

REPRESENTATIVE POLICY BOARD  
**CONSUMER AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**  
JANUARY 23, 2023  
MEETING TRANSCRIPTION

Stephen:

All right, it's 5:37, we can call the Consumer Affairs meeting for January to order. The first item on the agenda is the safety moment.

Stephen:

The safety moment is preparing your car for winter. I've looked through it all. Good suggestions if you can take a look at that just to make sure you cover all the bases. Always a good idea. Thank you, Jennifer.

Stephen:

The second item is public comment. I just want to remind everybody we have that in there so that if anybody wants to provide information regarding agenda items or bring an issue to us, they have the ability to do so. It's not a back and forth thing where we get into discussing anything in any detail with the public but it is an opportunity to present information

Stephen:

Item 3 is approval of the Minutes. Do I have a motion?

Tony:

So moved.

Stephen:

Thank you. Second.

Naomi:

Second.

Stephen:

Thank you, Naomi. Are there any corrections? Omissions. Any additions?

Stephen:

Hearing none, I'll call for a vote on this if there are no comments, all those in favor?

Committee:

Aye.

Stephen:

Any opposed? Any abstention?

Stephen:

Motion carries.

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Stephen:

Item 4 is our sort of issue for today, which is what we asked for. A session to discuss the security issues that the RWA has as a follow up to the presentation we had from Donna while ago. Sunny are you here, are you on?

Sunny:

Yes, Steve, I'm here.

Stephen:

OK, great.

Stephen:

So I understand that there's no presentation, it is just an opportunity to discuss this in some detail. Is that correct?

Sunny:

Correct. I think the presentation that Donna had given to the RPB and the Land Use Committee, I still have it, and Jennifer has it. So if we need to, we can go over that but we can certainly give some updates on what happened after that.

Stephen:

I'll call for a vote on this to go into executive session with regard to security issues on RWA property. All those in favor?

Tony:

Aye.

Naomi:

Aye

Stephen:

Any opposed.

Mark:

No.

Stephen:

Do we have a quorum, Jennifer?

Mark:

I think we've talked this thing to death, you know, let them do their thing and get back to us when they have more information.

Stephen:

Mark, we're just trying to have the discussion in executive session.

Mark:

I'm just telling you, we've talked this to death. Let's discuss it when...

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Stephen:  
Maybe you have, but our committee hasn't.

Mark:  
I know that I understand that.

Rochelle:  
Mark, sessions were in executive session that talked about it. So all we want do is go into executive session.

Mark:  
I understand that I'm saying it's been talked enough and I think that we don't have to go into executive session, but if I get out voted, it's OK. Just my opinion.

Jeff:  
Two thirds 2/3 vote.

Rochelle:  
2/3.

Jamie:  
Yes, Steve, you don't need everyone to have a quorum. You just need the majority of the quorum to go into executive session.

Stephen:  
OK.

Mark:  
Just my opinion now, right?

Stephen:  
We are now in executive session, Jennifer. By the vote.

Stephen:  
Everybody that's on can be in the executive session. So we haven't had anybody else on correct?

[EXECUTIVE SESSION FROM 5:39 P.M. TO 6:05 P.M.]

Stephen:  
On to item 5, we're we don't need a vote to come out of executive session. So we're back to our regular meeting.

Jennifer:  
Yes, we're back.

Stephen:

Okay. And item five is a review of possible recommendations to the RPB, regarding proposed changes to the Regional Water Authority rules and regulations. And the reason this is on the agenda is that with changes in the RWA, there were updates that needed to be done. And Prem is going to address this.

Prem:

Thank you, Steve. And good evening everybody. So as you are aware, every time we go into our rate case, we look at our rules and reg. And every year we make sure that we adjust the rules and regulations to accommodate any changes that we put forward.

So this year, the good news is that not a lot of changes that we have incorporated it, more of readjusting certain things that you see actually on the screen right here. So I'll just walk them through. And please ask any questions that you may have.

So page 11 and page 12 are references to domestic services. So there was a reference for a two-inch service line. We have removed the two-inch service line reference, because we would like to make sure that all domestic services are metered from a RWA perspective. So that's a minor change.

Page 18 had a reference on basically quarterly billing. If you remember, we went from quarterly billing to monthly billing. So we had made the adjustment to reflect the monthly billing that we have in play.

Page 24 and 25 of the rules and regs, we reworded the meter location. As you're aware, meter pit, or meter wall, are the responsibility of the customer. So we want to add a little bit more clarity on where the meter is located, so we reworded some of the things to make sure it reflects on customer responsibility. And also making sure that the meter is located at a point where an RWA employee can access it more easily.

