

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
MINUTES

A meeting of the Environment, Planning & Agriculture Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on February 22, 2016.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. Kara Hahn, Chairperson
Leg. Al Krupski, Vice Chair
Leg. Sarah S. Anker
Leg. Thomas Muratore
Leg. Robert Trotta (excused absence)
Leg. Bridget Fleming

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

George M. Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Sarah Simpson, Assistant Counsel/Legislature
Jason Richberg, Clerk of the Legislature
Amy Ellis, Deputy Chief Clerk/Legislature
Laura Halloran, Budget Review Office
Katie Horst, County Executive's Office
Michael Pitcher, Director of Communications/PO
Alyssa Turano, Aide to Leg. Hahn
Gwynn Schroeder, Aide to Leg. Krupski
Robyn Fellrath, Aide to Leg. Anker
Brendan Chamberlain, Aide to Leg. Muratore
Greg Moran, Aide to Leg. Trotta
Elizabeth Sutton, Aide to Leg. Fleming
Robert Braun, Deputy Bureau Chief/County Attorney's Office
Rick Brand, Newsday
Patrick G. Halpin, reappointment to SC Water Authority
Tim Hopkins, General Counsel/SC Water Authority
Nicholas Caracappa, SC Water Authority
And all other interested parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 10:06 AM

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Okay, welcome to the Legislature's Environment, Planning and Agriculture Committee. If we could all rise for a salute to the flag led by Legislator Anker.

SALUTATION

PUBLIC PORTION

Okay. We have one card for the Public Portion, Nicholas Caracappa. Welcome, come on up. Just make sure that that green light is on and you will have three minutes.

MR. CARACAPPA:

Good morning. Thank you for having me. I'm here today to essentially oppose the reappointment of Patrick Halpin, and I'll be here for every other board member on there as well, it's just not Pat Halpin. I just don't agree with the management style, what's going on in the Water Authority. And I was here in August. I left you guys a comprehensive report on customer service, the continual rate hikes. There's a lot of things going on that should not be going on.

Rate hikes, first of all, every year continuously -- ever since Pat Halpin's been on there, and if you guys see this change of plan for 2015, they're earmarking a billion dollars so -- over the next ten years, which my math is nine years, between now and 2025, but a billion dollars, folks. That's \$100 million a year. I know they have surplus, but it's going to take ratepayer money. It's going to take putting surcharge money put aside. And we just can't afford that. Where we risk the overall goal is what I need to know actually. Is the overall goal having the best possible product? We already have that in our water. We have the awards to prove it.

We actually -- we had the lowest rates. We still have the lowest rates countywide, statewide, probably nationwide as far as water goes. What are we hoping to achieve by doing this? Customer service? We raise rates every single year, customer service has gone south. We can't repair leaks when they come up. We wait days, you know, one day, two day, three days, same thing with fire hydrants. We're waiting a day, two days, three days, four days. We're gambling here. You know, for what we're paying rates these days, we should be getting number one customer quality and we don't have that. I know because I'm part of it.

Since August no one has reached out about my comprehensive report with facts. Since that time it was reported that the Water Authority had two sanitary code violations because of what we brought forward as a union because we're the only one doing oversight at the Water Authority. Since then, just recently through PESH, seven serious code violations. And it starts at the highest level for employee safety. For years we've been arguing with the Water Authority about employee safety in this particular circumstance and we were being told by their Director of Safety that we were wrong and we had to bring an outside agency, in fact, to prove them wrong. And they were issued, again, seven serious violations, which they're contesting. But right now PESH came out to the fields and they penalized them.

We are forced to go to outside agencies much like this one, Suffolk County Water Authority, who you all appoint the people here. And I would just like to ask one question: Do you ask what their qualifications are outside of being past public servants? Do they have business degrees, financial degrees, engineering degrees? Why don't you ask the more pertinent questions because it affects every one of your constituents. And I'm also free if you want to go over any of their stuff any time, Chairperson Hahn.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Thank you. Any questions? Legislator Muratore.

LEG. MURATORE:

Yes, Miss Chair. Nick, you said sanitary code violations.

MR. CARACAPPA:

Yes.

LEG. MURATORE:

What is a sanitary code violation?

MR. CARACAPPA:

Well, in this particular instance, when the Board of Health goes around and inspects the 200-plus well sites we have, where we collect samples, we treat the water, it was discovered -- of course we brought it forward, I mean that they were skipping stations, they were not assigning personnel to go check these stations. So in these particular instances, when they looked at the book and they saw no operator was there, the explanation we got is through the Board of Health, Water Services Division, was that they had assumed that the operator had not been there yet, and that they were going to get there. And the Water Authority maintains that -- that they knew all along that no operator has been there to take a sample. They have to take a mandatory graph sample to get a level reading, what's going into the water, Ph levels or chlorine levels. Without that, there's no way of knowing what you're consuming in your household, what your kids are consuming, what your family is consuming, what the public is consuming, what your constituents are consuming. So, of course, they were cutting corners and not assigning people to these runs, we brought that forward; whether it's because of what we did, because of the inspection, it doesn't matter, they realized that you have to have a daily graph sample there everyday.

LEG. MURATORE:

You say "we." Who is "we"?

MR. CARACAPPA:

Suffolk County Water Authority is responsible for the -- for the graph samples, to give assurances to the public what exactly -- what levels are going into the water everyday. Now the Water Authority does have technology, it has computerized 24/7 monitoring, but that wasn't authorized at the time to use that kind of technology and they still have several stations that don't have that so they're required to get the graph samples.

