



WMGLD  
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Peter D. Dion, General Manager

Philip Courcy, Chair  
Thomas Boettcher, Secretary  
Kenneth J. Chase, Jr.  
Jennifer Kallay  
John J. Warchol

**WAKEFIELD MUNICIPAL GAS & LIGHT DEPARTMENT  
BOARD OF GAS & LIGHT COMMISSIONERS MEETING  
May 6, 2020**

**MINUTES**

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Commrs. John J. Warchol, Chairman  
Philip Courcy, Secretary  
Kenneth J. Chase, Jr.  
Jennifer Kallay  
Thomas Boettcher

Peter Dion, General Manager, WMGLD

Mark Cousins, Financial Manager  
Dave Polson, Engineering and Operations Manager  
Sylvia Vaccaro, Office Manager

**PLACE:** Zoom meeting

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Chair Warchol called meeting to order at 6:34 P.M. and informed the Board the meeting is being recorded. No members of the public were in attendance.

**Chair Remarks:**

Commissioner Warchol nothing specific to report.

**Commissioner Remarks:**

Commr. Boettcher wanted to thank the staff for their generous donation to the Wakefield Food Pantry. Commr. Warchol stated that it was very kind of the staff to give back to the community.

**Town Council Comments:** Not in attendance.

### **Secretary's Report:**

Approval of minutes from the April 8, 2020 meeting was before the Board for approval.

Commissioner Warchol requested that page numbers be added to the minutes. He also stated that on page 6 the heading of "Final Audit" be inserted above the second to last paragraph on that page.

Commr. Kallay suggested that the heading "Energy Efficiency" be added above the last paragraph on page 5. She also noted that the unit of measure (ccf) be added accordingly to the second to last paragraph on page 8 discussing the price of natural gas

**A motion** to approve the minutes of the April 8, 2020 meeting with the proposed changes was made by Commissioner Boettcher and seconded by Commissioner Chase.

**Vote: The motion was approved unanimously.**

### **Old Business:**

#### **Project Updates**

##### **COVID 19**

General Manager, Pete Dion explained that the office remains closed to the public, with most of the office staff working remotely. He stated that we have been able to effectively manage customer's needs and we will continue in this mode of operation for a while even after May 18, 2020.

Customers are making cash payments at The Savings Bank and checks are being dropped off at one of our two drop boxes. Customer requests for payment receipts are either being emailed or mailed out to them. For those customer's without computer access, we have been mailing out any required forms for them to complete and return. Customer Service is back to full staff and is catching up with issuing rebates and incentives.

Commr. Kallay stated that a customer did have work completed and was waiting on a post audit. Pete explained that the customer was referred to Joe Coles from MMWEC and a virtual audit was performed.

Both the Gas and Electric departments have been split into two crews alternating weeks. They have begun limited performing routine work starting this week and in the coming weeks will be rolling out more types of work while keeping the crews separated and not overlapping. There is still no work being performed on customer premises unless it is an emergency.

Commr. Boettcher inquired if there has been an increase in online payments. Mark Cousins responded that although we have seen a slight increase in one-time payments, we have also seen an increase in cancellations of auto-payments because of these uncertain times. He also stated that in the last month we answered an additional 50 inquiry calls about late payments and possible payment arrangements from our customers. To date 10 new payment plans have been made.

Commr. Boettcher questioned if these arrangements were a result of WMGLD calling the customer or the customer calling WMGLD. Pete Dion explained that per the DPU we cannot initiate any collection calls, nor mail any collection notices at this time. He also confirmed for Commr. Warchol that the past due balances are still being reflected on the customer bills.

Commr. Boettcher inquired of the 50 customers that reached out to us, what percentage of them make up the 31-60 and >60day balances on the receivables chart. Mark Cousins responded that it is probably between 10-20 percent.

Commr. Kallay inquired as to how much wiggle room there is in our financials. Finance Manager, Mark Cousins replied although this could not have come at a worst time being so close to our year end, the preliminary cash flow projections indicate that we will be okay. Pete explained that MMWEC did reach out to the municipals and advised that they could make arrangements to delay paying the power bills for the short term situations, but interest charges would be assessed. He stated that this is something that we do not want to do until we absolutely had to, explaining that, although we may not have retained earnings, we do have other mechanisms to carry us thru this.

Commr. Boettcher asked if any programs have been introduced since the last Board meeting that may assist WMGLD if needed. Pete said that there has been a lot of discussion, however nothing has been formalized at this time. The State has recognized the fact that they have asked the Municipals to stop their collection efforts, while at the same time the Municipals must still continue to meet their obligations to their vendors.

Pete Dion discussed the load evaluation and the potential impact of COVID-19. Certainly, the mild winter of 2020 has contributed to the decrease in sales, however, sales are down more than just because of the warmer

weather. Businesses being closed are having a direct impact on the C & I MHH sales, off-set by only a slight uptick in residential MWs sales due to the stay at home order. There is an overall decrease of 7% in April 2020 compared to 2019.

The GM explained we are in a cautionary stage and will continue to monitor the situation.

GM Dion informed the Board that he was invited to be on the Town of Wakefield's Task Force on reopening the Town. He explained that the consensus was that this will be a slow and cautious process. Since WMGLD is doing a great job servicing our customers remotely, there is no rush to reopen the doors to the public at this time. The department is looking at blocking the openings in the glass at the front counter, to ensure safety for both staff and our customers.

Commr. Warchol thought this was a good approach as it may be too soon to reopen at this time.

### **Legislative Updates**

Nothing to report at this time. MMWEC & MEAM continue to monitor pertinent legislation that is critical to municipalities.

