

KENT COUNTY WATER AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE BOARD

December 1, 2020

A special meeting of the Board of Directors of the Kent County Water Authority was held on the 1st day of December 2020, at 10:00 a.m. both at the offices of the Authority in West Warwick, RI, in the Joseph D. Richard Board Room and via Zoom with the board members.

Chairman Robert Boyer opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. Board members, Chairman Robert Boyer, Vice-Chairman Joseph Gallucci, Treasurer Russell Crossman, Brian Kortz, Secretary Scott Duckworth, Jeffrey Giusti and Geoffrey Rousselle were all in attendance along with Executive Director/Chief Engineer David L. Simmons, Legal Counsel Patrick J. Sullivan, Esq., Director of Administration John Duchesneau, Director of Human Resources and Finance Michael Lanfredi and Administrative Assistant Nicole Jacques. Chairman Boyer led the group in the pledge of allegiance.

- **General Discussion of Ongoing in Meter and Billing Investigation.**
- **Board Action: Review Public Relations Firms and Engage Firm**

Chairman Boyer opened the meeting by commending Mr. Simmons in his response to this billing investigation. He said the responses stuck to the data and that Mr. Simmons was not influenced by Sen. Raptakis' constant media barrage. He also attributed the customer's confusion to the lack of monthly billing and quarterly billing. Summer usage during the extreme drought contributed as well. He added that the customer should be better informed than the way we are doing it now.

Mr. Rousselle added compliments on the work Mr. Simmons did explaining to the board, but thought the response to the general public was lacking. He said there were elected officials adding fuel to the fire and thought that the authority needed a new strategy. He said they didn't need the negativity.

Mr. Gallucci said that he read through all the reports. He said 1) that KCWA through Mr. Simmons and his staff were very responsive, and 2) that the new meters have an 8-10% higher accuracy than the old meters.

Chairman Boyer asked the board members if they received any calls from ratepayers. He said he received one call. Mr. Giusti said none from ratepayers, but one from reporter Valicenti. Mr. Giusti added praise for Mr. Simmons and suggested that ratepayers examine their bill closely after telling a story about his personal gas company billing error. He suggested a consultant to assist, even on an as needed basis. Mr. Rousselle said he received 3 calls, 2 from WW and one from Coventry. Mr. Kortz reported zero calls. Mr. Crossman reported roughly six calls. Mr. Duckworth reported zero calls and also thanked Mr. Simmons for a great job. Mr. Gallucci reported zero calls. Chairman Boyer was glad he asked, being surprised at the low number of calls.

Mr. Rousselle said ratepayers may have trouble calling individual board members without the contact information. He said a good measure was how many the office was getting, and if it was over 400, then this is significant. Ms. Jacques said they receive emails with complaints, and there were 447. Of those, 353 were from Coventry and 94 were from West Warwick, East Greenwich and Warwick.

Mr. Rousselle said a public relations firm, or someone to analyze our situation was needed. They could assess and develop a strategy. We could hire a firm on an hourly basis to ensure we are doing everything we can for our customers.

Mr. Simmons addressed the board. He said the investigations are ongoing, with each one requiring a visit to the home. He said so far, over 400 registered correct use and the bills are accurate. He said the majority of the increase was for outside water use, including pools and irrigation. He said the new meters tells us the hourly data. We can pinpoint the date and time the water usage spiked, unlike the old meters, he said.

He explained the meter mechanics, with the measure of water going through both the old meter and the new meter being the same. In order for the meter to register use, water flows through it. He said the difference was that the new meter stores the data on a chip we can read.

He explained the investigative process to the board as consisting of an 8 step process. They take a final reading photograph of the old meter when installing the new meter and they keep the old meters in a warehouse. Some investigations showed some customers using more water last summer. Mr. Simmons shared his screen which showed an information handout going out to customers. He said it explained water usage, the effect of a leak or running toilet on consumption, and how to test a water meter with a 5-gallon pail. He also offered to go out to any home at the customer request to answer any questions. He attributed the higher volume of complaints to the media coverage.