It's funny, because if you remember way back when we did, we found meters in weird spots from a customer standpoint in the garage, under the driveway, whatnot. So we just want to make sure that we add more clarity on the meter pit and meter wall, and the customer's responsibility there. So some rewording there, not anything material content change in terms of meter location.

And then on page 26, we actually have incorporated basically customer responsibility between for the service line from the curb valve to the point of entering the building. If you remember, if a customer is a pipe safe customer, you more likely are covered. But it is clear that it's customer's responsibility from perspective of meter, both sides of the meter, is covered by the customer in terms of the service line. So a little bit of a clarity there.

And then page 27, again, for whatever reasons, if the customer would like for us to test the meter, it's a free service that we provide. We do not charge the customer for that. We included the pandemic protocols, making sure that if somebody has COVID or whatever, we follow the protocols for pandemic. So we just added that inclusion to reflect COVID.

Pretty much those are some changes that we actually incorporated for this time. Again, like I said, it's all minor changes, nothing big or material. Again, as you all know, these are, as far as enabling legislation, it is not required for us to come in front of RPB, but with all the partnership and transparency we want to put forward, so we just want to make sure that you are aware. So if there's anything material comes in the future challenges or anything of the sort, we want to address it together.

So that's about it. I mean, for this year there's not a lot of changes. What you do see here is based on the rate effective date, the rules and regs would be dated to the same date, so it's all in sync. That's about it. Again, any questions you may have for me, I can answer, or the team can answer.

Rochelle:

Yeah. I just want to add, as far as the rate application, we are very much aware it's not yet voted on. So it will be an item that will be before you at the January meeting as far as the notification. So there's still a ways to go. So I just wanted to note that.

Stephen:

Okay.

Prem:

Thank you, Rochelle. Yeah, thank you. And I think based on that effective date is what we'll incorporate the date for the rules and regs. So... Sorry Steve, go ahead. Yeah.

Stephen:

Yeah. No, I just wanted to ask you if you wanted to have a proposal for this week's meeting, RPB meeting? Or if you want to have Jennifer put something together that we could approve it our next meeting. What do you think? Timelines?

Prem:

I would say we could approve it, provided we have an understanding about the effective date for it, Steve. So we could put forward, or we could hold off. Rochelle, I don't know what your preference is, until we actually have the effective date and then incorporate that. [Inaudible 00:05:14] the rates.

Rochelle:

Well, I would probably suggest that it get done at the same time that the rate application is approved or it's not approved. Hopefully approved, yeah.

Prem:

Yeah. So we will hold off, Steve, in that case. I mean, there's not a time crunch or anything in the start, so we could hold off and do it the same time.

Stephen:

Okay. Are you going to put the proposal together? I mean, just for me to read. Or Jennifer, somebody on...?

Prem:

Yes. Yeah, I think we'll put the proposal together at the same time when you're putting the whole rate change proposal as well. So I'll come, I can work with you. And we can take it offline. And we'll put it together. Yeah, we'll put it together.

Stephen:

Yeah, rather than just read all these things. I mean, we need a different statement. Yeah, okay.

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Prem:

Yep. Perfect. Yeah.

Stephen:

And our committee can then propose it to the full RPB.

Prem:

Yep. Sounds good.

Stephen:

Okay, great. Any questions from any of the committee members on this? Okay. Then we'll move on to item six, approval of the OCA budget for year 2024.

Tony:

I move we accept the budget. I mean, the invoice.

Stephen:

And a second?

Jeff:

This is the budget, right?

Stephen:

Yeah, this is the budget we're talking about.

Jeff:

Got it.

Rochelle:

There's a budget and an invoice.

Tony:

Yes.

Stephen:

Yeah. So first let's just hear what if this is. So Jeff, are you going to talk about this?

Jeff:

Yeah. I'm not proposing any change to the annual budget. It's been a \$50,000 budget for 15 years, and 10,000 for consultants. We usually, as you know, don't use all of the budget.

At some point I do want to talk about the rate. The rate has been changed once in 15 years. The original rate in 2008 was 2.25 an hour. It was increased to 2.50 five years ago in 2018. And shame on me for not

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talking about it sooner, but you could probably raise the rate and it won't affect the budget. We don't have to talk about that tonight, but at some point we can talk about it.

Stephen:

Yeah, that's reasonable, Jeff. Thank you. So we have a budget before us. It's the same budget as it has been in the past. I'll propose a motion that we approve that budget.

Tony:

Second.

Stephen:

Okay. Any comment on this? All those in favor?

Committee:

Aye.

Stephen:

Any opposed? Okay, so the budget for 2024 stays the same. Jeff, I don't know when you wanted to talk about an increase, this meeting or next meeting?