To date they're doing it, to their credit. But this was months, if not years, in challenging the Water Authority, saying, hey, you know, you gotta have people on these runs, you know. When you don't go on runs, these things build up. That means bigger mixes, it's more wear and tear on my members because they gotta make mixes and mixes of -- pounds and pounds of lime and chlorine. So, you know, finally we had to bring the outside agency in to make it right.

LEG. MURATORE:

Now you said that rates have risen since Mr. Halpin has been on the board.

MR. CARACAPPA:

Yes.

LEG. MURATORE:

So does Mr. Halpin have -- is it his direct responsibility -- did he cause it to go up? Did he cause these rates to go up? Is he --

MR. CARACAPPA:

Well, what happens is, any good business they do a rate study. And the rate study is based upon what -- and this is just me because I've been to some of their meetings, I don't go to all of them, in the rate study you put everything involved, what it cost to manage a company and, you know, payroll, healthcare, whatever it may be. I bring up healthcare because I know it's a touchy point between the board and I, but also capital projects is a big thing. Capital projects you have control over that. You know, if you don't have the money for it, you don't do it unless you need to do it. Now we have structures that need to be replaced. There was no question about it. We support that. Of course, it affects the public. But what they're looking to do now in this 20 -- 2025, it's just over -- it's over the top. It's what -- it's what got the County, the Town, the State in trouble. It's mismanagement of funds. It's overspending. They're having a field day with everybody else's money. So is it his responsibility? Yes. Is it because of him? Well, in part it is because he has control, not just him but it's a five-member board.

LEG. MURATORE:

So it's the entire management team that's at fault here?

MR. CARACAPPA:

Yes.

LEG. MURATORE:

They're not running the organization the way it should be run.

MR. CARACAPPA:

In my opinion, I would say no.

LEG. MURATORE:

And being an employer of -- you know -- or having some kind of control, we should make a decision to either keep those people that are not doing their job or not keep those people that are not doing their job. I know in the County government, we dismiss people that don't do their job. I know it's not a very high-paying job. I know Mr. Halpin does a lot of it on his own time, he doesn't make a lot of money from it, but maybe we need to replace the whole board. I know a while ago -- just to change the topic -- I received a letter from, I think, Mr. Szabo and it was a lot of -- allegations were made about what you said here. Now I know I reached out to you.

MR. CARACAPPA:

Yes, you did.

LEG. MURATORE:

And I think Leslie did. I hope some of the other -- other members reached out. There might be some new ones that weren't involved at the time. But, you know, to talk with you as well as the Water Authority to find out what's going on here. I mean, people are saying now -- I spoke to Legislator Trotta and he said last summer his water bill was almost as high as the electric bill. I know he does a lot with blueberries or raspberries, whatever he raised so he used a lot of water, but, you know, to spend that kind of money now in the environment that's going on, we can't have that.

So to me I'm seeing -- well, I know Mr. Halpin did a wonderful job as a County Exec. I like Mr. Halpin on a personal basis, but I don't know if I can support him again to go back for another five years as part of this team that's not doing the right job for the constituents and the ratepayers of the Suffolk County Water Authority.

You know, so -- I mean, you raised a lot of issues here. You know, we heard the rates are going

up. They're probably going to go up each year. A lot of good things are being done in the Water Authority. I know there used to be places we could go and pay our bills. You know, that's out. I mean -- so the convenience of the Water Authority is beginning to diminish. I know technology is here and maybe you can go into a 7/Eleven or a local deli and pay your water bill, but you're not being able to get answers for your issues when you go to a bodega or you go to a 7/Eleven or you go to another place where you can pay your water bill.

I think we need to -- you know, and when Mr. Halpin comes up here I'm going to ask him about that, we need to put contact back with government, with Water Authority. It's getting worse and worse. People want answers to questions. They can't get them at a deli; they can't get them at a 7/Eleven. So what's going on with those? I mean, are there any left? I mean, I don't see any more but are there any -- what do you call them, payment centers or whatever you call them, go pay your water bill.

MR. CARACAPPA:

Well, you raised several super important things. And I don't want to take up everybody's time here but I will tell you this: We have one -- one main payment center that's in Coram. We used to have -- we still have offices. We have Huntington; we have Bay Shore; we have Hauppauge; we have Oakdale; we have Westhampton, East Hampton where -- you know, most of these places you used to be able to go and pay your water bill. They closed them all down and made one central location. They made a call center. And when we raised all those issues with the Legislature years ago about the situation, and I think that may have been even before Pat's time, or maybe when Pat was first getting on there, there was a lot of feedback from the -- from your fellow colleagues here at the Authority; I think my brother was one of them. So what they did in return was they went to these bodegas and called them payment centers, but they're not getting the quality customer service.

See, that's what I don't understand about all this. Raising the rates every single year, cutting customer service there -- I was called a liar in that letter you mentioned to the CEO about a situation with a hydrant. We were discussing what happened in the district. You happened to be my Legislator, so I was saying "we." I read the minutes to that meeting when I was here. I never implemented the authority, and if I did it was -- it was interpreted the wrong way. I knew that was a private one but they're missing the point here. Whether it was the Water Authority's hydrant or not, that hydrant was not working. It was needed by the public and it cost this young lady her life.

The Water Authority's making conscious decisions, ladies and gentlemen, not to fix these fire hydrants in a timely manner. They're choosing to let them go because they don't want to pay overtime to the guys who do it. They're gambling with your safety, the public safety and the safety of your families. It should not happen. When you need that hydrant, when the fire department needs that hydrant because they're paying rent for it, that hydrant should be operational, not with a bag over it because it was hit and you don't want to pay the overtime. They're throwing the dice.

