



## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

4:00 pm

Full Meeting Minutes

**Teleconference**

### Attendees

Steve Bagwin	Chairman, WPCA Board Member
Ed Kelly	WPCA Board Member
Merritt Nesin	WPCA Board Member
William Brink	Executive Director, WPCA
Rhudean Bull	Administration Manager, WPCA

### Call to Order and Roll Call

S. Bagwin called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm. There were three (3) Committee / Board members present.

### Minutes Approval: May 15, 2024, Workforce Development Committee Meeting

E. Kelly made a motion to approve the May 15, 2024, WFD committee meeting minutes; seconded by S. Bagwin. There was no further discussion. **Vote 2-0-1.** M. Nesin abstained.

### Discussion: Position Vacancies

R. Bull explained that the vacancies remain the same; that there are some applications for the Plant Supervisor and the Wastewater Treatment Electrician but that she's been unable to obtain them despite having requested them several times. She stated that she hoped to have more to report by the Board meeting next week.

### Discussion: Strategies for Filling Positions

R. Bull reported that both the Plant Supervisor and Wastewater Treatment Electrician positions were posted at the end of April and that the WPCA distributed them to all wastewater treatment facilities across Connecticut. She stated the WPCA advertised on various wastewater treatment websites, LinkedIn and Indeed as well as newspapers throughout CT and in Westchester, NY. She mentioned that the cost for the newspaper posting was over \$5k.

### Discussion: Employee Email to HR, Deputy Dir of Ops & Board Members

R. Bull shared some important information regarding a recent situation. She explained that yesterday, she met with the HR Director, Paula Russell, in response to an anonymous email sent on May 21st at 3:18 PM. She stated that the email, addressed to Paula, Josie Carpanzano (Deputy Director of Operations), and Frank Salem (WPCA Board Member), raised concerns about a hostile work environment at the WPCA. She stated that despite the email being anonymous, Paula decided it was necessary to conduct an investigation.

R. Bull reported that she addressed all the allegations mentioned in the email. She explained that the first allegation concerned the abuse of power in scheduling, suggesting that she manipulates the work schedule to punish those who oppose her. R. Bull clarified the scheduling process, explaining that employees are asked to submit their schedule requests. She stated that while the WPCA tries to accommodate everyone, the needs of the plant are paramount, and scheduling considers seniority. She further explained that experienced staff are required for critical shifts, such as Sunday night to Monday morning, which demand more expertise. However, she said that new employees also need to learn, and the best way to do so is by working alongside more senior staff on these critical shifts.

R. Bull noted that most of the newer employees hired in the last three to four years prefer to work standard Monday to Friday, 7 AM to 3 PM shifts, and are often unhappy when assigned to weekend or night shifts, despite being informed during the interview process that the WPCA operates 24 hours a day and that they would be required to work any shift. She observed that, once hired, these expectations often change.

She mentioned that the unwanted shift assignments have led to instances where employees call in sick but are later found engaging in other activities, clearly indicating they were not actually sick. She highlighted that numerous sick call-outs, emergency call-outs, and requests for vacation or personal time before and after weekends or holidays are particularly problematic, as they force other employees to cover these shifts. She stated that the WPCA had to address these issues, which might have also contributed to employee dissatisfaction.

R. Bull emphasized that all scheduling requests are considered, but her priority is to do what's best for the plant and that although she is ultimately responsible for the schedule, she reviews it in collaboration with others. Before December 2022, she worked closely with the Shop Steward, who had years of relevant experience. Now, she stated she collaborates with the Shop Steward and another shift foreman, who also has some years of experience, to ensure that the most suitable individuals are assigned to each shift.

Another point raised in the email was the high turnover rate, suggesting systemic issues within the workplace. She explained that both she and B. Brink have discussed this and are not aware of any systemic issues. She stated that if the individual who sent the anonymous email believes there are such issues, she encourages open communication with Bill or herself to address these concerns. She stated that the WPCA strives to meet everyone's needs, but it's not always possible to satisfy everyone entirely.

She stated that the email also mentioned concerns about surveillance, alleging that cameras feed directly to her personal phone, which is not true; it goes to her work phone. She explained that the WPCA's surveillance system is far behind other city departments in the Government Center, which have extensive camera coverage. She said that the WPCA only installed cameras on the second and third floors and in the Lab area recently after repeated thefts occurred in these areas and that these cameras are intended for security purposes and not for monitoring employees.