Jeff:

Yeah. I mean, whatever you want. It's not on the agenda, so I'd rather do it at the next meeting. So that if anybody wants to think about it or comment on it, they have advanced notice.

Stephen:

Okay. Yeah, we can get that together for the next meeting. Thank you. And item seven on the agenda is the report of the OCA. So anything new Jeff, or just the same thing?

Jeff:

The only thing besides the rate application right now is at the end of December I had received from the authority the memo that Dave Fox at Raftelis did responding to the New Haven Environmental Advisory Council's questions about rate structures.

And I provided that at the end of December to Laura Kahn at the New Haven Environmental Advisory Council. Last week, Steve Vitko was contacted by the New Haven Environmental Advisory Council. I wasn't copied on the correspondence, Steve forwarded to me. But apparently the council would like us to come to their March 1st meeting to discuss what was submitted.

So that meeting is at five o'clock on March 1st, apparently. I'm happy to attend the meeting. I've asked the authority to see if someone from Raftelis, particularly Dave Fox, could be available because I'm just not in the habit of talking about someone else's work product. That way if they have questions about his work product, they can ask him.

Rochelle:

Jeff, just to let you know, we did reach out to him. He does currently have a conflict with a hearing, but he is going to wait to try to see if it could be rearranged.

Jeff:

Okay. Either that or we can-

Rochelle:

So I'm waiting to hear back.

Jeff:

Yeah. If he's not available, my suggestion is we can let them know that. Because if we do it without him, there's likely to be questions we don't have the answers to and we'll have to go back to the next meeting anyway. So we might as well just do it when he's available.

Rochelle:

All right. And I probably will attend with him, is my current thought.

Jeff:

That's great.

Stephen:

Hey, Jeff, that was a pretty comprehensive, I thought, thorough report in its explanation of the rates. So what is their concern at this point?

Jeff:

I don't know that they have particular concerns. Obviously, they just received it at the end of December, their members may want to have the opportunity to discuss it and ask any questions.

Stephen:

Okay. I mean, I don't know, it's a long way to go for the RWA, and without a whole lot of cause here, just because they would like to have that. We've responded to this.

Jeff:

I know. I just think as a courtesy. We told them we'd provide them with the information, now they've asked us to make ourselves available. I don't really have a problem. I think it's a remote meeting anyway, so I don't have a problem jumping on. And as long as Dave's available.

Like you said, I mean, I thought his memo was very well done, and answered the questions that were raised, every question, and explained the basis for the responses. So it kind of speaks for itself. But at this point if there's additional questions, we can hear them out and try to address any concerns.

I don't know that there are any concerns. They may find that the memo answers all their questions because, like I said, I thought it was well supported.

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Stephen:

Okay.

Sunny:

Hey, Jeff [inaudible 00:12:17]-

Stephen:

Go ahead. Who's on?

Sunny:

Steve, this is Sunny actually. Just I would say to what Jeff had suggested, I will coordinate with Rochelle to see if Dave is not available we can move this kind of hearing meeting to the next month's meeting as such from this month, from March to April. So I will coordinate on that with Rochelle to see whether we can move that over, if Dave is not available.

Jeff:

Yeah. The council usually has quite a full agenda, so I'm sure that we're not the only topic that night. So if we're not able to do it, I'm sure they could likely accommodate us at a future meeting.

Sunny:

Sure. I'll follow up with them.

Rochelle:

Yeah, I'll be in touch.

Jeff:

Thank you.

Stephen:

Jeff, the minor issues that existed, are they totally resolved at this point?

Jeff:

Yeah, I think so. We're waiting to hear back from the consumer, which usually means that they're satisfied. I talked about it at last month's meeting, the dollars were... it was under \$100 at issue. And the question was asked of me, "Well, is there anything we can do to avoid spending hundreds of dollars on an issue that involves tens of dollars?"

And the answer is, it's incumbent on my office to be as efficient as possible. And so the way that we do that is by balancing the charge in the enabling legislation, which is for the Office of Consumer Affairs to be an advocate for consumers in all matters of interest to consumers. We balance that with the desire to resolve it in a way that doesn't burden all rate payers, all customers.

And the authority is great in terms of getting us information and we give the consumer an opportunity to review that. And, as you know, we've only had, I think in 15 years, we've had three hearings. So

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usually the consumer is satisfied with the outcome and so we try to just get them to that point as quickly as possible. It's just sometimes it's not number one on there.

The authority gets back to us right away, but the consumer sometimes it's not the most important thing in their lives, especially when you're talking about 35 bucks. So I think it's done, but we haven't heard back from the consumer yet.

