



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, May 15, 2024

4:00 pm

Full Meeting Minutes

Teleconference

Attendees

Steve Bagwin	Chairman, WPCA Board Member
Ed Kelly	WPCA Board Member
Merritt Nesin (absent)	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 two (2) Committee / Board members present.

Minutes Approval: April 10, 2024, Workforce Development Committee Meeting

E. Kelly made a motion to approve the April 10, 2024, WFD committee meeting minutes; seconded by S. Bagwin. There was no further discussion. **Vote 2-0-0.**

Discussion: Resignation of WPCA Plant Supervisor

B. Brink began the discussion by noting that, to his knowledge, R. Pudelka did not have an exit interview with the Human Resources Division, so there was no input from HR. He mentioned that R. Pudelka had verbally indicated that his resignation was partly due to personal reasons and a need to recharge. B. Brink believed that Rob was not actively seeking new employment and was planning to take some time off. He suggested that Rob might have experienced burnout or needed a change of scenery. B. Brink explained that Rob had been somewhat unhappy at WPCA, had encountered issues with certain individuals—specifically in HR. For the record, Brink emphasized that Rob was not asked or forced to leave, nor did he do anything that would prompt the WPCA to make him leave. He stated that his resignation was entirely voluntary and, in his opinion, somewhat unexpected.

S. Bagwin asked if B. Brink knew if there was a precipitating event. He went on to say that it sounded like it was just an accumulation of things. B. Brink responded that yeah, he would say it was more of accumulation of various things.

E. Kelly expressed his concern about two primary issues: the structural elements of the job and the potential for a toxic work environment. He questioned whether aspects of Rob's role were inherently frustrating, conflict-inducing, or involved unmanageable expectations that made the job untenable. The second, and more crucial concern, according to E. Kelly, was the possibility of a toxic environment—improper behaviors or unpleasant conditions that made Rob feel so uncomfortable that he felt compelled to leave without addressing the issue with HR or the Union.

E. Kelly noted that Rob is a white male, so he didn't anticipate specific problems related to that, but he reflected on his decade-long tenure on the Board. He recalled that, ten years ago, Polish jokes and other offensive behaviors were more common and hoped that such a culture had been eradicated from WPCA. E. Kelly emphasized the importance of ensuring that such toxic elements were no longer present in the organization but, that if such behaviors are still prevalent, what can and should be done to rid the WPCA of such behaviors.

B. Brink responded, stating that he does not believe any toxicity was directed at R. Pudelka. While acknowledging that some people did not like Rob—just as some might not like any supervisor—he emphasized that disliking a supervisor is not uncommon. B. Brink noted that those who initially resisted Rob when he served as Assistant Plant Supervisor and then as Plant Supervisor have since left the organization.

B. Brink highlighted that there is now a significant number of new staff in both operations and maintenance, with whom Rob seemed to get along well. He admitted that, over the years, some employees had lodged complaints against Rob, but he considered most of these complaints to be unwarranted or frivolous, though he conceded that one or two might have had merit. He referenced a recent issue with one of the mechanics, suggesting that R. Bull could provide more details on that matter.

R. Bull briefly explained an incident involving a vendor, a Lead Mechanic, and with at the time Acting Procurement Coordinator, A. Logrono. She noted that this event occurred around September or October and was addressed in December. She stated that it involved Konecranes bringing equipment to the plant and that Rob, as Plant Supervisor, felt he should have been informed, despite Abby having emailed everyone to keep them in the loop. She said that when the Konecranes team arrived and asked for Abby instead of Rob, he took offense and made comments to the Lead Mechanic about the situation. Those remarks led to a hearing, which resulted in discipline and could have contributed to his dissatisfaction.

R. Bull mentioned that this was the only significant complaint-related HR issue involving Rob in the past year and a half to two years. She noted that Rob had ongoing issues with the Human Resources Division, particularly regarding his position upgrade, which the Board had approved in February of the previous year, retroactive to the beginning of the year. She explained that HR was reluctant to upgrade Rob's position due to his educational qualifications, arguing that other classifications in the grade required at least a college degree. Although it was argued that a college degree was not necessary for the position, and documentation from the state and similar towns supported this case, HR insisted on a higher qualification standard and remained firm. She stated that this resistance from HR caused significant frustration for Rob, which also could have contributed to his dissatisfaction and ultimately his decision to leave.

A lengthy discussion ensued regarding any other inappropriate conduct-related matters. B. Brink mentioned an incident involving Rob, where he had a Hispanic employee stand on a bucket and took a picture of it. B. Brink explained that Rob's intention was to demonstrate what not to do and how to ensure safety. However, a complaint was filed about the incident. B. Brink believes the situation was taken out of context.

R. Bull mentioned that the Director of Operations, the Deputy Director of Operations, and the Human Resources Manager are planning to be on site Thursday, May 16th, to talk to the employees and gather their input on the previous and any new Plant Supervisor. She stated that the WPCA will provide lunch for the employees.

Discussion: Position Vacancies

There was no time for this topic discussion.

Discussion: Strategies for Filling Positions

R. Bull reported that both the Plant Supervisor and newly created 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 and newspapers throughout CT and in Westchester, NY.

IUOE Contract Settlement Retro Payout

There was no time for this topic discussion.

Update: WPCA Staff COVID19 Cases

There was no time for this topic discussion.

Old Business

No old business

New Business

No new business.

Adjournment

S. Bagwin made a motion to adjourn the May 25, 2024, Workforce Development committee meeting at 4:34 pm; seconded by E. Kelly. There was no further discussion. **Vote: 2-0-0.**