This is the kind of customer service that I'm speaking about, ladies and gentlemen. They'll let them leaks go even in the wintertime just so it's not blowing out but it's still causing icy conditions. I got the picture to show you. Someone's got to respond. This is affecting your constituents, ladies and gentlemen. They're out of control with the spending; they're out of control with the management; they're out of control with the anti-labor. Let me tell you something: With \$12.4 million of surplus, yes, I am upset personally on that note that we have not had a contract and we haven't had a wage increase in three-and-a-half years. Yes, that is -- this is also a part. But when -- when I came here last time, I did not speak one word of the contract. Mr. Barraga, Legislator Barraga who was on this committee at the time, he was the only one who brought up the contract. I wasn't here to gripe about a contract. That's an internal issue. We will resolve that.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

We have another question. We have some other questions. So, Legislator Muratore, are you done asking questions?

LEG. MURATORE:

I'll pass for a little while.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Legislator Fleming.

LEG. FLEMING:

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. Good morning.

MR. CARACAPPA:

Good morning.

LEG. FLEMING:

I just -- I just wanted to make a note, because I've heard you say now a number of times about what you're calling out of control spending and irresponsible spending. But I happened to have been looking into this for other reasons just as a general sort of audit. I'm new, Bridget Fleming, by the way. It's nice to meet you.

MR. CARACAPPA:

Yes, hello. Welcome.

LEG. FLEMING:

The Suffolk County Water Authority's fees are some of the very lowest in the nation. I mean, I think -- and even compared to Nassau County, we -- my numbers that I know at the moment are that for a thousand gallons, Suffolk County Water Authority customers pay a \$1.74; whereas just next door in Nassau they pay almost \$4. So we're almost half of what Nassau County -- and that's not in the peak. In the summertime Nassau puts an extra dollar on each of those thousand gallons. So, I mean, out of the 500 largest systems, my understanding is that we rank 457th in terms of fees.

So, I'm a little -- I'm a little confused at the complaint that the fees are going up and up and up because I think it should be a source of pride and we should take a hard look at it why our fee so very low and perhaps that's -- that's -- you know, I'm thinking we might want to look in another direction based on the fact that the fees are so very low.

MR. CARACAPPA:

Well, thank you for your comment, but I would strongly disagree with you, Legislator Fleming. How do you think Nassau got in that condition?

LEG. FLEMING:

Let me just --

MR. CARACAPPA:

How do you think Nassau County got in that position if they're charging so much for the water?

LEG. FLEMING:

Understood but --

MR. CARACAPPA:

Mismanagement and overspending.

LEG. FLEMING:

Can I just ask you when you say you disagree, are you disagreeing with the numbers? Do we run --

MR. CARACAPPA:

No, no, the numbers are accurate but -- you want -- you know what they were six years ago, Legislator Fleming? Before they were raised 4.2% on average except for the one year that I intervened again and I brought up that they're selling off land for what reason? At the worst possible time they're selling off huge portions of land owned by the Authority for future wells. Even if they don't need it, why are they selling it off at the worst possible time when they have a surplus of money? Okay. And when I brought that up, all of a sudden it was like, hey, let's use that money to offset the raises and the rates. So that one year they didn't raise it.

LEG. FLEMING:

I do appreciate --

MR. CARACAPPA:

So, I know --

LEG. FLEMING:

I do appreciate your concerns with regard to decisionmaking. I just want to make sure that the record is clear with regard to the fees and where they stand relative to fees of our neighbors and nationwide.

MR. CARACAPPA:

Currently I would agree that they are still the lowest. Take a hard look at the billion dollars over the next ten years, \$100 million a year, we have 380,000 give or take a couple, okay --

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Okay. We're going --

MR. CARACAPPA:

So do the math on that.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

We're going to bring Mr. Halpin up next. So thank you very much, Mr. Caracappa.

LEG. MURATORE:

Madam Chair?

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

We appreciate your time. We're going to -- we're going to bring up the person who's going to be appointed and you can ask him questions. I don't think, you know, we need to -- he came to speak his three minutes and we appreciate all that you've said. We heard from you at the last -- you know, several meetings ago, couple months ago, so thank you, Mr. Caracappa, we appreciate that. And we're going to bring up -- we're going to move onto Introductory Resolutions since we don't have any other --

MR. CARACAPPA:

Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Were there any other speakers in the audience? And I also need to mention that Legislator Trotta had an excused absence today.

Were there any other public speakers who wanted to speak during the Public Portion? Okay. So Public Portion is closed and we'll move onto Introductory Resolutions because it's timely. We have -- we have the appointee here and he can come up and speak to all this. You can -- you want to have a seat?

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

[Reappointing member to the Suffolk County Water Authority (Patrick G. Halpin) (Pres. Off.)]

MR. HALPIN:

I'll stand.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

No?

MR. HALPIN:

Whatever you want me to do. Which would you prefer?

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

You are welcome wherever you'd like to be.

MR. HALPIN:

Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Just make sure that green light's on and that you have the microphone up.

MR. HALPIN:

Thank you so much. By the way, we have copies of our strategic plan. Let me just say, first of all, it is a privilege to be here. It's hard to believe that it was ten years ago that I was appointed by this Legislature to serve. It is one of the finest water providers in America. You know, you should feel very good about the job that's being done every day. I know you hear it. And this goes back to when Mike LoGrande, a former County Executive, served as Chairman and CEO, but still today we have the highest credit rating of any public water provider in America and we have the lowest rates. We have the best water in America. And we continue to make strategic investments to guarantee that.

What I find so interesting is that that's being characterized as mismanagement. It's not. You know, here's what we know. We know that when utilities, especially public utilities that provide water, do not make investments in their infrastructure, terrible things happen. Flint, Michigan comes to mind. You should know that that will never happen in Suffolk County. And that just didn't start when I got on the board. It's been that way. This is a well-run public benefit corporation.