Stephen:

Okay. Thank you.

Tony:

Jeff, the scariest thing I've heard tonight is that it has been 15 years that you've been on the job.

Jeff:

Yeah. June will be 15 years, yep.

Tony:

That is incredible. I mean, just I don't know where the hell 15 years went, but it sounds-

Jeff:

It sure is. It's been a fun 15 years though.

Stephen:

Item eight on our agenda is the approval of the OCA invoice for December, in an amount of \$1,252 and 50 cents. Do I have a motion?

Naomi:

I so move.

Stephen:

Thank you. Second?

Tony:

Second.

Stephen:

Thank you, Tony. Any questions for Jeff on the current invoice? Hearing none. All those in favor, aye?

Committee:

Aye.

Stephen:

Any opposed? You get paid this month, Jeff.

Jeff:

Great.

Stephen:

Under new business, there are a couple of things I'd like to mention. At the executive committee, we talked about future meetings and whether we would go back to in-person meetings or continue with hybrid. I thought I'd bring it to our committee. They just wanted some feedback from all the committees on what we'd like to do.

We recognize both the convenience and sometimes the necessity of being able to attend remotely, if you're traveling or had a close meeting elsewhere, it creates the ability to do that. There was a pretty good feeling that we should get back to some in-person type of meeting as well.

So it looks like we could have sort of hybrid meetings going forward. For the immediate future, in February, we will still have a remote meeting, but after that we'd like to kind of decide on what we're going to do. Probably return to in-person meetings with the option to attend remotely. And I'd like to just know how members feel about that.

Tony:

I think this remote system, it came about obviously by chance because of COVID, but it's worked amazingly well. My attendance has improved dramatically because we could do it remotely, because I've got so many balls in the air.

So I don't see any reason why we can't continue the way we're doing it. It seems to work. It's got to be more convenient for everybody, gets people off the road. I don't see why we have to go back. I mean, if there's an important meeting, or you want to say a couple of times a year we want to get together in-person, that's fine. But I like the system we have.

Stephen:

No. It does work, Tony, to get business done. But sometimes the in-person stuff gives you an opportunity to talk to members, discuss some other things. There are advantages to the in-person meeting and I think there's a number of people would like to get back to that.

So I think you'd always have the option. COVID has kind of changed the work world in general, so I think we'll always have the option going forward of attending this way. But, as you say, I mean, if you have a great distance to travel and the weather's really bad during the winter, I mean, it's helpful to be able to attend and get business done and not have to be there physically. So, we'll see.

Tony:

Okay.

Stephen:

Anybody else? Thank you. Naomi, matter to you?

Naomi:

No, it doesn't. But, I mean, I know some of the groups I talk to, we are doing in-person for some and still staying remote for others. So we're not doing all of our meetings in-person.

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And right now with this, everything is on the uptick. So I think we still need to be a little careful, that's all I'm saying. Because I just came out of COVID, I've had COVID for three weeks. And I have been fully vaccinated. I got one of the first vaccines that came out. And I've gotten all my boosters and everything, and I was very sick. So I have been very cautious, I'm wearing my mask like I have been all the time, but it's just that... So like I said, either way works for me, but.

Stephen:

Okay, good to know. Yeah, it's been impacting people differently, so hopefully you're on the mend and doing better. I'm fairly cautious myself when I'm out in public places and still wear a mask. But, as I said, there is an interest in getting back to some in-person stuff too. As long as we have the option, I think that would be great. So we're looking into the technical ability to do that easily.

The other thing I want to mention here is on February 14th, Valentine's Day, there is an update on the Whitney Water Plan. If anybody would like to attend, it is an in-person meeting. It's held at the little education center on Whitney Avenue. And it not only talks about Whitney, but they do a great job of covering things like what's been the rainfall for the year, some more general issues that the water authority addresses in terms of planning for water. So just wanted everybody to know about it in the event they'd like to attend.

Naomi:

Steve, what was the date of-

Stephen:

Anybody else have anything under new business?

Naomi:

Steve, what was that date again?

Stephen:

The 14th. Jennifer, is that correct?

Jennifer:

Yes, it's February 14th. I think it's at 6:00 PM. I sent out the invitation, I can resend it if you want?

Naomi:

Okay.

Stephen:

Any other new business? Okay. Our next regular meeting is February 27th at 5:30. Do I have a motion to adjourn?

Tony:

So moved.

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Stephen:

Thank you, Tony. And second.

Naomi:

Second.

Stephen:

Thanks, Naomi. All those in favor, aye?

Committee:

Aye.

Stephen:

Thanks, everybody.