



## **Customer Advisory Council (CAC) Meeting**

Minutes of the January 4, 2022 Virtual Meeting

### MEMBERS PRESENT:

Lois Timms-Ferrara – Ellington  
Jamie Gamble – South Windsor  
Rick Hartenstein - Stafford  
Jim McGrath – Naugatuck  
Charlie Nordell – East Windsor

### Connecticut Water Staff in Attendance:

Donnel Dillon, Rich Hanratty, Dan Meaney, Art O’Neill, Craig Patla, and Michelle Williams

### Welcome and Introduction:

Mr. Patla opened the meeting at 6 p.m., welcomed new and current members, and asked members to introduce themselves and what town they represent.

### Minutes of the October 5, 2021 Meeting:

Discussion of the October 5, 2021 minutes was deferred until the next scheduled meeting, when there may be more members in attendance.

### Purpose of the Customer Advisory Council:

Mr. Patla explained that the Customer Advisory Council provides an opportunity for the company to update customer representatives from the towns about projects, policies and procedures that may impact water quality or service, and for us to receive feedback from the council members. This will help the improve communication, learn about the needs and priorities of customers and better coordinate in the towns we serve.

### Brief Overview of Connecticut Water:

Mr. Patla gave a brief overview of the company’s service area and water systems -- serving about 106,000 customers in 60 Connecticut communities through more than 60 non-interconnected water systems.

### Rate Case Update

Mr. Patla provided an update on the company’s 2021 rate case.

He noted that PURA had issued a final decision on July 28, 2021, but there was one outstanding tax-related issue that was reconsidered following that decision. A final decision on the tax matter was issued by PURA on November 17, 2021, which concluded all outstanding issues in the rate filing.

He stated the net result of the rate case was an overall impact of about 8%, and that the rates applied to customer bills would vary by customer class and division. He noted that company was successful in its mission

to minimize the impact on municipal budgets by holding public fire charge increases to about 5% for most communities. Additional information on public fire charges for the 2022/23 fiscal year will be provided to communities in the first quarter of 2022.

#### Customer Assistance Update:

Mr. O'Neill discussed the company's customer financial assistance payment plans that include:

- COVID Payment Plans required by PURA,
- New Water Rate Assistance Program (WRAP) offering a 15% on water bills of eligible customers,
- Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) that provides up to \$1,000 in assistance for past due water bills for income-eligible customers,
- Partnership with Operation Fuel, and
- Deferred payment arrangements and hardship forgiveness available through the company's Help to Others (H<sub>2</sub>O) program.

Mr. O'Neill also informed the committee that the company had received authorization from PURA to begin the process to shut-off customers for non-payment. He stated that termination of water service is always the last resort, but there is a substantial number of customers with delinquent accounts who have not called to discuss financial assistance despite numerous outreach attempts by the company. He added that Connecticut Water will initially focus on non-residential accounts that are more 90 days past due with large balances, and that financial assistance options are available for those who are in need.

#### Customer Satisfaction:

Mr. O'Neill discussed the results of the company's 2021 customer satisfaction survey. The year-end survey showed customer satisfaction at 90.4%, while down slightly from 91.7% at midyear, it was up from the 88.7% recorded in 2020. He stated he was especially pleased that more than 90% of survey respondents said they were treated with dignity and respect by Connecticut Water and that the company met their expectations all or most of the time.

#### Universal Vaccination Policy:

Mr. Patla discussed the company's universal vaccination policy that requires all Connecticut Water employees to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. The requirement was announced in November and effective in January, and it followed the requirements of the Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) issued by OSHA, and would be implemented regardless of the results to pending legal challenges regarding the ETS. He stated that Connecticut Water provides an essential service and that the company needed to protect its workforce to deliver on its mission. He also noted that with the spread of the Omicron variant, the company had temporarily suspended in-premise appoints, except for those of an emergency nature.

## 2021 Infrastructure Investments, Including WICA:

Mr. Patla updated the committee on the company's Water Infrastructure and Conservation Adjustment (WICA) program.

- WICA allows for the recovery of completed infrastructure replacement and certain conservation related projects between general rates cases through a surcharge on customer bills that can be adjusted twice per year.
- WICA provides sustained infrastructure replacement and helps to spread the cost of eligible projects over time rather than lump sum during rate cases.
- The WICA surcharge is capped at 5% per year and 10% between general rate cases.
- PURA authorized a WICA of 2.4% for all Connecticut Water divisions that is effective with bills issued on/after January 1, 2022.
- The WICA covers about \$22 million of completed WICA projects

He also noted the company's 2022 budget for infrastructure investment is \$61.4 million, and of that more than \$25 million is allocated for WICA projects.

In response to a question, Mr. Patla noted that Connecticut Water works in collaboratively on the scheduling of WICA project with local communities. He stated the company works to coordinate projects with town road and sewer projects to the greatest extent possible.

Mr. Patla noted several larger projects completed, in progress or planned in Clinton, Farmington, Naugatuck, Plainfield, South Windsor, Southbury, and Suffield.

## Support of the Communities:

Ms. Williams provided a recap of the \$120,000 in monetary/in-kind donations made by the company in 2021. The overwhelming majority went to Connecticut Water's service communities. She noted that donations are not recovered in the rates charged to customers. The donations included water bottle filling stations to schools, grants to local fire departments and donations through the state of Connecticut Neighborhood Assistance Act.

Ms. Williams also commented that the company paid \$10.7 million in local property taxes.

## Support or the Environment:

Ms. Williams updated the committee on the environment, social and governance efforts of the company in 2021, including the development of an SJW Group wide greenhouse gas reduction goal of 50% from 2019 levels by 2030, which aligns with the science-based targets in the Paris Agreement. She also noted that the SJW Group 2021 Corporate Sustainability Report was available at [www.sjwgroup.com](http://www.sjwgroup.com).

She also informed the committee of the status of 6 parcels of land offered to Connecticut Water service communities, construction and installation of wood duck/bluebird nesting boxes on company land and 2 pollinator gardens being installed in Clinton and Naugatuck at company facilities. She added the company was planning to again offer rain barrels at a discounted price to customers based on the success of the 2021 program.

## Linebacker Program:

In advance of the meeting a member of the committee had reached out to suggest the company discuss its Linebacker® program. Mr. Patla and Ms. Dillon discussed the program, which features repair/replacement coverage for a homeowner's water service line, wastewater line, and in-home piping. They noted that it is an optional program that has been available to customers for more than 20 years, and can potential save homeowners enrolled in the program thousands of dollars if covered items need repair or replacement.

Other Business:

None.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting was scheduled for April 5, 2022.

Adjournment:

The meeting ended at 6:50 p.m.