

**South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority
Strategic Planning Committee**

**February 24, 2022
Meeting Transcription**

[STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING STARTS AT 1:55 PM]

David:

All right. With that, I will ask for a motion to approve the minutes if we've all had a chance to look at them.

Suzanne:

I'll make a motion to approve the minutes.

David:

All right. Moved by Suzanne. Who would like to second.

Catherine:

Second.

David:

Seconded by Catherine. Any discussion? All those in favor, signify it by saying aye.

Group:

Aye.

David:

Aye. Passes unanimously. We will move on to our work plan for the upcoming fiscal year. I'm sure it's going to be put up on display. Are there any questions regarding that?

Larry:

This is very similar to the work plan that was presented for fiscal '22.

David:

We're consistent. That's good. All right. That doesn't require a action, but just for your awareness. Then we'll move into the meat of the meeting, which is the fiscal year strategic plan of initiatives and a preview of employee meetings. Quite a bit of interest, so that's good. Larry, I'll hand it over to you.

Larry:

Before I get into the actual discussion of the strategic plan initiatives, I did want to take a moment and introduce Donna Verdisco who is our new VP of HR and Chief Human Resources Officer. She's been on the job now, two and a half days and she's likened it to drinking from a fire hose.

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Larry:

I wanted to have her attend this meeting and have meet her because you will be hearing more from her as time goes on. Welcome, Donna.

Donna:

Thank you.

David:

Welcome, Donna. It's great to have you here.

Donna:

Thank you very much. Looking forward to working with all of you.

David:

Good.

Larry:

As you know, our fiscal '23 strategic planning cycle is underway, and we've been working on it for over a month. As we were beginning to formulate our fiscal '23 strategic planning initiatives under the four perspective of the balanced scorecard, we took into account the survey and focus groups that Andrea Hawkins and her group led as part of the DE&I roadmap.

Larry:

There were three themes that came from those surveys. One, employees wanted to have the opportunity to share authority. Two, they wanted to collaborate in making decisions. And, three, they wanted the leadership team and other management within the organization to consider diverse perspectives.

Larry:

With those three commitments in mind, we invited all employees of the RWA to provide input into our strategic planning initiatives for fiscal '23. We have done that two other times. One of them in 2018 and then one of them for fiscal '19 strategic plan, and had good representation across the organization.

Larry:

For the past three Thursdays in February, the leadership team and directors of other departments worked together with the representatives of Leading Culture Solutions, Andrea's group and co-facilitated a series of strategic planning focus groups. We will have a total of eight of them. As a matter of fact, the final two are being held today.

Larry:

We had about 90 employees sign up to participate in particular sessions, which is a good turnout because in the past we've had somewhere between 100 and 110. I think given that we're working more

remotely now, I think having that kind of a turnout is very good. They've been participating in offering their thoughts and observations for our fiscal '23 strategic plan.

Larry:

Here you can see the list of the dates that the focus groups are scheduled. If you'll go to the next slide, Jennifer, this shows the four perspectives of the balanced scorecard on the left. Customers and constituents, employee, financial, and internal business process, and some of the actions and themes that are coming out of those focus group sessions.

Larry:

In the external customer/constituent perspective, there was a suggestion that we provide a training plan for employees to understand the importance of accountability, and how they can provide outstanding internal as well as external customer service.

Larry:

That can be things as simple as understanding what the timeline is for returning an email, or how long to return a phone call, as well as communicating to, either an internal or an external customer when you will be able to meet a commitment. If that date changes, keep that individual advised.

Larry:

Another important theme in the employee section that came out was succession planning and cross-training as well as the transfer of institutional knowledge of longer-term employees. Lots of discussion around those key areas and the need for the organization to do more, to not only develop employee skills and abilities, and knowledge, but to use that as a way to retain employees, and to ensure that we have adequate in-house resources to carry out all of the various initiatives.

Larry:

We've been hearing a lot from employees that there's a lot going on at the organization. We've analyzed what we need to do about that issue. We have hired some additional resources as part of our budget, to help alleviate some of that stress. That was reinforced during the strategic planning focus groups.

Larry:

Another item that came up around our commercial enterprise as a way to support the utility, and there was an emphasis on the four pillars of our commercial enterprises and why new business development is very important to the customers of the company, as you know, as a way to offset rate increases moving forward.

Larry:

Then finally, under the process and project management, a lot of conversation around the need to have more effective and efficient project and resource management to help us execute on some very significant initiatives that are going on in the organization particularly along the line of business transformation. That involves using technology. Lots of conversation around the need to have adequate resources and more effectively managing large enterprise-wide projects.

