.

David:

The short, condensed version.

Larry:

That's correct.

Paul:

The short, condensed version. It doesn't appear that my camera's working, so I apologize, but I do hear and see everybody. But today's safety moment is tips for email. So, let me just focus on a few of them that I think are particularly important. There are eight here, but I'm not going to talk about all of them.

Paul:

The first one is to avoid sending any sensitive information over email. We want to be very careful about sending password, bank account numbers, social security numbers, because they can easily be hacked. Second, when it all possible avoid public hotspots, whether it be airports, bookstores, libraries, if you're sitting in the park, if you don't have to use it, that's the best bet. But if you do, try to avoid using your email because again, you're leaving yourself open to hackers and we want to avoid that.

Paul:

Third, and this just makes sense, it's don't click unsubscribed links in spam mail, because all you're doing is verifying that you have a legitimate address and what it's going to do, it's going to end up causing you to get more spam email. And then, lastly, and probably something that's really important, and that's to always log out. That way you can avoid people getting into your account. If your email is open all the time, then, again you're open to hackers. That's some very brief points on how to keep your email safe.

David:

Thank you, Paul. Appreciate that. And welcome aboard. I don't think we-

Paul:

Thank you.

David:

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... met yet. Although we can't see you, we're hearing you. Thank you. Critical role with the company, and we appreciate that. All right. We will move on to the meeting as the pension and benefit committee. So, is there someone who'd like to move that we recess the authority and meet as that sub committee?

Tony:

So moved.

Kevin:

I second.

David:

Moved by Tony, seconded by Kevin. All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

Group:

Aye.

David:

Passed as unanimous. Suzanne, it's all yours. Thank you.

[PENSION & BENEFIT COMMITTEE MEETS FROM 12:32 PM TO 1:17 PM]

David:

Okay. Thank you very much. Good stuff going on there. Thank you for keeping track of all that and keep because on the straight and narrow with regards to those technical matters, all right. We are now an item C, which is meeting as the sole member of the watershed fund. I don't know if Brian is coming. I didn't see-

Brian:

I'm here.

Catherine:

He's here?

David:

Oh the hi Brian. Now you're okay. We couldn't see everybody when we were sharing the meeting afternoon and welcome.

Brian:

Good afternoon thank you. [Inaudible 00:48:51] Hey. Excuse me there for a time.

David:

Always good to see an old friend. Now we got two Brian's on here. So Brian Stone, you're requesting that we add a member to temporarily get us up to 13 members for a few months and we have a capacity of 15 so sounds good.

Brian:

Right. April Capone is the director of public affairs for the authority. We have only one act of employee of the authority right now. That's Rob Olejarczyk, on the board and he's actually... This is going to be his last year. And I was discussing that and our needs with Larry and he thought April would be a great fit.

Brian:

I talked with her. She's excited about being on the board. I think she has a tremendous skill set that will just be beneficial to us so our board unanimously recommends to the authority that she'd be appointed to the board.

David:

Okay. This is pretty much following in footsteps. Kate had been on for this purpose.

Larry:

Kate actually is still on.

David:

Is she still on as the public member now?

Brian:

She's on, but she's not a [inaudible 00:50:12]. She retired, but she stayed on the board of the watershed fund and she's attends meetings remotely, which of course we're all doing anyways.

David:

Right. Yeah. So this follows folks what's your pleasure.

Brian:

I would ask that you vote to elect April to the board and I put in our resolution, let it be for a term expiring August 31st, 2024, which would be the last of our current terms.

David:

Okay.

Brian:

So there'd be five people that would come up that year instead of four, but ho hopefully my goal is to make it all five, to fill our board and make it five, five and five each year.

David:

Okay.

Kevin:

I moved-

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David:

Good effort.

Kevin:

The resolution.

David:

Thank you, Brian. Okay. Kevin, you move the resolutions is there a second.

Tony:

Moved.

David:

Seconded I Tony, who is our member of the authority representing us there. Is there discussion?

Suzanne:

I just have a question since Tony's a member representing us. Is there anything that you'd like to add about her candidacy?

