

SOUTH CENTRAL CONNECTICUT REGIONAL WATER AUTHORITY

Thursday, July 28, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.

Meeting Transcription

David:

All right. Well, it is 12:30 somewhere including here on the east coast, in New Haven, Connecticut. And that's where our meeting is originating from wherever we may happen to be. So I will call this monthly meeting of the Regional Water Authority to order. I will note that Kevin is out. He's not feeling well, so he will not be attending the meeting today. And we wish him the best and am glad everybody else is here. And we'll go right to the safety moment. Pretty self explanatory. Make sure you drink lots of water. I don't know if I cut somebody off on that, but we'll move on to the next item. And that would be to be begin and meet as the pension and benefit committee. So who would like to move that we recess the authority and meet us that?

Tony:

I will.

David:

Tony, move-

Catherine:

And I'll second.

David:

Seconded by Catherine. All right. All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

Group:

Aye.

[PENSION & BENEFIT COMMITTEE MEETS FROM 12:32 P.M. TO 1:53 P.M.]

David:

All right. Thank you very much. Let's do these next couple of items and then we'll take a break. So Consent Calendar, what's your pleasure on those items, folks?

Tony:

Approve the Consent Calendar.

David:

Is there a-

Suzanne:
Second.

David:
All right. Any personal questions on them?

Suzanne:
Yeah, I do have a question on the tank. It's not on the screen. It's the tank-

David:
The Derby tank.

Suzanne:
Yes.

David:
All right. If it's just point of clarification, please ask and that's fine.

Suzanne:
I'm not sure, but I'll ask. I read it and now I have to refresh my memory. Oh, the equitable relief and damages. I know that it sort of got reported to the board this is what is going on, but does Murtha or anybody else think that there's any real concern about that playing itself out? Or is anybody talking about potential settlements of that, which I'm sure we'd have to go into executive session?

Larry:
No. No, they're not. In fact, there was supposed to be a hearing this last Monday and it was postponed and a new hearing date will be set. The issues that are being raised by these two individuals are two that have already been adjudicated in courts and dismissed.

Suzanne:
Right.

Larry:
So, Murtha had recommended, and we did so, that we proceed with construction. So that is taking place. The sites will be probably completed this fall and we'll begin construction of the tank next year. So, they feel pretty confident that this should probably go away.

Suzanne:
Okay. Very good. Thanks. Thanks for that explanation, Larry.

David:
Okay. Any other points of clarification? Sensing you're ready to vote. All those in favor, signify by saying, "Aye."

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Group:

Aye.

David:

Passes unanimously. All right. We'll go to reports of RPB Committee Meetings and Suzanne, the last Finance Committee meeting that was moved because of the golf tournament. Did you attend?

Suzanne:

Oh, my gosh. David, can you come back to me? I forgot that I still haven't reported on that. So, let me get my notes out.

David:

Oh, sure. We'll come back to you. That's fine. Oh, you went to that meeting then, the finance meeting?

Catherine:

No, that was me.

David:

Yeah.

Suzanne:

Yeah. Okay then thank you. I was going to say I don't-

David:

No, I think you're set this month.

Suzanne:

Okay. Thank you.

Catherine:

Yes.

David:

All right, Catherine.

Catherine:

I did attend. Unfortunately, I was a bit late but attended the special meeting of the Finance Committee, which because it was a special meeting and a limited agenda, was pretty quick. Following the usual safety moment and the approval of the minutes, Ms. Kowalski presented the committee with the financial report and analysis, which included the usual overview of the balance sheet, maintenance test year projections, operating maintenance, key variances, capital expenditures, the investment earnings report, the year in disposition. Rochelle highlighted particular areas that were preliminary results would expected to be updated through the audit process. And let me think. Are you guys getting feedback?

David:

Yeah.

Suzanne:

Yeah.

David:

I'm hearing something from someone.