B. Brink explained that there were monitors in the previous Plant Supervisor's office and in the Control Room. He talked about the reason and purpose of the cameras around the plant and stated that in summary, the measures the WPCA take are intended to maintain a safe and productive work environment.

R. Bull further stated that another concern raised was that A. Logrono was allegedly allowed to sit in on disciplinary hearings, which is not true. She clarified that Abby has never sat in on a formal pre-disciplinary hearing. She explained that in some meetings, Abby or Crystal may be present to take notes, but they have never participated in formal hearings.

Additionally, R. Bull addressed an issue regarding the liaison at the government center. She stated that the claim was that Rose Frasier should not be the liaison to the WPCA. R. Bull explained that Rose used to be the WPCA liaison some time ago, but for at least the past six years, the WPCA has had a different liaison. She said that during this period, the WPCA encountered numerous issues, which led to multiple requests for a change in liaison from the HR Director before the current Director, making the request four or five times due to ongoing issues with the HR department.

She explained that for the month of May, the WPCA had a different liaison, which resulted in significantly more progress. Consequently, R. Bull emailed HR again, requesting a permanent change in liaison. She stated that the complaint suggested that R. Bull has a personal relationship with the new liaison she was requesting, which she clarified as a professional friendship, similar to her relationship with the current liaison. She emphasized that they do not visit each other or share meals outside of work.

Lastly, R. Bull addressed the email's claim that Rob Pudelka was forced out of his position, which she stated is not true. She said that the email mentioned that Rob was not very personable and had communication issues, although he was smart and a leader. She stated that the email suggested that Rob was made a scapegoat.

She concluded by saying this summarizes the entire complaint, and that she wanted to share it with everyone so that if any other Board members, such as F. Salem, hear about it, they will know what happened. She went on to say

that while the email was not a formal complaint, HR did investigate it, and she had provided responses to all the allegations.

E. Kelly responded, stating that he also received a similar email; that it was sent to him and M. Quinones, with no other parties on the distribution list, unless they were blind copied. He noted that it seems like this email went out to multiple people, although he was unsure why F. Salem was specifically chosen. He said that he does not know if other Board members received it as well, and that the email led to a phone call between him and M. Quinones, where they discussed this and other matters related to Rob Pudelka's departure and the overall work environment.

E. Kelly shared that Matt's perspective is that the work environment is generally healthy, though there is always room for improvement. He said that Rob apparently had some conflicts with a few people, but nothing that indicates a toxic environment, which was reassuring for him to hear. After speaking with M. Quinones, he stated that he also discussed these matters directly with B. Brink.

He concluded by saying that while the email being anonymous is somewhat amusing, it led to productive discussions and a general consensus that things are not as dire as some might think. E. Kelly expressed surprise at the supportive tone towards Rob at the end of the email, given the issues he had heard about; that it was an unexpected conclusion. E. Kelly stated that he wondered how many copies of this email were circulated and noted that, from what he could tell, only he and M. Quinones received the email directly on the copy he had.

Both M. Nesin and S. Bagwin stated that they did not receive the email. S. Bagwin questioned if the WPCA has notices of camera surveillance, to which she replied there is no notice posted. She stated that this is a City building and the City has a policy stating that they have the right to surveillance their buildings and computer activities. After a brief discussion, R. Bull stated she would check with the Law Department.

#### **IUOE Contract Settlement Retro Payout**

R. Bull reported that the Union met with the Labor Relations Specialist today on a grievance that she had mentioned last month, and they talked about the contract retro settlement. She stated that according to the Union Rep she spoke to today, the retro was supposed to have been processed as of yesterday, but because the WPCA is paid a week behind, payment would not be until next week. She stated that she is hopeful the guys are going to get paid out next week, and that this topic will no longer need to be on the agenda. There was a brief discussion before moving to the next agenda item.

#### **Update: WPCA Staff COVID19 Cases**

R. Bull reported that there were no COVID cases to report for this month and hopefully not next month either.

#### **Old Business**

No old business

#### **New Business**

No new business.

#### **Adjournment**

S. Bagwin made a motion to adjourn the June 12, 2024, Workforce Development committee meeting at 4:27 pm; seconded by E. Kelly. There was no further discussion. **Vote: 3-0-0.**