Tony:

I think April's knowledge of the community and the groups that live and work in the community is going to be invaluable to us. There are other members of the board who have such knowledge, but with the RWA's interest in mind, I think April's going to be closer to it. I am strongly in favor of her presence on this board.

Suzanne:

Okay. Thank you.

David:

Oh, sensing you ready to vote all those in favor, signified by saying aye.

Board members:

Aye.

David:

I heard five eyes. So passage unanimously. All right, Brian. Thank you so much. We appreciate.

Brian:

Thank you all take care.

David:

Sorry we couldn't give you lunch.

Brian:

Take care, stay safe. [crosstalk 00:52:09] Thank you.

David:

All Right. So we will move on next to the consent agenda and there are seven items and one is a presentation. So we get a little bit of update on the [inaudible 00:52:22] program, which will be spoken of as part of the board report at the authority at the RPB meeting later per their request last month to get an update on this. So any-

Suzanne:

I'd like to make... I was just going to make a motion to approve the consent agenda as presented.

David:

Great. Is there a second? Seconded by Tony. Is there any amplifications or clarifications or request to take items off? Seeing none shaking no, that's good. All right. Well then all those in favor signify by saying aye.

Board members:

Aye.

David:

There are five votes. That's great. All right. We are now in finance and we have a type B amendment more significant than usual regarding Lake Gaillard water treatment plant concrete improvements. So who wants to give as a little explanation is Rochelle or is this going to Larry?

Rochelle:

I can provide the context for this. So basically what we're doing is the west river water treatment plant improvements has available money for fiscal 22. It's been a bit challenge with supply chain issues in particular so we're moving up this critical project that had actually been deferred due to the pandemic and the constraints that we had there into fiscal 22.

Rochelle:

Given the size of the amendment of 650,000, it does require board approval. I also just want to mention that we are looking at the capital expenditure projections for the west river water treatment plant. As you know, it's one of our larger projects, as well as given the status on the Derby tank and look at what we really expect those projects to come in at, at the end of the fiscal '22 and potentially propose an at an upcoming meeting to move those monies into contingency because they're going to be needed in fiscal '23. So I just wanted to mention that.

David:

Are their questions or concerns among the board members? I can't see you all because of the presenting. So feel free to speak up and no speaking up. Okay. Very good. Assuming none of you are on mute when you meant to speak, who would like to move this motion or move that we approve. I'm sorry. Move the motion, the [inaudible 00:55:08] this in their sorry.

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Catherine:

I'll move the question, David.

David:

Thank you, Catherine. And who would like to second?

Suzanne:

I'll second it.

David:

Thank you, Suzanne. All right. Sensing. You're all set with discussion and ready to vote all those favor signified by saying aye.

Board members:

Aye.

David:

I heard five votes. Perfect. Thank you. Passes unanimously.

Rochelle:

Thank you.

David:

We are now on updates. Thank you very much, Rochelle. Appreciate that. And keep our capital plan moving and keep our system in good shape. Updates we're going to hear first. The COVID update. I don't know. Larry, did you want to... Well you take over this section here.

Larry:

Yeah, Paul Joseph will do the COVID update.

Paul:

Okay. I found a plug in camera. So here I am. Welcome to the group.

David:

Nice to see you.

Paul:

As of Monday we had 64 confirmed cases. This is an increase of 21 cases since Jeanine made the last report, and we'll continue to monitor this. Our vaccination rate has gone up. It went up from 81% to 85%, which is excellent. Our mask mandate remains in effect for all of our indoor locations in including the water plants we have been cleaning every Saturday we do a full electrostatic spraying in all shared workspace. And again, the treatment plans were included in this treatment.

Paul:

And then at 90 Sargent, there's a daily midday sanitizing of common areas, which include door handles and tables. I checked the Connecticut COVID positivity rate yesterday that comes out every day at three. And as of yesterday, the positivity rate was 11.36%, which is a drop from Monday, which was 13.75%, but it's still high. And so currently we will have our employees working remotely until February 4th. And on the second we'll send out an email informing them whether or not we will continue with this full work from home or return to office policy.

