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Peter D. Dion, General  
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Jennifer Kallay , Chair  
Elton Prifti, Secretary  
Thomas Boettcher  
Philip Courcy  
John J. Warchol

**WAKEFIELD MUNICIPAL GAS & LIGHT DEPARTMENT  
BOARD OF GAS & LIGHT COMMISSIONERS MEETING**

**March 8, 2023**

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Commrs., Chair Jennifer Kallay  
Elton Prifti, Secretary  
Thomas Boettcher  
Phil Courcy  
Jack Warchol

Peter Dion, General Manager, WMGLD

Mark Cousins, Finance Manager  
Dave Polson, Engineering and Operations Manager  
Joe Collins, Business Analyst- Energy Services  
James Brown, Gas Superintendent  
Raven Fournier, Gas System Engineer  
Paul Robertson, Gas Street Foreman  
Sylvia Vaccaro, Minute Secretary

Members of the Public

Nate Schimmoller, 14 Wakefield Ave.

**PLACE: 480 North Ave., Wakefield, MA & ZOOM MEETING**

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Commr. Kallay called the meeting to order at 6:31 pm and advised the meeting was being recorded.

**CHAIR REMARKS:**

Commr. Kallay mentioned that Green Communities received grant funding for between \$180,000.00- \$190,000.00 subject to producing a further detailed cost report for the projects. She said that she will follow up with the Board on the exact dollar amount of the grant. Pete mentioned that he did receive a call from Town Hall about setting up a meeting to discuss ta project at the Dolbeare school.

**COMMISSIONER REMARKS:**

Commr. Boettcher stated that the Environmental Sustainability Committee voted unanimously to approve the Energy Park at their last meeting. The committee posted their letter of endorsement on their website and forwarded a copy to Pete.

**TOWN COUNCIL LIASON:**

Not present.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Nate Schimmuller, 14 Wakefield Ave.

**SECRETARY’S REPORT**

Approval of the February 8, 2023, minutes was before the Board for approval.

**A motion** to approve the February 8, 2023, as amended was made by Commr. Courcy and seconded by Commr. Prifti.

<b>Roll Call Vote:</b>	Commr. Boettcher	Aye
	Commr. Courcy	Aye
	Commr. Prifti	Aye
	Commr. Warchol	Aye
	Commr. Kallay	Aye

**Vote:** The motion was approved unanimously 5-0.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

Commr. Warchol inquired about the January 24, 2023, customer service issue that is listed as still pending. Pete explained that the customer, located at 13/15 Albion St is currently upgrading their service. Both the Town's Inspectional Services and WMGLD are requiring changes to ensure that the building meets current code requirements as part of their requested service upgrade. He stated that both departments are working with the customer, and they understand that changes need to be made to meet code.

Commr. Warchol also asked that the streetlight issue at 4 Gumwood Lane be noted in the Customer Service log. Dave Polson said that he spoke to the customer at 4 Gumwood Lane, and they stated that they do not want an additional streetlight installed. It was noted that the person that lodged the complaint does not live on Gumwood Lane or in Wakefield. They merely cut thru that area to reach their mother that lives on another street. Pete noted that the bulbs in the fixtures on Gumwood were replaced with new LEDs to make it a little brighter in the area. Dave mentioned that WMGLD did install a streetlight on a trial basis at 4 Gumwood and the homeowners on the street said it was too bright and that they did not want the additional light. He noted that he will follow up with Steve Maio to ensure that he followed up with the person that submitted the streetlight request.

Commr. Boettcher inquired if WMGLD has identified any trees for removal under the tree trimming program and if so, to make sure they are clearly marked. Pete stated that no trees have been identified for removal yet. He said that trimming will be performed first, then the next step will be identifying trees for removal. He also said that the solicitation for the Tree Planting Initiative for private property for this year will go out to the Town shortly, with a minimum of 50 trees to be planted.

## **Project Updates**

### Presentation on Gas System Overview

Raven Fournier explained that the regulator station replacements have been completed across all six stations providing uniformity across design and procedures. Outdated underground sensor lines have been replaced with industry best practice above ground sensor lines reducing the risk of these lines being hit. The new design allows for the potential of relief valves to be installed on regulating stations if required in the future.

