

WMGLD
P.O. BOX 190 480 North Ave.
Wakefield, MA 01880
Tel. (781) 246-6363 Fax (781)
246-0419



Peter D. Dion, General Manager

Sharon Daly, Chair
Thomas Boettcher,
Secretary
Jennifer Kallay
Elton Prifti
John J. Warchol

WAKEFIELD MUNICIPAL GAS & LIGHT DEPARTMENT

BOARD OF GAS & LIGHT COMMISSIONERS MEETING

June 17, 2024

IN ATTENDANCE: Commrs., Chair Sharon Daly
Thomas Boettcher, Secretary
Jennifer Kallay
Jack Warchol
Elton Prifti

Peter Dion, General Manager, WMGLD
Mark Cousins, Finance Manager
Dave Polson, Engineering and Operations Manager
Joe Collins, Business Analyst- Energy Services
Sylvia Vaccaro, Minute Secretary

Members of the Public

Paul Rybicki, 152 Parker Rd.
Bronwyn Della-Volpe, 8 Cyrus St.

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

CALL TO ORDER:

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

CHAIR REMARKS:

Commr. Daly inquired if there was any follow up information from the March 6, 2024, meeting with the Wakefield Public Schools regarding the Town's Energy Reduction Plan. Pete responded that the detailed audits for the Dolbeare and Woodville schools are going to be performed on June 24, 2024. Once the audit reports are received, a follow-up meeting will be scheduled to discuss the reports and recommendations.

COMMISSIONERS REMARKS:

Commr. Boettcher commented that he noticed Connected Homes has made some additions and omissions from their list of mini splits and Wi-Fi thermostats, therefore we should mirror these changes in our Energy Rebate offerings. Joe Collins will investigate and make any necessary changes.

TOWN COUNCIL LIASON:

There is no update to report on the appointment of a Town Council liaison.

Public Comments

Paul Rybicki stated that he attended the meeting to comment on the Energy Park. He noted that he is a very happy customer with WMGLD's excellent service, rates, and people. His entire experience for the last 40 years has been great. He noted that he was shocked and disappointed to see the trees for the Energy Park were cleared at the worst possible time (breeding season) for the birds. The loss of the nests and the impact of the wildlife could have been mitigated by better foresight and planning. He questioned why the trees could not have been cleared outside of breeding season, such as after Labor Day or in March. Pete explained that approval was not received until about a week and a half before the land was cleared and that we could not wait until after Labor Day because to stay on schedule the site work and foundations need to be completed over the summer. He said that ideally, we would have done the work in the February or March time frame, but we did not have the okay to proceed. Unfortunately, we were held up by delays, challenges and several approvals along the way. Mr. Rybicki said that ultimately it could not have been a worse choice for a week and that there were protected birds that were impacted. He thanked the Board for listening to his perspective and for providing the reasons as to why the work was done at that time and hopes that we do not have to deal with this again in Wakefield.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Approval of May 8, 2024 Minutes was before the Board for approval.

A motion to approve the May 8, 2024, minutes as printed in the Board book, was made by Commr. Boettcher and seconded by Commr. Warchol.

Vote: The motion was approved 4-0.

Commr. Prifti abstained as he was not present at the May 8, 2024, meeting.

Pete mentioned that the cash on hand number was added to the dashboard for tracking purposes. As of April, the cash on hand number was 2.83 months. He said that the goal is to have 3 months of cash on hand. It was noted that our auditors have recommended this for the past few years but we have had some challenges reaching this level over the past two winter seasons given high natural gas costs.

Old Business

Project Updates

Energy Park

Pete stated that all major equipment has been ordered. The contracts for the battery are being finalized with Lightshift Energy. Three batteries are now being installed for other Municipals which will provide us with valuable feedback in the coming months. The Energy Park battery will be installed late next Spring so, that is why we need to get these foundations in this summer along with the site work before the winter. We need to be prepared for each piece of equipment as it is scheduled to arrive. Some of the switchgear will also arrive in Spring with the remainder arriving a little later. The generator had a 92-week lead time so that will be arriving at the end of the year.

Dave said there will be activity at the Energy Park for a couple more weeks and then work will start on Hemlock Rd. We will be doing all the electric infrastructure and the connections between the Energy Park and both schools as well as gas work. Pete said the gas will be extended down to the site for the generator. The electric duct bank will be installed over the summer, and we will also get the manholes installed. The manholes on site will be installed and we will be starting the foundations. Commr. Boettcher asked if the manholes and duct bank will follow existing Hemlock Rd or following what is proposed. Pete said they are already considering the relocations that are required at the end of the street where it intersects Farm St. Dave said that prep work is being completed now with test pits next week. Once we receive the information from these tests we will integrate that information into the design of the foundation. A bid package for all the sitework will go out by mid-July.