Catherine:

Yeah. Okay. Frankly, we're going to get a lot of this today as well, the committee questions, I'm going to focus on that centered around trying to understand where whether metered revenues were down and the reason behind that. And there were some questions about the leak that happened in Hamden. Rochelle got great compliments, with respect to favorable impacts on the financial side. I guess the last thing was that the committee elected Mr. Slocum to serve as chair for the next fiscal year. Are there any questions? There was a lot of information I'm trying to pick things out that might be of interest to people.

David:

I don't have any questions.

Suzanne:

Catherine, were you reporting that you felt like the committee had a lot of concerns and were confused about reports that were being presented related to lost revenue?

Catherine:

Oh, absolutely not.

Suzanne:

Oh, okay. Then I misunderstood.

Catherine:

There were a couple of questions that were asked about the reports, but most of them were just trying to clarify information. And frankly, there were more comments than questions and they were mostly favorable. In fact, I would say all favorable, with respect to the fairly good news on the financial side.

Suzanne:

Okay. Thank you.

Catherine:

Okay. I suppose the only negative concern, or it really wasn't a negative, it was actually there was a positive on how the RWA handled it, but there were questions about the boiled water notice that came from the leak in Hamden. So, that would be the only negative thing.

Tony:

What were the questions, Catherine? That was a meeting that I couldn't attend due to a conflict. What were the questions? Do you recall offhand?

Catherine:

About the leak?

Tony:

Yes.

Catherine:

They just wanted to have an understanding of let's see. Let me just look here.

Rochelle:

Catherine, do you want me to-

Catherine:

Yes.

Rochelle:

From what I remember, it was actually it came up only in the context of our unaccounted for water-

Catherine:

Yes.

Rochelle:

Which was part of the RPB dashboard. So, one of the reasons that the unaccounted for water was up was due to the leak. That's the context that it came up in.

Catherine:

Thank you, Rochelle.

Tony:

Okay. Do we owe them an answer on that, Catherine or Rochelle?

Catherine:

No. I think they were satisfied with the response.

Tony:

Well, one of the things that I do want to point out as part our strategic plan for 2023, Sunny is investigating using an artificial intelligence that looks like it is a very reliable, in terms of detecting leaks, in the water system. So, that should help us. Matter of fact, we have a goal to reduce it by 18 million

gallons, which I think is about a percentage point as just as a trial this year; but we are addressing that unaccounted for water issue.

Catherine:

Great. Thank you. That concludes my report.

David:

Okay. Land Use was next and I had the pleasure of attending Land Use on our behalf and it was a field trip. We were out to see the main item on the agenda was visiting [inaudible 01:32:17] install and seeing Furnace Pond, where they were going to do the cleanup of the water chestnuts, the invasive species, which is there. And they did a cleanup last year and the year before. And they were expecting this one to be a little better, but being on site was a little bit better for members to be able to have a handle as to what's going on. And it's a great interest in that. They also did ask for an update on the status of police and enforcement of safety at our properties. And Prem gave an answer and let them know that there is a consultant that has been hired to take an overall look at what we need in the way of safety and security services and that it'll be a little while until that report comes in. But when that report comes in, they'll certainly be made aware of what their recommendation is going to be and how management is going to handle that. And they elected Mr. Betkoski chairman again, and that was their meeting. Any questions?

David:

All right. So, Consumer Affairs. Kevin is not here, so we don't have a report on that. Actually, I'll just ask Jennifer, or any staff, any management level person that's here, any of our senior teams that were there, maybe is there anything that we should be aware of?

Prem:

I actually attended the Consumer Affairs meeting.

David:

You did? Okay.

Prem:

Yeah. Lori, our government relations specialist did a presentation. There were a couple questions from Steve Mongillo, who's our Consumer Affairs chair, but overall there was not any raising concerns. So, it was a good meeting overall.

David:

Okay. And Naomi, you're on that one, right?

Naomi:

Yes, I am.