We happen to test more often, more frequently for more things, more rigorously than any other utility -- public water utility in America. We test for things like lead. And we test for it frequently. We also go into people's homes and test for lead to make sure that those contaminants are not leaching into their water that people are consuming.

You saw the story, the big headline last week by Newsday talking about the -- what -- the leachate that's coming from compost. Do you know that your Water Authority, the lab that we continue to invest in, and by the way, there will be millions of dollars of investments into that lab in order to keep it the best in the nation, has been testing for those contaminants. And we are the only lab on the East Coast to test for those things. In fact, the DEC comes to us for information. We tested over 600 wells. So we have a clear understanding and picture of what's going on in our water supply in Suffolk County almost in a realtime basis. When I say we test, we test frequently.

Mr. Caracappa, I love him. I loved his mother. I knew his brother. He's a strong, fierce advocate --

MR. CARACAPPA:
(Inaudible)

MR. HALPIN:

I do love you. You know, we're working through a negotiation. Tim Hopkins is here as our General Counsel. He'll talk to that. My job and the board's job is not to negotiate a contract. You all appreciate that. We have the same role -- same role you have, which is that it gets negotiated and presented. And we're working through some issues. But as Tom Muratore can say when I was responsible for negotiations when I was County Executive, in difficult budget times, we negotiated with every contract including the PBA. Because that's the only way you get a fair contract. So we're working on that. And I'm hopeful and confident, there's been a lot of work being done by both sides to get to a place where we can all say we're ready to go forward.

To his point that people haven't gotten paid in his union, we have budgeted the funds in each and every contract for an eventual payment. We wish it was resolved sooner, but people will get paid. They will have a contract. And they will get whatever they would have earned had we had a contract on day one after the contract expired.

I just want to make another point. Look, the Water Authority has historically spent somewhere in the neighborhood of 70 to \$80 million a year in capital. Because if you think about the Water Authority, it's really about pipes, it's about wells, it's about the laboratory and the sophisticated equipment there. It's about making sure that we have good, solid infrastructure.

The Water Authority is required as a condition of its bonds -- there's literally a bond covenant, and Counsel will talk to you about how important that is, and we don't mess with bond covenants, to do two things: One, is that every five years there must be a complete independent analysis of the quality of the infrastructure. Because bondholders, when they buy our bonds, and we have the highest credit rating and some of the lowest interest rates, want to know that money is being invested to protect their investment. So we -- that is required and that is a matter of public record. We put it on our website. And it's something that the rating agencies look very carefully at and often cite in giving us the highest credit rating as a reason why.

The second thing that bondholders have insisted from the beginning -- oh, by the way, the story behind that first requirement was that when the Water Authority floated bonds when it first really got rolling in the late '40s and early '50s, one of the biggest bondholders that was ready to purchase said "I want a guarantee in the covenants that you don't shortchange infrastructure." So that's where the five-year analysis came.

The other requirement is that we must have a 1.5 -- we must have enough cash -- one-and-a-half times the amount of cash on hand that is required to pay debt service on an annual basis.

Going back to Mike LoGrande and every rate study that's been done, it's all focused on the fact that we have to have those cash reserves because, you know, we only get -- the Water Authority only makes money if people use water. And if for some reason people stopped using water or there was a catastrophe where, you know, we lost electricity in the middle of the summer for -- after a big hurricane for two months, we'd have enough cash to pay our debt service. So that is something that's statutorily through our covenants we are required to have.

The last point I want to make is that we do have very low rates, Legislator Fleming, you're right. And that's a good thing. But, frankly, a lot of people waste water. If you look at people's water bills, you'll see that the overwhelmingly majority of water is used during the summer. And we've had some issues in places like your legislative district where these huge estates are putting a lot of water -- now, you know, frankly, we're getting paid for that, but what it does is that it puts enormous stress on the system. So we, as a water authority, have had to dig more wells, upgrade the existing pump stations to pump more water, and also take steps in the middle of heat waves to manage the water flow.

We had concerns a couple of years ago. We've since mitigated them because of the -- because of what the impacts would have been, that the Southampton Hospital would have lost water pressure. Now that would have been a big, big problem. And literally we had people there managing our system, which is all interconnected, by the way. It's an interesting system. You can go to our SCADA system -- to the headquarters where we have SCADA, which is where we manage the entire system, we know everything that's going on and you can see water pressure at every well. And all of that was being done so we wouldn't lose water pressure at Southampton Hospital. Because had we done that, then, what happens is that it kicks in a whole matter of protocols that the Suffolk County Health Department and the State Health Department require to ensure that water pressure when it comes up, that the water quality is perfect. Fortunately that didn't happen, but it was a concern.

So what I'm saying to you is that it's been a privilege to be on the Water Authority board. We're working real hard. The issue that Mr. Caracappa talked about, having to do with chlorine and all that, if you're interested in that and other things, our Counsel, Tim Hopkins, will be happy to answer those, but we take employee safety very, very seriously. And, frankly, we are changing some protocols over the objections of the individual that you mentioned, who is responsible for safety to guarantee that the issue that he talked about, which was an isolated case, doesn't happen again. So it's something we constantly monitor as a board and ask for reports.

So I'll be happy to answer any questions you have. I just want to say if any of you want copies of this, keep in mind that this strategic plan is a plan. It is not cast in stone. But what the Water Authority has done for the first time is to say, okay, each and every year going back to Mr. LoGrande and when other members were on the board, we've made, you know, millions and millions of dollars each year in infrastructure. And it's been pretty consistent. Let's, as a water authority, and this was something that was done by staff, not by outside consultants or anything, it was done by staff, let's think about what our priorities are going forward and make sure that the investments we're making address those priorities. And you'll see that they fall in a number of critical areas.