Pete mentioned that the apartment project at the head of the lake is moving very quickly. Duct bank work on the Lowell Street side was

done this Spring and we will work on the North Ave. side next year. The developer owns a lot of the manholes and duct bank on the site that we will tie into. Dave said that they are working on the building close to the lake and the parking garage. Once completed then they will move to the largest building closest to Route 128. He commented that WMGLD will begin electric site infrastructure in the Fall.

Kenneth J. Chase Jr. Community Solar Project and Dedication Update

Pete stated that the project is almost fully subscribed. We decided to be fully subscribed by July 1st, and Joe will solicit the people that signed up for the first shares that said they wanted more than one or two. He has already received responses from the solicitation. Right now, we still have 19 kW still open, but we should be fully subscribed by the end of the month. Commr. Boettcher inquired if the Town had expressed interest in the low-income for the Town paid low-income housing. Pete stated that they had not. Commr. Daly asked if there would be an issue reaching the July deadline. Pete said that we should be fully subscribed by then. Commr. Kallay requested a report of what remains on the waitlist. Pete said that for the first month each customer received a credit of 133 kWh. Joe said it was about \$18.00 per customer. Commr. Warchol inquired about an MCAN email that stated Taunton MLP is no longer allowing rooftop solar because it is affecting their circuits. Pete explained the system becomes unstable if you are putting more back on the system than it is using. He said Middleborough MLP is getting close to that as well as Rowley. Solar is an intermittent resource, and this is the problem. At times, if a circuit does not have enough of a load on it to absorb all that the solar that is being generated there can be a stability issue. Pete noted that WMGLD has a long way to go to get to that point. We are almost up to a megawatt of small commercial and residential solar generation. There is also a megawatt on Audubon Rd. on the parking garages and we will soon have just under another megawatt on the WMHS and NEMT. In total we will have just under 3 megawatts of solar. Dave said Taunton installed extremely large systems. It was a design issue that caused a dramatic impact on the distribution system. We do not have the same situation. Usually, a system impact study is conducted before construction and the developer is normally responsible for any upgrades. The residential solar is small scale and spread out and does not have a dramatic impact. If we received a request for a quarter of a megawatt, we would evaluate to see what the impact would be. Pete said we also do not have a lot of open land where there would be such large installations. Commr. Boettcher inquired if we would have a policy to require battery installation on large solar installations. Pete stated that it would be a consideration. Commr. Prifti asked if the policy is that you do not allow any more than what the load is. Pete said that the cap is 25 kw for small commercial and 10 kw for residential. Anyone over 25 kw must come to WMGLD for approval. We would perform an impact study and evaluate the information. Dave said Commr. Prifti is correct we do not want them to be a generator that is a separate conversation. They will be generating

something that will flow onto our system, but we want them to size the system appropriately, so they are not generating back to us all the time at a higher than anticipated level. Commr. Prifti stated that National Grid has taken the opposite route allowing up to the limits of the circuit to back flow into the substation and even into the transmission system. He asked at what point do we need to think about what type of smart grid investments we need to make in order to have visibility down to the tail end of the circuits and provide additional data that could aid those system impact studies. Pete commented that right now we have all that we need but over time as we evolve it will change.

Commr. Warchol said that due to Ken's mobility challenges, perhaps the dedication of the Ken Chase Community Solar program could be held at Brightview. Pete said we could bring the plaque and have the dedication ceremony there and mount the plaque to the building later. The time and place of the dedication will be determined according to former Commr. Chase's rehabilitation. The ceremony is tentatively scheduled for this Fall.

Strategic Planning Discussion

Pete asked if anyone had any changes to the last set of goals before it is given to the staff to build a Gantt chart over the summer months. There were no changes. The staff's recommendations will be discussed at the September 4, 2024, Board meeting.

New Business

Rate Comparisons

Pete stated that the Board book includes a monthly bill comparison from MMWEC. It shows that we are well below the Investor-Owned Utilities, and at the high end of the municipals. He noted that WMGLD is in the same relative position they have been in for the 17 years since he has been there. It reflects the investments being made in the system and the program offerings. He noted that electric gas bills drop coming out of the winter months as heating costs are a significant component of energy bills. This year bills dropped one month earlier than normal in 2024 (April instead of May) as gas costs were lower this heating season as compared to prior heating seasons.