David:

Okay. And Nothing to add to that report?

Naomi:

No, nothing. Just a lot of questions regarding, which we will be discussing tonight, the CIS. That was basically it.

David:

Okay.

Naomi:

They just thought it was a big project. It was a lot to read and it was a big undertaking for the committee.

David:

Absolutely. Okay. Very good. Thank you. We're caught up with that. Why don't we take an 11 minute break until 2:15. All right? Then we'll come back and we'll get into the business updates and then meet as a Compensation Committee. See you all back in a little while. Thank you.

Suzanne:

Thanks, David.

[BREAK FROM 2:10 P.M. TO 2:15 P.M.]

David:

All right, let's see who we've got. All four of us are here. Okay, because I see Catherine, I see Tony. All right, so the next item is our business updates. So we'll hand it over to Larry.

Larry:

With Donna being under the weather a bit then, I'll do the COVID update and hopefully we'll get through this and answer all your questions. So as-

Larry:

As of July 18, we have 96 confirmed cases of COVID within the RWA. This is an increase of five new cases since our last board report on June 18th. Our vaccination rate among the employee population is still at 85%. We are continuing our aggressive cleaning schedule so that every Saturday, our micro electrostatic spraying is taking place for all of the shared surfaces, workspace. The treatment plants are also that way every Wednesday.

Larry:

There's daily midday sanitizing of common areas, which includes things like door handles and tables. And we have sent our staff home on July the 5th to work remotely to accommodate. So we are planning that they'll be at home until at least September 9th, and we'll make a decision the week before whether or not we continue with the remote working for office staff.

Larry:

The Connecticut COVID positivity rate is at 10.39, and our team is continuing to monitor the daily positivity rate in our area and following CDC guidelines for any changes in our operations. So that's it for the COVID update and perhaps Donna and I can handle any questions you might have.

David:

This may be just empirical or whatever, but are you finding that there's less severity even though there's more cases over the last two or three months?

Larry:

Sorry. There's what, David?

David:

Are you finding that there's less severity, less hospitalizations, less need to--

David:

Maybe they're able to work from home a little bit as in-

Larry:

Yeah. I think we're hearing that employees are that are coming down with this, I think generally are having more mild cases and have been isolating, so yeah.

David:

Good. Thank you.

Larry:

With that, I'll take a few minutes to highlight some points from this month's board letter. First, I outlined my personal strategic priorities for 2023 and I'll get into those during the compensation committee. Secondly, I reported that the environmental testing lab that we were pursuing, the owner withdrew interest. Citing expectations about an environmental audit of the site as the reason. However, we have a number promising prospects in the pipeline. I also reported that this month that I had a number of stopovers in the field, which were really a great opportunity to engage with employees and allow me to get firsthand knowledge about some of the major projects underway. I won't go into detail on that because it is in the board report. Also, I would like to spend a little bit of time. We had a special recognition breakfast that was held for the support and field workers involved in that May 23rd, 16 inch main break in Hamden.

Larry:

And as you recall that was the first main break that we've ever had where we've had to issue a precautionary boil water notice. So we had members of the construction department gather, and we celebrated not only their tremendous work that they did and long hours that they spent, but also we celebrated the unveiling of the RWAs first long triaxle dump truck.

Larry:

So you may say, why is that a big deal? About a year ago, a construction worker from the steelworkers union brought a concern to me about a particular dump truck that hauls heavy loads and didn't feel like it was safe to be driving. So I listened to his concerns. I inspected the truck, talked to the fleet department and it was scheduled to be replaced. So through collaboration with members of the leadership team and fleet department and the steel workers on a union, which ultimately led to purchasing a long triaxle truck that is ideal for hauling heavy loads that our construction crews do on a regular basis.