One is replacing aging infrastructure. The other is to expand infrastructure to places where they don't have public water. The third is to continue to invest in our lab. The fourth is customer service. We have completed a program which began under Mr. LoGrande, we're just in the process of completing it, to completely automate all of our meters, nearly 380,000. We are going to a complete paperless system. We have folks going out there to deal with issues like non-payment who are collecting checks and cash. We are now automating all of that so people can use a credit card in terms of -- in terms of -- in terms of the issue that Mr. Muratore talked about in terms of customer service. We have a call center that is open. We'll answer any call. We have people who

are bilingual and also we have a service where if somebody calls and can only speak Mandarin, they'll have the ability to get their answer questioned (sic) because we -- we bring them on. And the other piece is is that we're working to make sure that our customer service is responsive, efficient and on top of things. Because in the end, those are the folks that pay the bills.

So thank you very much. It's been a pleasure.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

So have -- have -- have the rating numbers -- I don't know what agency rates customer service satisfaction for water authorities, I'm sorry that I don't know that but -- I mean, have the numbers --

MR. HALPIN:

Well, unlike --

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

-- been going down?

MR. HALPIN:

No, no, they haven't. No. In fact, you know, what happened was that back when Mr. LoGrande was here and prior board, they made the decision to create a call center in Coram. And over time the district offices that you heard about before were phased out. But in a modern call center, we have the ability and do, to monitor calls and outcomes. And one of the things that -- that we're working on, and we're actually tapped into some of the expertise that has come from PSE&G, there with the electric utility, you'll have, you know, real metrics in terms of customer improvement.

So we have asked them, you know, what they have done over the course of the last year-and-a-half or so that they've been in charge to improve customer service. So we're constantly looking for best practices. But to answer your question, do you -- do we have an independent group to analyze how satisfied out there doing it, but it's something that we ought to consider.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Can you speak a little bit to -- I know my daughter's school, there was a water main break that happened; so, you know, the aging infrastructure, I imagine, it was -- probably has to do with that. I know you spoke a lot about infrastructure improvements and that investment, and I think we all recognize how important that is, but if you can just speak again or repeat about the kinds of infrastructure that you're prioritizing.

MR. HALPIN:

Well, first of all, we collect data on every water main break and where it's happened and what are the factors that contributed to that. That data is analyzed and we look for patterns. So there are a couple of things that the Water Authority does. One is to look in areas where there is -- there are an unusual number of water main breaks. And historically what we have found is that a lot of those have occurred in places like the Southwest Sewer District where they actually dug up the roads and had to fill them in. And where you have construction like that in other places, the ground settles and it creates a weakness where a main could break. That's one.

The second is the age, the age of the infrastructure. So we know how old our pipes are. And in the priority areas where we know we have aging infrastructure and where failures are occurring, that goes to the top of the list.

The other thing that happens is that we have to upgrade water mains to address capacity issues as development occurs. So that's a -- that is a third factor that goes into that in order to guarantee

that people, customers and fire services have sufficient water pressure. And one of the things that we're able to do with the SCADA system is that in real time, and that is a center that operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in the middle of the winter, we could have a terrible fire. And the operators there can see water pressure go down because the fire departments are demanding more water. And within minutes they will have more water than they could ever need by simply directing that wells that are typically shut down in the winter because of the lack of demand get called up and there's ample water supply to protect property and lives.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

And then my final question, and I'm sure we have others --

MR. HALPIN:

Yep.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

And I apologize, Mr. Caracappa, because I could be butchering what you said months ago, but I know there was a complaint about a pipe breaking or maybe it was a main breaking and waiting 'til the next morning to address it and people having to wait overnight and we not sending crews when things happen and making the public wait for fixes, is this occurring? Is there -- are there new rules that are saying that we're not handling things that happen at night? How -- hopefully I'm not totally --

MR. HALPIN:

No, I could --

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

-- ruining what the -- the accusation that had been made previously, but --

MR. HALPIN:

(Inaudible) -- about your question. First of all, I know that our CEO, Mr. Szabo, did respond to the issues that were raised by Mr. Caracappa. And, you know, he -- well, he could -- he could answer more specifically, and I believe he did because he did share the letter with the board, you know, that particular situation.

What I can say is that it is the board's policy that if there is -- first of all, we are carefully managing overtime. Let me just say that. And that's a responsibility of management. But the criteria's very simple: If homeowners, individuals and businesses are inconvenienced, it's their job to put that water main back in service as quickly as possible. If there are health and safety issues, they are to put that water main back in service. If we have the kind of break other than, you know, something where we may see that there is, you know, a minor situation that can be held over 'til the next business day, they are expected to address it then. And Mr. Hopkins, is there anything else I should add?

(OFF THE RECORD - INAUDIBLE)

MR. HALPIN:

Sorry --

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Oh, um, yes, if you'd like to come forward and address that question, I'd appreciate it.

MR. HOPKINS:

Timothy Hopkins. I'm General Counsel for the Suffolk County Water Authority.

With regard to water main breaks, if a water main is broken, a crew is immediately dispatched. I think what is being confused is a water main leak and a water main break. A leak, if there's a slight crack in the main and there's just a trickle of water coming from it, rather than sending out a crew, turning off the water at night and fixing it, we will wait until the next business day. Typically that interferes with homeowners' availability of water a lot less. Just the fact that it's slightly leaking does not impact the water that they receive in the house. And so they'll go during the next day and repair it. Because if you go at night and you repair it, you're going to have jack hammers jack hammering in the street and things like that. You're going to turn -- have to turn off the water during that period of time. Typically if we can, we'll do it the next day so it doesn't interfere with the customer service.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Okay. Thank you. I thought of one more question for Pat. This being the Environment Committee, we appreciate all that you spoke about, about the lab, about testing for contaminants, you know, if there -- if you can add a little bit more, you know, about that, and what you're doing to keep this -- the number one water in the country, probably the world, we'd appreciate that because we do get our water from sole source that we are vigilantly trying to protect here. And we know you are -- you all support that --

MR. HALPIN:

Sure.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

-- our initiatives there.