Grant Summary

Commr. Daly requested data on the various grants that WMGLD has pursued and the award amounts. Joe stated that Jaylen, a summer help accounting student has been tracking grants and meeting with him weekly to review. Joe reviewed the following recent grants:

National Gas Distribution Infrastructure Safety and Modernization Grant (FY2023)

We were recommended for this but did not receive it because there were other larger projects that were chosen. We will add additional projects to our original submission and apply again.

The Energy Futures

This is led by Littleton and the Beneficial Electric League (BLE) this is a group application with 26 other municipalities working together to create easier pathways for low-income customers to participate in electrification and decarbonization. All 26 municipalities received the \$500,000.00 grant. There is a meeting this summer with the other municipalities to discuss potential projects and next steps. This is just a planning grant. The next grant is for the implementation of the projects.

Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships (Topic Area 3)

This grant allows you to apply for three topic areas. Joe mentioned that WMGLD applied for two different topic areas. One is grid resilience, which is more infrastructure related. We partnered with Vermont utilities and Littleton as there are strength in numbers for a lot of these grants. Part of this would be to replace underground cable and six different circuits. The other part of the grant would be to add a circuit to the Wallace substation. Our portion of this would be \$8.1 million. The total application for the four municipalities was \$21 million. There is a one third cost match because we are a small utility. The other topic area was for the Energy Park and some other small projects. We applied along with 10 other municipalities and ENE. Beacon Climate helped us apply for this grant. Joe stated that he can send the Board the specific details of this grant. Our allocation of the \$176 million that was applied for is \$16.1 million. You can receive a grant for one or both topic areas. We applied for these in April of this year with a projected award date this Fall, but often there is a bit of a delay. Joe will keep the Board posted. Commr. Prifti inquired if this is a one third match. Commr. Daly stated that is usually the case for small utilities. Commr. Prifti also inquired whether the receipt of these grants will affect the timing of investments in our capital plan. Pete said that if these are awarded, we can reschedule some of our projects to ensure that grant money is used in the specified time frame. He said normally you have 5 years to use the funds.

Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund - Zero Emission Technologies Grant Program (Solar for All)

Joe mentioned that the State applied for this grant and was awarded \$156 million dollars a couple of months ago. They will create programs based off this larger Federal program and one of the programs being discussed is Community solar for low-income and zero percent financing for low-income and disadvantage communities. One hundred percent of the benefits of this

grant must go to low-income and disadvantaged communities and there must be 25% savings over a specified period of time.

Demonstration of Energy & Efficiency Developments (DEED)

Joe noted that we did receive this grant for the educational piece of the Energy Park.

Commr. Boettcher asked how many of these grants could potentially impacted if the Town does not pass the MBTA overlay. Pete stated that it would not have an impact on the Federal grants but may have an impact on the State grants. The only State grant would be the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund - Zero Emission Technologies Grant Program (Solar for All). Commr. Daly asked why we did not pursue the Smart Grid for a third topic under the Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships (Topic Area 3). Joe said they applied for 1 & 3 because they had immediate needs, but certainly can apply for this in the next round. Commr. Kallay asked that the EV chargers be added to this list and a total for Wakefield. It would be helpful to have a running total moving forward. Commr. Prifti noted that it would be useful to indicate those that require matching funds. Joe will incorporate this information.

Any other matter not reasonably anticipated by the Chair

Commr. Prifti asked Pete if there was an update on Senate bill 2080. Pete said the Senate released their bill the other day and the House is expected to release theirs tomorrow. Power Options wants to modify their language and we are very much opposed to that. They are trying to make themselves exempt from the provisions that make us unique. They want to deal directly with our customers, and we cannot allow that. If they came to us with something worth pursuing, we may work with them as long as they use existing legislation. Pete noted the macro level issue is that we procure our power supply for years, so that is why in the 1997 legislation we were exempted because we make long term power purchases.

Pete informed the Board that he is going to be serving on the **Electric Subsector Coordinating Council**, which is a nationwide committee appointed by the Department of Energy. Its focus is on infrastructure reliability and stability. Dave will also be joining for these meetings. Pete said it was a great honor to be nominated by APPA. There were 15 around the country being considered and he was one of two that was nominated.

Executive Session if necessary

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made at 7:38 pm by Commr. Warchol and seconded by Commr. Prifti.

Vote: The motion was approved unanimously 5-0.