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

Peter D. Dion, General Manager

WAKEFIELD MUNICIPAL GAS & LIGHT DEPARTMENT

BOARD OF GAS & LIGHT COMMISSIONERS MEETING

June 4, 2025

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

Peter Dion, General Manager
Mark Cousins, Finance Manager
Dave Polson, Engineering and Operations Manager
Joe Collins, Business Analyst
Olivia Hayes, Business Analyst
Sylvia Vaccaro, Minute Secretary

PLACE: **480 North Ave., Wakefield, MA
& Zoom Meeting**

CALL TO ORDER:

Commr. Boettcher called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm and advised the meeting was being recorded.

CHAIR REMARKS:

Commr. Boettcher thanked the department especially Pete and Olivia for hosting Girl Scout Troop 83417 and helping them towards completing their Moving Journey Badge. This was done by conducting an energy audit on the WMGLD building with Pete and Olivia explaining some interesting topics including the roof top solar system and department's electric vehicles.

He also noted that the Wakefield Police department purchased a Chevy Blazer EV and will be evaluating its performance over the next year. Commr. Boettcher also thanked the department for their attendance and photo tributes at Town

Manager, Steve Maio's retirement party this past weekend. He mentioned the informative joint meeting with members of Wakefield Public Schools, the Town, and Highland Electric on the opportunities to electrify Wakefield Public and Town buses and a potential EV fleet charging hub in town. He thanked Commr. Kallay for bringing everyone together for this meeting.

COMMISSIONERS REMARKS:

Commr. Kallay stated that she anecdotally heard that the school department is going to apply for the EV school bus grant.

TOWN COUNCIL LIASON:

Commr. Boettcher noted that Town Councilor Doug Butler is the new liaison to the WMGLD.

Public Comments

None

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Approval of May 13, 2025, minutes was before the Board for approval. Commrs. Warchol and Daly provided additional edits.

A motion to accept the May 13, 2025, minutes as amended this evening was made by Commr. Kallay and seconded by Commr. Prifti.

Vote: The motion was approved unanimously 5-0.

Approval of May 14, 2025, EV meeting minutes was before the Board for approval. Commrs. Daly and Warchol provided additional edits.

A motion to accept the May 14, 2025, minutes as amended this evening was made by Commr. Kallay and seconded by Commr. Warchol.

Vote: The motion was approved unanimously 4-0.

Commr. Prifti abstained as he did not attend this meeting

Old Business

Update on the Customer Outage Events on May 25 and June 1, 2025

Pete explained that on Sunday, May 25, 2025, at 12:09 PM, there was a cable fault that occurred just outside the Beebe substation on Farm Street. There was a momentary outage seen by many in town, however there were 26 customers that were impacted for two hours and three minutes. Because the fault was located so close to the substation, customers on other circuits saw voltage fluctuations.

After isolating the underground feeder section for the circuit, switching was completed, and all load was restored at 2:13 pm. He noted that the process of replacing the cable has begun. Pete acknowledged that there was a lag in resetting some of the meters that experienced the outage so they continued to appear as out on the outage map for several hours even though they had been restored. He said that IT Manager Jeff Morris, is looking into why this happened.

Commr. Warchol inquired about an outage that occurred on Sunday, June 1st in the Greenwood section of town. Dave mentioned that the outage occurred at 6:49 am and that power was restored at 7:57 am. There were 869 customers that were impacted. The outage was caused by a squirrel. He explained that there was another distribution feeder coming out of Beebe that also feeds that area and went out on its own because it detected the increase in load and that there was an imbalance, so it tripped. This was opened, isolated and the load switched onto another circuit. Commr. Kallay stated that a customer said that they called in about this outage and the call center did not pick up at all. She asked as to why the call center did not have a recorded response about this outage. Pete stated that Jeff is looking into this issue. He also noted that if we know it is going to be an extended outage we will record a message.

Dave noted that they were prioritizing their efforts in restoring power. Pete noted usually outages are resolved quickly so there is no need to change the recording. Commr. Kallay inquired if there was a dire emergency that perhaps there could be a different person or process that would ensure there was a recorded outage message for customers phoning into the call center. Dave said they do have another person contact the call center.

Commr. Prifti inquired if there was thought on automation on all the distribution circuits where they automatically isolate the fault and start picking up customers at some point. Dave noted that they are looking at this down at Hemlock and Farm Street where the schools are located. He said normally we do not have a lot of major outages, and our response time is quick.