Jim Brown stated that WMGLD continues to work on main replacement. WMGLD has a contractor lay dead main each Spring

and then WMGLD goes back in and livens the main and cuts over the services. He explained that the DPU supports this process because we are the ones living the main and no one knows our system better than we do. At the end of 2022, 78.50% of the system is plastic. He noted that WMGLD continues to work with the Town on their paving schedule and is about two years ahead the Town's current schedule. This provides us the flexibility to adjust our schedule if the Town needs emergency work completed. Jim stated there is about 1000 feet of cast iron that needs to be replaced. This work was to be completed this year; however, we are still waiting to hear about grant funding. Commr. Kallay requested an update on the grant program. Raven stated that the decision date was changed to this Friday, March 10, 2023. Jim added that there is new a requirement in the grant requiring that everything needs to be American made. Raven said the grant was to be used for equipment or work to be performed. She said some equipment maybe made in the USA but assembled elsewhere, so this is causing some confusion that needs to be clarified. Commr. Boettcher stated that this grant was for the EJ (Environmental Justice) area, but that area was deleted from the State's map. Pete said that we did not change the application and we will just await their answer.

Jim stated that the department continues moving gas meters outside which helps not only with future meter changes, disruption in service, but also eliminates over pressurization issues. He said if there is an issue it will blow the meter apart and will not go into the house. To date 56.62% of WMGLD gas meters are located outside. He mentioned that there are no Class 2 leaks and only 8 Class 3 leaks that are considered environmentally impactful. Two of those leaks are scheduled for replacement this week. The goal is to eliminate all environmentally impactful Class 3 leaks by year end.

Paul Robertson provided an overview of upcoming projects:

- Central Street & Cordis Street Main (Scheduled for Monday, March 13, 2023)
  - Contractor to lay 1615 dead main on Central and Cordis Streets resulting in all plastic in that area.
- Dillaway Street & Upland Road Main Replacement Project
  - Contractor to lay about 675 feet of main on Dillaway Street and Upland Road for a water tower and main project. This will be replacing some bare and coated steel.

- Northeast Metro Tech High School
  - There is pipe in the ground from Farm Street to the football field. WMGLD will take the pipe up to the security gate then the contractor will bring it up to the school. Pete said we will t-off from that to the Energy Park.

## **Energy Park**

Pete noted that the State has asked us to hold off on filing our Alternatives Analysis because they want us to submit it electronically. However, their website is not operational yet. He mentioned that he is meeting with an appraiser this Friday to go over the financial appraisal that is required for the properties involved in the exchange. Pete said that he is trying to set up a meeting with not only our delegation at the State House but also the Representatives from the other towns that the Tech serves to help gain support of the Home Rule Petition and speed it along as quickly as possible. He explained that a Fail-Safe Petition was filed with MEPA (Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act) by a handful of Wakefield and non-

Wakefield residents asking MEPA to review the project. The Fail-Safe Petition states that the Energy Park and NEMT projects are linked together. Pete noted that they are not interdependent. If neither the Tech nor the High School were built, the Energy Park would still have value. He stated that if new schools were twenty years out from being built, we would install solar panels on the existing school buildings and tie them into the Energy Park. Pete said that on March 1, 2023, WMGLD filed a response with MEPA. Pete stated that the Fail-Safe Petition as well as our response is posted on our website.

He said that we want to work with the Conservation Commission. WMGLD has met with them four times and they said they would get back to us, but they have not. We asked them to take a vote and they did not. Pete said if the Conservation Commission invites us back, we will meet with them. He noted that discussions with the State's Energy Office have been positive, and we are taking guidance from them on this. Commr. Kallay inquired as to when we can expect a decision from MEPA. Pete said that we should expect to hear back from MEPA within a week or two. He stated that support for the project on a global level has been very high. It was noted that the Board packet includes

a copy of a letter that was sent to the editor of the Wakefield Daily Item by the same individuals that filed the FailSafe Petition. Pete informed the Board that he was appointed to one of the Governor's committees assembled by Rebecca Tepper, Secretary of Energy & Environmental Affairs, to represent the State's gas municipals to help define the goals and expectations of the gas business in the future.