MR. HALPIN:

Yeah, thank you. One of the most gratifying parts of being on the board is -- is the role we play in guaranteeing high quality drinking water to the people of Suffolk County. We know that water providers all across the nation are going -- are being confronted with more rigorous water quality standards coming from the Federal government and also the State. Our lab is often the lab that is used by those agencies to collect the data because we have -- we're able to collect it from all of these wells in a region the size of Suffolk County. And keep this in mind: You can fit all of Nassau County in Suffolk County, the Town of Brookhaven, and still have room left over in Brookhaven. So we are a huge area with the largest sole source aquifer source for public drinking water supply.

And another part of the strategic plan, when I talked about the well, I talked about the investments and the lab, we know that those standards are coming. It's only a question of when. It will be sooner rather than later. We know that as a consequence the kind of treatment that we will be required to do, and every public water provider in the country will be provided to do, will be costly. It costs more money to treat the water at the well head than we're currently paying. So part of what's anticipated in this plan is to make sure that we are ahead of that as we have always been.

If you look at what's happening in places like Nassau County, I mean they're really struggling. The Governor was out the other day to talk about the plume coming from the Grumman property in Bethpage and what the implications are there for the water providers. Contaminants, plumes like that are a serious threat. We work closely with -- with the Federal agencies that monitor those in Suffolk County. But the good news for us is that our entire water supply has an interconnect. I mean, we're -- we will not have a situation like they could have in Bethpage where their inability to get drinking water or to spend money for a very expensive well could put the municipal water supply at risk. That will not happen here.

The second thing, if you look at what's going on in Nassau because they have 37 water suppliers as opposed to one regional one like we have, is that you get communities like Williston Park and

Williston fighting over who's selling the other one water. And the one that's selling the water wants to charge some ridiculous price. And now the mayors are getting together to decide how the water should be treated. And, again, something like that, you -- we heard in Flint where the politicians got involved, it's happening right in Williston Park, that doesn't happen at your water authority. Because, first of all, the Suffolk County Health Department, the State Health Department, rigorously review all that's being done and are experts, the folks that run the lab and the people that analyze it report directly to them. And there's no political interference in important water quality decisions. Period, end of story. And that's the way it's always been. And I'm hopeful that that's the way it will always be.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Thank you. Were there other questions by the Committee members? Legislator Anker.

LEG. ANKER:

Hi, Pat. Again, thank you for your time and taking this position.

MR. HALPIN:

My pleasure. Thank you.

LEG. ANKER:

You know, hopefully it will be approved. Just a couple of questions regarding, you know, water quality. And I'm glad you mentioned, again, we have a sole source aquifer. And I believe it's what, maybe one or two -- maybe three in the country, this unique type of water that we drink and how vital it is that we protect that water. We've had so many circumstances where the quality of our water has been threatened, you know, and also the issue that it has been actually polluted, you know, between the dumping -- illegal dumping. We've had, you know, radiation -- you know, I'm on Brookhaven National Lab's board. They're cleaning up that, that water area. So I do want to commend the Water Authority for the work that they've been doing to protect our water.

And I just want to bring up, you know, again, some -- I'll say concerns, but, you know, understanding that there are so many contaminants that are -- that could get into our water and they can create a synergistic effect. And I know, you know, working with the cancer -- high cancer rates, especially in my area, the number one concern is the water. Number one concern why are people getting cancer? And they look at the water. And is it the pesticides, is it the chemicals that are getting in the water? So I did a lot of research, you know, ten years ago, even up to now. And, you know, the area where I live, you know, it's been -- it gets tested -- 300 -- 300 tests, I think, you know, when you have the water report. And you do look at a lot of different contaminants.

So, you know, with that in mind, you know, I will encourage the Water Authority to continue to be diligent with the testing, you know, if you have to increase the testing to understand the, again, the synergistic effects. I know when you do find contaminants, there's this process called blending and that's something, you know, that I would like to see as pure water available, especially for our children because they are the most vulnerable in our society pertaining especially to health effects. But, you know, I don't know if you can speak on that, you know, again, how you're able to determine that, you know, if a well is contaminated, there's hundreds of wells and you close off a well, do you -- do you repair that well or do you just close it off for good? So I'm just curious how --

MR. HALPIN:

Sure.

LEG. ANKER:

-- you determine when you have a contaminated well, when it's able to go back on line and how it's managed.

MR. HALPIN:

Thank you. Yeah, thank you. First of all, as I mentioned before, the water at every well is tested more often than the State requires. The State requires that tests be done on a monthly basis. We do it several times a month. The other thing -- so we know the quality of the water in a given well.

The other thing is, is that where we have identified potential threats, and typically the Water Authority takes wells out of service before they reach the threshold that require a well to go out of service, but when that happens, there is -- there is treatment at the well and there are a variety of things that are done to make sure that the water that's pumped through the system is of the highest quality. So there's treatment at the well.

The other thing for you to keep in mind is that we have gotten more aggressive, I should say the staff when I say we, it's really the staff, they're the professionals, at looking at developments that are being contemplated in the areas that could affect wells, the zone of influence. And we will make those comments through our attorneys on the record as part of EIS, that's something that the Water Authority's doing more aggressively because we know that future development has -- has an impact.