Larry:

The next steps in the process are Leading Culture Solutions will take all that input that the employees provided in the focus sessions and they will synthesize and present to the leadership team in early March. We will take all of those themes and consider what will be included in the fiscal '23 plan, which will help us also determine the budgets that we'll need in order to execute those initiatives.

Larry:

We did tell employees that even though they may not see their particular idea in the fiscal '23 strategic plan, to not be concerned because we will capture all ideas that have been offered and put them in an appendix. Even though we may not be able to pick a particular initiative for fiscal '23, we can certainly use that for the next fiscal year. If we find that we need to substitute one initiative for another, that could provide an opportunity to use some of those in the appendix as well.

Larry:

Ultimately, the final fiscal '23 strategic initiatives and global metrics will be shared with you at the June meeting when we have the next strategic planning committee meeting. So we'll show you the results of not only all of that input, but what the leadership team decides, moving forward.

Larry:

We'll also show an initial draft to employees in an all-employee team meeting near the end of March, so they can see the results of all their input as well before we finalize the plan. A bit of a preview of what's been happening for the past few weeks. Really some exciting thoughts and ideas are coming forward.

Larry:

Great to see the level of engagement that we have from employees, and their willingness to offer ideas on how to guide the RWA's strategic plan for the next year. With that, I'll be glad to take any questions you might have.

David:

I can't see you all at once so speak up. Don't be afraid. No? Okay. Thank you, Jennifer. Anyone have any questions regarding the work so far on the strategic plan for next year, and the update?

Suzanne:

I just have a question, David. We had talked last time. Dennis made a presentation about putting together some metrics that help us identify things that we've already done to invest in our business enterprises, and how they're performing, and what indications of success there are.

Suzanne:

Two, some sort of metrics or plan that helps us see what's on the horizon for that development in that area. I'm just wondering where we are on that.

Larry:

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Dennis is still working on that information I believe and we will be sure and include that in the June strategic plan update.

David:

We may get an update sooner on the commercial business because we have a meeting of that coming up.

Larry:

I'm not sure whether he'll have that information completed by then.

David:

Could actually fit for either one when it's ready, and just an update.

Prem:

Just to add, and thank you, Larry. We are working on that, to your point. As you all know, we actually have a formal monthly governance that we meet every month to review the different commercial enterprise's divisions. We are preparing for that, so we should have that update in the upcoming meeting, David as you mentioned. We'll be ready for that. We'll come back to you, Larry, on that.

Larry:

To Prem's point, management is reviewing the business status monthly. It's not like we're not doing anything with it. We just haven't formally presented the metrics to the board.

Prem:

Yeah.

David:

All right. Anything else? Any other questions or comments regarding this?

Catherine:

Well, this probably can wait until we actually have some metrics, but do you have a sense, Larry, of how this employee input is affecting morale? Positive, flat, negative, anything.

Larry:

That is an interesting question. My sense is that working remotely has presented some extra challenges in terms of keeping employees engaged and involved in the business. This past Tuesday, as you know, we had everybody come back into the office that had been working remotely, back on three days in the office and two days working remotely.

Larry:

I think one of the things that the leadership team's going to take up beginning tomorrow is, we'll start considering other things that we can do to enhance engagement. I think the fact that we had 90

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employees participate in these strategic planning sessions, I think is a good, strong indicator because our best sessions, a few years ago only had 110.

Larry:

While it's about 20% less, it's still, I think, a good turnout. The remote working does present extra challenges.

Catherine:

Thank you.

David:

Not to put Donna on the spot her first meeting and whatnot, but this is over a third of our workforce participating in this. In your experiences with other companies, is that good? Is that low? Do we need to get in a concerted effort to get more involvement or are we ... How do we fairing?

Donna:

It's a very good point. I think that, that's probably normal, especially given that you have a large workforce in field operations. Some of it could be just accessibility and them not being able to carve out the time, but I would say that, that's ... I think, Larry, you had said that it was about half of the population that you typically find that, responds to those types of things.

Donna:

I think that, that's actually, generally good, given just the dynamics of the workforce.

David:

Thank you. All right. Any other questions regarding this? All right. Then I'll ask for an adjournment of the strategic planning committee, and reconvene as the Authority.

Suzanne:

So moved.

David:

Moved by Suzanne. Seconded by Kevin. All those in favor, signify it by saying aye.

Suzanne:

Aye.

David:

Passes unanimously.

[STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE ADJOURNS AT 2:09 P.M.]