Mr. Simmons also said higher usage patterns send out red flag warnings. He said some of the complaints of bills doubling and tripling show people comparing summer usage with winter usage. He used the analogy of the heating bill in the winter tripling over the heating bill in the

summer. He did say he understood the frustration of the customers, though, with Covid-19 still a significant part of our lives. He also added that KCWA customers used over 220 million gallons over last year. He said he surveyed PWSB and Bristol County Water Supply and all reported significantly higher usage rates.

Mr. Simmons and Mr. Kortz discussed the ability of the new software to give the data to the customer that he was showing on the screen. Mr. Simmons said he could provide it manually when we go to monthly billing, but he said KCWA can reach out to individual customers during a red flag event and ask them if they wanted us to look into it. He added that once all the meters are finished being replaced, KCWA will be going to monthly billing.

The Chairman added that they found 3 errors out of 9000 bills sent out. He asked what the errors were. Ms. Jacques said they transposed digits on the final reading of the old meter.

Mr. Simmons said 18000 bills went out.

Mr. Kortz said with PWSB and BCWS both with record usage, what does Mr. Simmons attribute this issue to? Mr. Simmons said the big issue is they are on monthly billing. KCWA is on 90-110 day billing.

Mr. Duckworth said, in light of the rate reduction, if a customer used the same amount of water as last year, their bill would've gone down. Mr. Simmons replied yes, and Mr. Duchesneau added that the rate reduction was effective September 1, 2020, so it would be pro-rated. Mr. Duckworth asked if they could send out a letter similar to that of National Grid electricity summarizing their usage to their neighbors. Mr. Simmons thought it was a good idea, and would see if the software could do it.

Mr. Duckworth discussed a running toilet and its reflection on usage. He said small pieces add up. He seemed to think people think perhaps that when they discuss a leak they mean a leaking pipe in the basement. He asked about the visits by staff to get the data. Mr. Simmons said they can do 20 to 30 per day, with each stop taking 15 minutes.

Mr. Kortz said KCWA wasn't suggesting that the primary issue was leaks. Mr. Simmons said he was one hundred percent correct. Mr. Simmons said it was the increase in usage, primarily outdoor usage. Mr. Duchesneau said that Centerville Glen had an independent test on their meter and it showed it was fully accurate.

Mr. Duckworth said perhaps KCWA should embrace Sen. Raptakis and bring him in and walk him through the process. Mr. Simmons said he would be happy to meet with any elected officials. Mr. Duchesneau said Mr. Simmons had 3 telephone calls with Sen. Raptakis and he still doesn't understand.

Chairman Boyer indicated he would not support that route adding that Sen. Raptakis has a history of twisting information. He said the system runs well.

Mr. Rousselle asked if the complaints had slowed. Ms. Jacques said they receive 30-40 per day and that they were slowing a bit. Mr. Duckworth added that as the issue fades from the press, complaints drop.

Chairman Boyer thought it would be a good idea to at least speak to some public relations professionals to see if it was the right thing to explore. Mr. Rousselle agreed. Mr. Crossman agreed, commending Mr. Simmons but conceding these people are professionals. Mr. Duckworth also agreed, saying that Mr. Simmons is trying to run a water authority and should have this off his plate. Mr. Kortz agreed as well, saying KCWA needed a consistent and cohesive message. Mr. Giusti also said he agreed, needing someone outside the box.

Mr. Boyer asked if the board needed a vote. Mr. Sullivan said no vote was needed to speak with them, but a vote would be needed to engage. Mr. Rousselle asked Mr. Sullivan if an RFP was necessary. Mr. Sullivan said it was dependent upon the results of Mr. Simmons' interviews. Mr. Simmons said our regulations allow engagement without an RFP up to a certain dollar level.

Mr. Crossman asked to set another special meeting as the issue couldn't wait for our next regular meeting. The board agreed to allow Mr. Simmons to set up and conduct the interviews.

There being no further business before this board at this special meeting, Mr. Rousselle moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Crossman at 11:00 a.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Dated: December _____, 2020

Patrick J. Sullivan
Legal Counsel