Larry:

So this new truck sports more axles, which allow for better weight, displacement and stability. But more importantly, the purchase of the new truck was a real partnership where management and the union acted as one team to work together, to find a solution to a key issue. So I would like to take you, I would like to take a moment to show you the result. Jennifer actually has a video that I think she's going to roll out of the June 30 employee celebration. So do you have that, Jennifer?

Jennifer:

I do.

Jennifer:

Let me know if you cannot see this. Can everybody see that?

Larry:

Here it comes.

Larry:

So that was the christening of the truck. Thank you. Thanks Jennifer for doing that. But there's a number of things about that truck that are really special, it was not only the partnership with the employee and the steel workers, the leadership team and fleet, but also that truck features a new contemporary color scheme and branding that I think really helps signal the transformation of the RWA to an environmental service company.

Larry:

So the new color scheme is it has the blue dump truck area that used to be all white. And that's a really a beautiful blue. And then the cab is white. The truck is equipped with two red Amber and green light bars on the rear of the truck, which transportation studies have shown that it improves the visibility of the truck to drivers in work zones. And that new safety feature will be added to all new RWA construction vehicles. So that's really great stuff. And then I don't know if you notice it or not, but on the door of that cab, we have a new logo that we trotted out that is a contemporization of the current RWA logo. So we'll be slowly making that transformation going forward as well. And I'll show that to the board at one of our future meetings. So that's the exciting.

Tony:

Does that mean that we'll no longer look like the parks department?

Larry:

Hopefully not.

Larry:

And then I also, in this board report, I informed you that RWA has been accepted into a water research foundation research project that is designed to help water utilities recognize the presence of Legionella in their drinking water distribution system. Our involvement in this will provide us with a better understanding of our water distribution system. It will also assist us in identifying potential areas of improvement and help increase the trust in RWAs commitment to public health and forward thinking on emerging contaminants.

Larry:

The good news is that we are the only Connecticut utility invited to participate in this Legionella study. This has been an issue that the health department has been concerned about for quite some time, because many times Legionella happens. It's not the utilities issue, but actually in the customers because it comes from water storage tanks or water sitting within a building for long periods of time and not being used.

Larry:

They've reached out to the water utilities to help them get a better handle on that. It's good that we've been invited to participate in this project.

Larry:

And then finally, I provided detail on progress with our unique partnership, with the greater new Haven chamber of commerce to help local businesses thrive and grow and stay in the region as well as grow their employee population. I won't go through the time to review the results cause it's detailed in my letter, but I'm very pleased with the partnership to date. It has some specific results such as they visited 234 companies, they've uncovered 977 new job potentials, so that all results in RWA water use. So we'll continue to partner with the chamber on other economic development and other officials on economic development.

Larry:

In the meantime, we're focusing our energies on inclusive growth to attract and develop water intensive enterprises to the industry, which the chamber is working on as well. That's the highlights of my board report and be glad to take any questions.

David:

All right. Any questions? Any items that would fall in this area, Suzanne?

Suzanne:

No, I guess I would follow up with the loss of the group that we were talking to for potential acquisition. I know you said we have other prospects. Do we have any other prospects that are as close as that was? That were in more down the road conversations or we're sort of back to the drawing board? And--

Larry:

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Matter of fact, I was going to mention that in my performance, but we have two plumbing companies that we're looking at and we have two others that I'll not discuss in session. We have four potential opportunities. And of course the value is in having a number to look at because out of those four, we may get one, but we have four prospects that are in the pipeline that we've submitted indicative bids to, and to see if we'll be able to go forward in discussion.

Suzanne:

Thank you, Larry.

David:

All right. Any other questions for Larry? All right. Then looks like we are ready to meet as the Compensation Committee. So I would ask if someone would move that we recess the board to meet as the compensation committee.

Tony:

So moved.

David:

Is there a second?

Catherine:

Second.

David:

Second by Catherine. All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

Staff:

Aye.

[COMPENSATION COMMITTEE MEETS FROM 2:31 P.M. TO 4:10 P.M.]