In places like the North Fork where you have shallow aquifers and there's been intensive farming, there we have difficulty -- the Water Authority has difficulty finding mains -- finding water wells that produce quality water. So part of the plan that -- that's the strategic plan for 2025, we have both short-term interim and long-term goals in each of the key areas. We're contemplating extending water mains there and bringing water from places where we have ample water supply out to the -- out to the North Fork to guarantee that the water out there is of the highest quality.

So it's a variety of different strategies. All of that is examined on a regular basis. And, Tim Hopkins, if I forgot anything, let me know. No? Okay.

LEG. ANKER:

So, and I guess the question is, visiting other areas in the country and you see how the -- how the water has decreased, you see lakes drying up, rivers drying up, is there a concern that our sole source aquifer is -- will not supply the amount of water that is needed?

MR. HALPIN:

I'm told by the experts that our -- that we have plenty of fresh water in our aquifers, plenty. What our concerns are and what the experts' concerns are is the quality. So those things that you talked about that leach through the -- through the various aquifers are the threat. I mean, we're not in an area where we have to worry about -- we need an El Nino to replace a reservoir. We have -- we have -- we have ample supply of fresh water and it's constantly being replenished every time it rains.

LEG. ANKER:

Okay. And I think next biggest concern with the fire hydrants that they're not being repaired and there could be an issue with a fire, comments on that?

MR. HALPIN:

Well, look, we have a whole protocol for fire hydrants. We have a separate contract -- and this, again, began with Mr. LoGrande when he found out that that wasn't the case, but it's been continued, where we have a separate contract, where we have people going out to test all the well -- test all the fire hydrants to make sure they're operational. When a fire hydrant is damaged

as a result of an accident, it's replaced. We found a situation in East Farmingdale, because the Town of Babylon which owns the East Farmingdale Water District asked the Water Authority to operate that water district where when we went out and did a complete inventory of all of the hydrants, that there were many missing, which we replaced. That was something that was neglected long before we took on -- took on the responsibility of operating that district. So we take it seriously. Do you want to add anything to that; about hydrants?

MR. HOPKINS:

Sure, I can add.

MR. HALPIN:

Sure, please, go ahead.

MR. HOPKINS:

So one of the things that I want to dispel is this inaccuracy about someone dying because a hydrant didn't work. It is completely false. First of all, that hydrant was -- this is approximately seven or eight years ago, it was a private hydrant. It was operated in a private system. The only thing the Water Authority did for that system was to ensure that the hydrant worked mechanically each year and it provided bulk water to this private system. The problem with the private system was that they didn't -- they took out their booster pumps that were required to be put in in order for the project to be approved. When they took out the booster pumps, it reduced the amount of flow going to the hydrant. That was the reason the hydrant didn't work on the day that there was a fire there. But in addition to that, the fact that the fire hydrant didn't work didn't contribute to the death of the woman who was in the apartment. She was -- she had passed away before the fire department even got there.

In addition to that, there was litigation against the Water Authority and the apartment complex regarding that death. And the suit was settled without the Water Authority contributing anything to the settlement because we had no responsibility for actually getting water to that hydrant. It was the apartment complex. So that is a myth.

With respect to the timeliness of repairing hydrants, it's an issue for the union because they like to go out on overtime and repair hydrants. Typically there are hydrants every 500 to 1,000 feet along a roadway. So what we'll do, is if it's in front of a school or a hospital or a critical area, it will be repaired immediately irrespective of overtime or anything like that. But if it's on a street where there's multiple other hydrants and it could be done during the workday, we will go, we will get the hydrant and we will repair it the next day. So there's not a big delay and there are other hydrants available in the area; and there's never been an instance where having a hydrant out of service has affected any fire suppression in anyway whatsoever.

LEG. ANKER:

Okay. As far as -- with regard to the issue if there's an issue with fire hydrants, do you have an outreach number or place where fire departments can call? Or do you outreach to the fire departments just to --

MR. HOPKINS:

We do work with the fire departments and we do outreach with them all the time. We teach them about what pressure zones the hydrants are, how to operate a hydrant. We're going around now with a crew to each fire department and educating them on how and when to use a hydrant, which hydrant to use if you have a problem with one hydrant, what you can do; sometimes depending on where the hydrant is, it may operate a little differently. And we have a program where we go and we teach all the volunteer fire departments how to operate them and how to -- when you have two hydrants in a row, depending on how you turn them on, there could be pressure issues so we teach

them about how to handle the hydrant and how to operate them.

We also -- we inspect each and every one of our hydrants every ten months so there's a schedule. And Water Authority employees together with contractors go out and they test each and every hydrant in our system every ten months so there's never a problem with it. Problems arise when people hit hydrants, snow plows can hit hydrants and things like that. As soon as those issues arise, they're addressed immediately.

LEG. ANKER:

And I do appreciate, again, your availability to, you know, not only our fire departments, but, you know, also working with County departments, you know, our FRES department that trains the firefighters; and also working together, you know, people assume Suffolk County Water Authority is owned by Suffolk County and it's not.

MR. HOPKINS:

Right.

LEG. ANKER:

But we are here to make sure we work together in partnership to protect our water, whether it's preserving open space, cleaning up contaminants, you know, again, training or firefighters, you know, in use with the hydrants. So, you know, again, I think it's important that we have a clear line of communication as we work together -- sewerage, I know we're working on huge sewer projects. There's so many things that working together we can really protect our water. So I want to thank you. I want to thank you, Pat, for volunteering for this position.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Okay. Legislator Muratore had a question.