### **Construction and New Customer Projects**

#### **National Grid 345 kV Project**

Dave Polson reported that the National Grid MBTA track crossing project at Broadway was to begin at the end of this month, but it has been delayed until July. Permitting continues to be an issue. The Town is scheduled to meet with National Grid soon to develop a plan for them to return to work. There is no activity as of now. If work does not start soon, it may extend into next year.

Commr. Boettcher asked for clarification on the Rail Trail project. Dave Polson said National Grid was pulled off that project and are having discussions with the DPW on how they should address that area and how it should be handled.

Pete Dion said there was a lot of concern in looking at the Spring work schedule with police details between our gas main installation, the National Grid 345 project, and any other regular work in the town. The gas department was able to safely continue with contractor gas main installation in March and April. There was a lot of discussion DPW Director Joe Conway during that time and we were able to get the contractor work done.

Therefore, when the United Civil and National Grid project does startup the burden on the town will be lower. The big crush that would have happened this Spring has been minimized.

## **Electric Vehicle Charging**

Commr. Chase inquired if the barrels could be moved at Vet field, so the EV chargers could be utilized. Dave Polson said that on the ChargePoint app it does indicate that the lot is closed and can charge at your own risk. Some have been charging their vehicles even though the parking lots have been closed. Commr. Boettcher said there has been 5 or 6 use points on the level 3 charger despite the current situation.

Commr. Kallay would like to see reporting metrics set up, so the numbers can be tracked. She indicated the utility cost is something that people expressed interest in learning. She also asked what would trigger the demand charge and if we would hit that threshold. Pete said even without the COVID situation we would not hit that threshold. Dave Polson said we can look at the dashboard and add customizations once things get back to normal.

## **Solar**

There were no new customer installations in April. The Water Department solar installation will begin May 8 and should take a week to complete weather permitting. There are approximately 3 more projects that can be completed under the original grant. The second grant has been awarded but has not been announced by the DOER. This approval means that we are fully funded for the additional \$41,000.00. Commr. Boettcher inquired about the total grant amount. Pete stated the total amount is \$300,000.00, \$150,000 from the State matched by \$150,000 from the WMGLD. Commr. Kallay asked if the first grant's deadline of June 30, 2020 had been extended and what the deadline would be for the second grant. The General Manager indicated that the first grant was extended beyond the June 30, 2020 deadline, but there has been reluctance by the DOER in discussing any further dates.

## **Strategic Planning**

Low -income rates and incentives

Commr. Warchol was in touch with Assistant DPU Director Jeff Hall, of the Rates and Revenue Requirements Division, to discuss how low-income rate programs are administered. Commr. Warchol explained, in December of 2001, the DPU opened an investigation to see if there was a way to centralize the determination as to low-income rate eligibility. In August 2003, the DPU implemented a program where the State oversaw the administration of the database and reviewed it on a quarterly basis. He indicated that the IOUs low income rate is a 25 percent discount off the entire bill.

Commissioner Warchol explained that another state agency has now been named to oversee this program and he will continue to research to find out what agency this is. He did state that WMGLD would still have to notify the DPU if we wanted to participate in the program. He will email the link for the DPU orders included in docket DOU 01-106 to the rest of the Board and noted this will be intended for informational purposes only.

## **New Business**

### **Board of Commissioners Liaison to the Environmental Sustainability Committee**

Commr. Warchol asked if anyone is interested in serving as a liaison to the Environmental Sustainability Committee. Commr. Boettcher said he would be happy to serve as a liaison to the Sustainability Committee, if Commr. Kallay would like to take a break. Commr. Kallay expressed that she would be happy to rotate this position.

**A motion** to nominate Commr. Boettcher as the liaison to the Environmental Sustainability Committee was made by Commr. Courcy and seconded by Commr. Chase.

**Vote:** The motion was approved unanimously.

### **Board of Commissioners Reorganization**

Commr. Warchol said he will entertain motions for the next Chair and the next secretary.

**A motion** was made that Commissioner Courcy be the next Chair and Commissioner Boettcher be the next secretary. The motion was made by Commr. Courcy and seconded by Commr. Chase

**Vote:** The motion was approved unanimously.

**Any other matter not reasonably anticipated by the Chair**

Nothing to report

## **Executive Session**

**A motion** to enter executive session at 7:27pm to discuss the General Manager's review, returning to open session at its conclusion to report on the vote and for adjournment by was made by Commr. Warchol and seconded by Commr. Chase.

The Board of Commissioners reviewed and discussed the General Manager's 2019 Performance Goals and Objectives.

**A motion** to return to open session was made at 9:02 pm by Commr. Boettcher and was seconded by Commr. Courcy.

Commr. Courcy began the discussion by noting that the Board was very pleased with the department's 2019 Performance.

Commr. Courcy introduced the following areas where improvements could be made and discussion ensued:

- Motor Vehicle Accident – Reporting severity and costs
- Employee Training- Broaden safety training
- Updating Electric System-Completing McGrail Station Upgrades
- Customer Communications- Alternatives to Natural Gas (heat pumps) FAQs
- Commercial Solar Policy – Establish a commercial policy

**A motion** was made by Commr. Warchol and seconded by Commr. Courcy to increase the General Manager's base salary by 2.5% per contract and to award an overall 95 percent rating for achieving performance goals and the associated bonus and contribution to retirement that go along with that rating.

**Vote:** Unanimously in favor.

**A motion** to adjourn was made at 9:24 p.m. by Commr. Courcy and seconded by Commr. Chase.

**Vote:** Unanimously in favor of adjournment.