## **Winter Supply Update**

Pete explained that the electric rates held constant last month, however the gas rate did increase. Mark Cousins stated that the gas charges the customer sees on their bill is a pass thru charge. Pete clarified that the gas charge is made up of two components: transmission and commodity costs. The commodity cost is what WMGLD pays Sprague to procure and to move gas. The transmission costs are what WMGLD pays National Grid. He explained that these bills come in more than one month after the gas is used. Mark Roberts from Sprague provides WMGLD with a budget number every November for the upcoming heating season, however there are variables that come into play that affect these budget numbers. For example, we received a higher-than-normal bill for December 2022 with the November and December combined bills totaling two million dollars. This is the number we are trying to recover in February as well as forecasting for the rest of the winter. This is what caused us to adjust the gas charge. We were able to decrease the gas charge by 10% in March and are working with Sprague to recoup under collections from the winter by levelizing the cost between March and June. Pete noted that this approach has been utilized a couple of times in the past. Commr. Warchol said that the IOU's (Investor-Owned Utilities) calculate their rate not just to catch up, but also to spread the under collection over the rest of the winter months per the gas adjustment clause that they are subject to and wondered if we should implement a formalized design to address this issue. Pete noted that the IOUs were over collecting earlier in the winter. He explained had we not increased the rate, we would have been further behind.

Nate Schimmoller, of 14 Wakefield Ave. stated that he posted his concerns over the recent increases in the gas rates on Facebook. He said that as a consumer he would like to know what the gas rate will be before he is billed. He said that the IOU's publish their rates 7 days prior to the billing cycle. He understands that there are variables that may still affect the rate but would like to be informed so that he may reduce his usage. He stated that the rates increased by 54%, a figure that was significantly higher than the originally projected 30% increase. Pete explained that for the heating season thru January we are even with the forecast. Mark explained WMGLD's rate is

posted on our website, either on the 31<sup>st</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> of the month allowing for 7 days' notice before the first billing. Pete explained that we do not receive Sprague's bill until the last week of the prior month so it is hard to provide the update earlier. Nate asked if we had an idea of April's rate. Pete stated that the projected Cost of Gas rate for March is the projected rate for the rest of the winter, but there are factors during tough winters that force us to make changes to this projected rate. Commr. Boettcher suggested to add the updated date to the rate page when changes are made. A discussion ensued about changing the location of WMGLD rates on the website. Pete noted that this will be addressed. Commr. Kallay inquired if we can include a rate comparison tool as this was another aspect of Nate's inquiry and analysis. Commr. Warchol said he will call the DPU (Department of Public Utilities) to see if they have this information available. Commr. Kallay stated that we knew this winter season was going to be difficult and noted the assistance information that Mark Cousins compiled and made available to our customers. She inquired if WMGLD would put together a public information session about the natural gas market today and what the future holds for customers. Pete stated that he can make a compilation of MMWEC's and Sprague's presentations on the natural gas market. Commr. Boettcher noted that we can also state what measures we are taking to mitigate these issues. Mark noted that we work with our customers, as Pete has said in the past the only customers that are shut-off are the ones that do not communicate and work with us.

## **2023 Strategic Planning**

Pete noted that Jon Wortman will join the April Board meeting to facilitate a discussion about strategic planning and craft a proposal for a facilitated strategic session.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **2023 Goals and Performance Review**

Pete stated that he will meet with Commr. Kallay and Commr. Courcy. Commr. Kallay asked the Board to email her any suggestions. She noted that the Energy Park will need to be added but does not see any other major changes. She stated that a residential battery project has been listed in the goals for some time. Pete said that MMWEC has a new program that WMGLD will be joining. Commr. Courcy mentioned that Pete will be updating his 2022 performance evaluation.

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

None

**A motion** to exit public session and enter Executive session to discuss Collective Bargaining and the MMWEC Project 2023A returning to public session for the sole purpose of adjournment was made by Commr. Warchol and seconded by Commr. Prifti at 8:05 pm.

<b>Roll Call Vote:</b>	Commr. Boettcher	Aye
	Commr. Courcy	Aye
	Commr. Prifti	Aye
	Commr. Warchol	Aye
	Commr. Kallay	Aye

**Vote:** The motion was approved unanimously 5-0.

The Board returned to regular session at 8:59 pm for the sole purpose of adjourning.