Project Updates

Energy Park

Dave noted that the battery is currently running and tested at 5 megawatts today and charged and discharged for an extended period of time. Dave noted that the foundations will be completed sometime in July. Pete said the generator and radiator will be coming in the fall. The Board scheduled to visit the project on June 11, 2025, at 9:00 am. Pete informed the Board that Light Shift asked him to participate in a presentation at the APPA Conference next week about WMGLD's battery project.

Dave mentioned that the Head of the Lake project is moving along. Meters have been installed in building 1 and meters are now being installed in building 3. Pete mentioned that most of the infrastructure on the Lowell Street side has been completed and work will begin on the North Ave side of the project. Commr. Boettcher inquired if we have some sort of introductory information that we can send to these new customers about all the WMGLD programs. Pete said we do send information when customers sign up, but we can also have information available at the rental office. Commr. Daly inquired about meter inspections on page 25 of the Board book and the notation of 20% cut meter seals indicating work may have been done without a permit. Pete stated that this value may be a little high due to the fact that there had not been field visits in several years. He also noted this value included inside meters. He said that we only found one theft of service and it was relatively small. Dave commented that this list was also shared with the Building Department. He explained that there is now a system in place that in order for an electrician to get a permit we have to be notified so we can pull the meter.

New Business

Introduction of a Heat Pump Rate

Business Analyst Joe Collins shared with the Board that he researched heat pump rates from other utilities. He noted that there are not many utilities that offer this type of rate. One of the largest ones locally is Unitil. Their rate began as of March 1, 2025. It is for either whole or partial home heating with a one-year commitment. The distribution charge is lowered from 9.5 cents to 3.5 cents from November 1st to April 30th. The other charges remain the same. It is still too early to see how many customers have signed up yet, but this is something that he will continue to monitor. Joe stated that National Grid was ordered by State regulators to come up with a rate for their heat pump customers that is similar to a winter rate. National Grid came back with a technology neutral rate that would essentially give you a discount for a higher usage volume. There was push back on this from different agencies because it did not take into account energy efficiency or the use of heat pump technology. So, if a customer on this rate used more electricity they would receive a higher discount.

Joe cited another example (Central Maine Power)

- Pilot program – 5,000 customers
- Delivery charge lowered from \$0.012803 to \$0.011418 from November 1st to April 30th. However, delivery charges are returned to \$0.0254547 from May 1st to October 31st
- Shifts some of the costs away from the heating season to the cooling season

He said this may be beneficial to someone who has a winter vacation home in Maine.

Preliminary WMGLD Rate Discussion:

- Preliminary analysis of heating season bills for heat pump apartment building vs. gas-heated apartment building shows heat pump customers are paying \$38 more on average per month during the heating season
 - There is also estimated to be savings on average of \$48 per month during the non-heating season for heat pump customers
 - Initial recommendation to offer a \$0.03 discount on the distribution charge from November 1st to April 30th
 - Efficiency of heat pump system is important to the savings calculations

Pete stated that this would be offered to single family homes only if the customer completely remove their fossil fuel heating system. This rate would be available to new construction multi-family projects that were built in the past few years (no removal is necessary since they did not have fossil fuels in the first place). Discussion ensued.

Approval of 2024 Department of Public Utilities Annual Report

Pete mentioned that the pension numbers were received from the Retirement Board, so the audit has been finalized. Mark provided a review of the financials.

A motion to accept the return of the Wakefield Municipal Gas Light Plant to the Department of Public Utilities for year-end December 31, 2024, as amended was made by Commr. Kallay and seconded by Commr. Warchol.

Vote: The motion was approved unanimously 5-0.

Any other matter not reasonably anticipated by the Chair.

Executive Session

Collective Bargaining – Review for both Associations

A motion to go into Executive Session was made by Commr. Prifti at 7:49 pm and was seconded by Commr. Kallay.

Vote: The motion was approved unanimously 5-0

The Board reviewed and discussed the Employee Association contract.

A motion to approve the Employee Association contract was made by Commr. Kallay and seconded by Commr. Prifti.

Vote: The motion was approved unanimously 5-0

The Board reviewed the Supervisor's Association contract.

A motion to approve the Supervisor's Association contract was made by Commr. Kallay and seconded by Commr. Daly.

Vote: The motion was approved unanimously 5-0

A motion to come out of Executive session and back into General session to adjourn was made by Commr. Kallay at 8:14 pm and seconded by Commr. Warchol.

Vote: The motion was approved unanimously 5-0.