Tony:

What the goals that would bring them back.

Paul:

I think certainly, and we have committee that looks at this. I think you want to a positivity rate below 10.

Tony:

Seems like a low boundary. The employees and the union people are not worried about coming back at those levels?

Paul:

I honestly don't know without doing an employee check.

Larry:

Tony there's some concern from employees about coming back during this period of time when the positivity rate is higher. So we're giving them that flexibility that having them stay home, those that can work from home effectively.

Prem:

I can speak from a perspective of customer care. So our productivity levels are pretty high. And as you know we've [inaudible 00:58:33] event live with our many different initiatives and the team has been outperforming. So there are concerns in terms of coming back. Like Paul mentioned, we have another conversation to see what makes sense, and we may have to push up the data again, Tony. So looks like at this point, we just have a watch, we'll have to regroup again and come back.

Tony:

Is there any word yet on what target is for us coming back and meeting in person?

Larry:

No, David, and Mario and I have talked about that at our meetings. And we'll probably be remote, I think through March at this time. And we'll just have to evaluate what's going on both at the RWA as well as the going on and the outside.

David:

Yeah. And as I've said in the past. Some of it will depend on the mayor because we are in New Haven, we're hosted by them. And he wanted the percent, some percentage I believe vaccinating people to hit

80% before he would allow open public meetings. And I don't want us to have to go into the larger meeting room and be spread out. Because we have had meetings in there we can't hear each other. The ceiling [inaudible 00:59:52] are bad. So I don't want us to be to the point where we're there. So it has to be that we're good enough to go into the small room and me and now maybe it'll just be the five of us plus Larry actually in the room. And then the screen, can have a...

David:

Of us plus Larry, actually in the room, and then the screen can have our presenters. And so, there may be a hybrid. And that will happen, hopefully, sooner rather than later, but think spring, as well. That's what we've been talking about. And we may be meeting in person sooner than RPB does, because we're a smaller, more nimble group, I think. So.

Tony:

The nonprofits are planning to re-meet in March.

David:

Yeah. So March or April depending, could be. Maybe our first get together would be the budget meeting, which is the end of March. That might be a timetable for a special topic, which we have anyway. That special meeting that might be the time, but-

Tony:

Isn't it safer to meet remotely? Because we could kill each other, if we're all in the same room.

David:

It is safer to meet remotely. That's why we're doing that, so far. And-

Suzanne:

[crosstalk 01:00:50] So-

David:

Not just for health reasons, as you're alluding. Sorry, Suzanne.

Suzanne:

That's okay. I would just ask, David, that you consider as you make the decision, that it be in sync with whatever Larry's asking employees to do. So if employees are being asked to be going back to work, and sitting in conference rooms to meet, then we should go back and meet in conference rooms, and do whatever is in sync with that.

Tony:

Should we lead that, Suzanne? Should we be ahead of them?

Suzanne:

I don't know that we have to be ahead of them. I just don't want to be sitting in remote, and employees are... Employees going back to work, sitting at their desks, six feet apart is different than being asked to

be called into conference rooms and tighter quarters. So, I just want to mimic whatever we're asking them to do, that we don't enjoy a certain remoteness, when everybody else is a little closer.

David:

[crosstalk 01:01:44] Understood. But I'm not so sure that their remote meetings in conferences have quite the number of people that we do. So [crosstalk 01:01:52] the factors-

Suzanne:

[crosstalk 01:01:53] All things considered. Right.

David:

Right. Right. I would like us to get back to meeting in person as soon as we can, because I think that's much preferable, in terms of actually seeing each other, and getting more of a feel, how we're feeling about items that, rather than the sanitized version here, that we're getting when we're remotely in our own places.

Tony:

So, how were we doing with our vacancies? Do you have a handle on that yet?