LEG. MURATORE:

Well, it's not so much a question, but I appreciate what Legislator Fleming brought up about the cost. You know, and I'm just figuring out a few numbers here. And if you a hundred dollar bill right now in the Water Authority and they do an average of 4.5% over the next five years, your bill's going to go from a \$100 to about \$144. So that's about a 44% increase on your hundred dollars now at a compound of 4.5 if that's where it stays.

So what I think, you know, Legislator Fleming, we are paying very little right now. But as someone said, we're going to be in Nassau's situation if we don't manage it the right way. And I think we need to find ways to stop the 4.5 increase in each year. And I think the way you do that is by bringing the right kind of people in to manage the organization. And, you know, I don't think that's happening right now in the Suffolk County Water Authority. And maybe even it's time for this Legislature body to put together an oversight committee, like we do have with PSE&G, to maybe work with the Water Authority and meet with them and answer our questions so we can carry these answers to our constituents. So that's all I want to say. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Thank you, Legislator Muratore. Any other questions or comments? Legislator Fleming.

LEG. FLEMING:

Tom, I appreciate -- I appreciate that point and would love to talk further about it. I'm just wondering, Mr. Halpin, if there is -- has been given any thought to looking at the fee structure from the perspective of incentivizing careful and conscientious use of water. Because it is a problem. I mean, there are a lot more people in my district who have small homes and lawns than the big, big ones. But the big, big ones certainly do exist and I appreciate your point about waste. Has there

been any thought given to that?

MR. HALPIN:

Yeah. In fact, we are -- we hired a consultant to do a thorough analysis of the Water Authority's rate structure to look at ways that we could encourage large consumers to be, you know, more mindful for, you know, for the cost of -- for the impact of the water that they're using. So we expect to have recommendations on that shortly from them.

We have in the past, you know, done some things like, you know, giving away free water sensors. And those are things that we do periodically. We wish that more people took advantage of that because that's a very simple way. You know, one of the things to save on water -- I mean, the interesting thing about water is that, you know, it's within our control. I mean, this is not something where people -- you know, people can control the amount of water that's being used. And if you look at folks who -- you know, who did it the old fashion way, who still do it the old fashion way like my parents did with a sprinkler and a hose -- I know, George, your parents did -- you had big sprinklers all over, but you know --

MR. NOLAN:

We did nothing.

(LAUGHTER)

MR. HALPIN:

-- but neither did I. And I put the hose out there. And then I would slow down doing it when I realized that by July it all turned brown, I didn't have to cut the lawn as much. (Laughter) So that was -- that was a disincentive for -- and created an opportunity for my mother, who was very mindful about money coming -- growing up in the depression, about not wasting it. So my point is, is that we can do a lot more with efficiency and promoting things like rain sensors, using things like drip irrigation systems, which they use in -- where you have -- where you'll have a water supply shortage. I mean, there are things within each other's control. And I think your point is a good one, that we can do more to promote, you know, more responsible use of water and that'll have a direct on people's bills.

LEG. FLEMING:

Thank you.

MR. HALPIN:

You're welcome.

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Okay, thank you. With that, I'm going to make a motion to discharge without recommendation; second by Legislator Muratore. All those in favor? Opposed? Abstentions?

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Madam Chair, I'd like to note my recusal for the record. I filed appropriate paperwork with the Clerk and with the Presiding Officer.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Thank you. So one recusal. So it is discharged without recommendation. **(VOTE: 4-0-0-1-1.**

LEG. TROTTA NOT PRESENT. LEG. KRUPSKI RECUSED)

Introductory Resolution 1067, Making a SEQRA determination in connection with the proposed rehabilitation of Riverhead County Center's sewers, pumping station and force main, Capital Project 8142, Towns of Riverhead and Southampton. (Pres. Off.)

Motion -- I'll make a motion; second by Legislator Krupski. Oh, I'm sorry, was that Fleming? Second by Legislator Fleming. (Laughter) Yeah. All those in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? **1067 is approved. (VOTE: 5-0-0-1. LEG. TROTТА NOT PRESENT)**

Introductory Resolution 1068, Making a SEQRA determination in connection with the proposed safety and security improvements to Suffolk County Sewer Districts (CP 8103).

(Pres. Off.) I'll make a motion; second by Legislator Muratore. All those in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? **1068 is approved. (VOTE: 5-0-0-1. LEG. TROTТА NOT PRESENT)**

Introductory Resolution 1069, making a SEQRA determination in connection with the proposed chemical bulk storage facilities for Suffolk County Sewer Districts (CP 8178).

(Pres. Off.) I'll make a motion; second by Legislator Muratore. All those Opposed? Abstentions? It is approved. **(VOTE: 5-0-0-1. LEG. TROTТА NOT PRESENT)**

Introductory Resolution 1157, Authorizing and directing an update to Agricultural Stewardship Program. (Krupski)

LEG. KRUPSKI:

So moved.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Motion by Legislator Krupski; second by Legislator Fleming.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

On the motion.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

On the motion, Legislator Krupski.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Thank you. So, this is an update from the 2004 Ag Stewardship Plan. And I'd encourage everyone -- a lot of people put a lot of time and effort into it. We had our last meeting -- I say that -- I hope we had our last meeting last week. Everyone seems satisfied. There was some minor changes made. I have yet to see the draft of those changes to make sure, but everyone was pretty pleased with the work product who worked on that. And it was -- it was, like I said, years of collaboration of a lot of interested parties. And agriculture is a very important industry in Suffolk County. And this plan certainly will help it move forward into the future. So I encourage everyone to take a look at it before we vote on it next week.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Thank you. Any questions? Okay. We have a motion and a second. All those in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? It is approved. **(VOTE: 5-0-0-1. LEG. TROTТА NOT PRESENT)**

Seeing that we have no further business before the Committee, we are adjourned.

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 11:06 AM
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**