Paul:

We're having a tougher time. Melanie is working on what we have. I don't have an exact number of how many openings right now. I can have that for you, certainly, for the next meeting, but it's been difficult finding people. And it's also difficult finding the right people from a DEI perspective, because from a culture point of view, we're certainly looking to, hopefully, make the organization more diverse. But, we're plugging away. We're using as many sources as we can, and we're putting forth our best efforts.

David:

Thanks.

Paul:

I would note, in our board report, the number of employees versus the number that's authorized is about 12 or 13 different. And that's been a number we've had fairly consistent for quite a while. So, it appears as though we weathered through COVID without making the hiring process even more difficult than it could have been. So, just my observation.

Tony:

David, before we move on further, can I ask for a brief executive committee meeting at the end of your agenda?

David:

Yes. We need to have one as part of your compensation committee and review of Larry's performance, so far, midyear review. So-

Tony:

This would be for a different issue.

David:

All right. We'll have to talk about that, and the board can decide if we want to do that. Absolutely.

Tony:

Okay. Thank you.

Larry:

Yeah. Are there any more questions about COVID or anything related? If not, I'll give a brief update on the highlights from my board letter. So, no questions? I wanted to let you know, and that, that we are in the process of due diligence for the acquisition of a regional lab, as well as another well services company. I also informed you, in the letter, that we have recently entered into a partnership agreement with the town of Walcott Sewer and Water Authority, as part of our efforts to offer pipe safe to homeowners outside of the RWA service territory. And Prem and Dennis Donovan handled that, did a great job, and really an exciting development for the new year.

Larry:

And I also mentioned, in the letter, about our ongoing strategic partner arrangement with the engineering firm of Tighe & Bond. And the partnership is continuing to work as designed, and Tighe & Bond is continuing to be a great strategic partner to the RWA, providing ideal support to our engineering staff.

Larry:

So with that, I'll conclude my report, unless there's any questions.

David:

Are there any questions? I'll have to ask you to speak up, because can't see all of you. All right. All right. Very good, Larry. Thank you. So then we will move on to reports of the RPB committees and your committees that you visited. For January, we had Catherine at finance. Were you able to attend?

Catherine:

Yes, I did.

David:

Good.

Catherine:

So the finance committee, after reviewing this safety moment, and approving the minutes, took some time to discuss the completeness of the application for Lake Gaillard, water treatment plant clarifiers, recycling pump station, and concrete restoration project, and did recommend that a public hearing be scheduled, or that they discussed the scheduling of a public hearing at the next meeting, which would be today.

Catherine:

The committee also reviewed, Rochelle actually made a presentation for financial reporting. There weren't any controversial issues discussed, but there was quite a bit of conversation about the monthly billing. Many members wanted greater understanding and clarity on how different types of structures are billed, commercial versus residential, meter size, and the like. And that was a robust and very interesting conversation. I learned a lot.

Catherine:

Finally, there was a review of the dashboard report for RPB, and then they scheduled who would be attending the various meetings in the future. Does anyone have any questions?

Catherine:

Okay.

David:

Then, thank you so much. And [inaudible 01:07:58] this committee met. Kevin, were you able to attend?

Kevin:

I was. So, met and there was an update from Mr. Henley, the RWA's aquatic resource scientist, and Mr. Tracy, excuse me, the RWA's invasive species management technician. And this was an update on the water chestnut harvest at Furnace Pond in Branford, which has been going on, I don't know if it's been two years or three years, now. They talked about the progression of the water chestnut, and the conditions, overall invasive species prevention, the equipment used, the decomposition and future initiatives. And you can definitely see, I've seen the presentation, you can see the progress that's been made.

Kevin:

There was also a report, the typical report, from John Triana that's got a lot of detail in it. I'm not going to go over each point.

Kevin:

A deer hunt surveys have been mailed out, and those deer hunt surveys are being returned. And they're gathering that information, getting feedback from that program.

Kevin:

Invasive plants, they documented or treated invasive populations in North Branford and Gilford, and discussed aquatic species grant that was applied for last year, with the new grant writer for the RWA. They've, so far, documented or mapped 39 acres of invasive species, and treated 2.66 acres. So that's been an ongoing process or initiative that's started two, two and a half years ago.

Kevin:

So there's progress being made. And I think the land's being managed very responsibly. So, that was it.

David:

Very good. Thank you. Questions? All right. And then consumer affairs met this past Monday. Suzanne, were you able to attend?

Suzanne:

I was able to attend, David, and picking up on Catherine's comments from her committee, this is the shortest meeting in, I think, in the history of consumer affairs, but we did get done some interesting presentations around the financial reporting and analysis, that has to do with the historical background, and the various scenarios of build consumption by fiscal year, class, and months. So, some of the questions that Catherine was talking about being raised in her committee got addressed in a formal presentation by Rochelle. She did a nice job laying out and having visuals. So, you could see the changes and the impact of the monthly billing by sector, along the way, in terms of the customers we serve for RWA.

Suzanne:

The OCA reported nothing new, but that they were involved in the review of the Lake Gaillard water treatment plant application. And, they also approved this bill. And that was pretty much it.

David:

All right. Thank you for that. Regarding that, I know, Larry, I may be a little bit early, but any feedback yet on the monthly billing, in general, for us?

Larry:

Well, it's going successfully. We have had an uptick in calls, some customers, because some of them paid their bill in December, and then they got a bill in January, so they're calling to see if that's correct. So calls went up from 150, 200 a day, up to 500 a day during the first part of January, but the team did a great job putting it together, and it was on time and on budget. So, we'll provide a little bit more robust update a little bit later on, either March or the July timeframe, depending on calendars and agendas.

David:

Okay, thank you. All right. So then the next item on the agenda is to meet as compensation committee, but before we do that, Tony, what subject matter did you want to have us vote to add to the agenda? Or is it something contained within another area?

Tony:

Personal communication, which I sent to all of you, I think.

David:

Oh. Well, you did. And I suspected that since that is related to exactly your committee's item number three, I thought we would discuss it then.

Tony:

Okay, fine.

David:

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I wondered if that's what it was, so, all right. All right. So then, we are ready to recess as the Authority and meet as the compensation committee. Who would like to move that?

Tony:

I will.

David:

You will? All right. Second? Moved by Tony, seconded by-

Catherine:

I'll second.

David:

Seconded by Catherine. Thank you. All those in favor of that, please say, "aye."

Group:

Aye.

[COMPENSATION COMMITTEE MEETS 1:41 PM TO 3:23 PM]

Tony:

[crosstalk 01:52:24] motion to come out of the committee and resume as the authority?

Catherine:

So moved.

David:

[crosstalk 01:52:31].

Tony:

[crosstalk 01:52:31].

Jennifer:

Hello?

David:

Hi.

Tony:

Hi, there, Jennifer.

Jennifer:

Hi.

Tony:

You're just in time.

Jennifer:

I know. Sounds like it.

Tony:

How about those in favor of turning everything over to Jennifer and let her solve it?

David:

Ay yai yai.

Catherine:

So [inaudible 01:52:50].

David:

You're back as the authority. The last item on the agenda is at that matters arising from the committee meetings. We did have the resolution designating senior management functions that happened to receive an endorsement from-

Catherine:

Right.

David:

... the benefit committee, so what's the pleasure? I assume the chairman of that committee is trying to move that as a motion for the full board. Is there a second?

Tony:

Second.

David:

Seconded? Any discussion on that further than what-

Catherine:

Yeah, you need to slow down. You lost me. I don't know where we are.

David:

We're moving to approve the recommendation from your pension benefits committee regarding the 401(k) management.

Catherine:

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Okay. Thank you.

David:

It's been moved and seconded, any further discussion? All right. All those in favor signify by saying [inaudible 01:53:44].

Group:

Aye.

David:

Passed as unanimous, so we are at adjournment. Who would like to [crosstalk 01:53:50].

Catherine:

I move to be adjourned.

Suzanne:

[crosstalk 01:53:53] motion to adjourn.

David:

Moved and seconded. All those in favor signify by saying aye. Aye.

Group:

Aye.

[AUTHORITY MEETING ADJOURNS AT 3:25 PM]