



WMGLD  
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Peter D. Dion, General Manager

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

## **WAKEFIELD MUNICIPAL GAS & LIGHT DEPARTMENT**

### **BOARD OF GAS & LIGHT COMMISSIONERS MEETING October 2, 2019**

#### **MINUTES**

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

Peter Dion, General Manager, WMGLD

Maureen Mata, Executive Assistant  
Mark Cousins, Financial Manager  
Sylvia Vaccaro, Office Manager

Rob Darnell  
Ed Cutter  
Wayne M Tarr  
Jim Scott  
Eric Reid  
Joseph Dorney  
Karen Faler  
Sara Ericksen  
Kristin Weekley  
Mike Festa

**PLACE:** WMGLD Conference Room, 480 North Avenue

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Chairman Warchol called Public Meeting to order at 6:31 P.M. and informed the attendees that the meeting is recorded and that there is a sign in sheet for the members of the public.

### **Opening Remarks:**

Chair Warchol indicated that he planned to move right into the Public Hearing for the purpose of allowing public comments on a proposed change the WMGLD Electric tariffs. The Public Hearing would be limited to the discussion of changing the monthly conservation charge from a flat rate of .30 cents a month to a per kwh charge. This charge will vary depending upon kwh consumption. He then asked if there were any questions about the proposal.

Attorney, Mike McCarthy stated that a motion should be made to open and continue the Public Meeting until the conclusion of the Public hearing.

**A motion** to continue the public meeting was made by Commissioner Courcy and seconded by Commissioner Chase.

**A motion** to open the Public Hearing was made by Commissioner Courcy and seconded by Commissioner Boettcher

### **Public Hearing Comments:**

Ed Cutting and Wayne Tarr asked for clarification on if and how the rate will change. Comm. Warchol stated that the Board can change the rate on either a fixed or per kwh charge by a vote of the Board.

Joe Dorney asked if the Board, who can change the rates and what percent of this money goes to the ratepayers through energy efficiency programs.

General Manager, Pete Dion, stated that the entire \$45,000 in the budget is spent on energy conservation. Anything from appliance rebates to energy incentives such as insulation, and windows.

Comm Courcy stated that this proposal is driven by the Customer Survey that people were disappointed by level and quantity our energy conservation rebates & incentives as they compare it to MASSAVE.

Comm. Kallay explained the reason why the IOUs do more energy efficiencies is because it costs less to save energy than it does to purchase energy. It has a long-term impact on the rates for all the rate payers, not just those that participate in the programs. Anyone that participates helps everyone else save.

Wayne Tarr wanted to remind the Board that although the Customer Survey stated that customers were interested in increasing energy efficiency offerings, they also wanted to keep the rates low. He expressed his concerns to the Board to ensure these charges would not be too expensive. He suggested the Board share a comparison of WMGLD's rates to other Municipals and IOUS with the ratepayers.

Commissioner Kallay stated that WMGLD is one of the last Municipals that still charges a fixed rate for the conservation charge. It is no longer common practice to have a fixed rate, but rather a scale based upon kwh consumption.

Commissioner Boettcher explained by keeping demand low by saving energy it is a methodology to keep the rates low, as it is expensive to buy power for peak hours.

Ed Cutting advised that he is against the rate change. He expressed concern that the rate change is disingenuous and regressive. He stated it is social injustice to ask low income ratepayers to subsidize rebates and incentives for higher income ratepayers, who would be the only ones that could afford to pay for any efficiency improvements. He believes this is a policy decision that should be decided by the public. He also believes that WMGLD should ask the ratepayers to conserve energy during peak times.

Commissioner Boettcher stated there are services like "Shave the Peak" that customers can sign up for and he suggested the Department issue messages via the website and social media.

Karen Faler stated that she was not sure why this rate change is considered regressive when those that use more kwh will pay more than those that use less. She will not be insulating her house but does care about the future of her children and grandchildren and believes this is a step in the right direction. She commended the Board for communicating they have taken conducting meetings at convenient times for the public.

Kristin Weekley agreed this method makes sense. People that use less pay less and people that use more pay more. As a local realtor, she explains to people the wonderful benefits of municipal but also that rebates are not the same as an IOU.

Commissioner Warchol asked if there were any additional comments from the public.

Rob Darnell, a local contractor declared his support for the proposal citing this is a great improvement from the current energy efficiency program.

Commissioner Courcy verbalized that the energy world is changing rapidly, and we are trying to advocate for what we see coming all while trying to keep the rates down.

Eric Reed commended the Board for taking this direction.

Commissioner Warchol thanked the public for their comments.

**A motion** to close the Public Hearing was made by Comm Warchol and seconded by commissioner Chase.

**Vote: the motion was approved unanimously**

General Manager, Pete Dion's recommendation was to change the rate structure starting with the first billing cycle in January 2020 which was supported by the Board.

**Commissioner Remarks:**

Commissioner Warchol discussed with Pete Dion pending legislation at the State House, H2863, regarding Municipal Electric Departments moving toward the State goal of 80 % renewable generation by 2050. He thought it might be a good idea to stake out the Board's position in regard to pending proposals and add this item on next month's agenda for discussion and a vote.

Pete Dion stated the Bill is still with the joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy, but hopeful it comes out of committee in November. So far out of 24 municipal boards have taken votes on the Bill, 21 are in favor, and 3 are not in favor of the Bill.

Commissioner Kallay stated that she had a question from a ratepayer in regard to the watering of the trees. Pete Dion stated that the WMGLD planted the trees but the Town DPW is tasked to taking care of the trees. Any trees that have died have been replaced. The town realized that there was a problem with the watering schedule, which has now been resolved. WMGLD is replacing any trees cut down with utility friendly trees.

Another question was what the plans are for replacing holiday lights when they fail? Specifically, the tree lighting. The Town is responsible for these commercial LED lights, but WMGLD does provide assistance when needed.

Commissioner Kallay asked if a ratepayer was moving, but staying in Wakefield would they need to remove their EV charger or would WMGLD give them another EV charger?

General Manager, Pete Dion said he would take this under advisement and return his decision to the Board.

Commissioner Kallay inquired about the work being done on Broadway. Pete Dion and Dave Polson, Operations Manager stated that National Grid is trying to place manholes in the public way by the moratorium November 15, 2019. They meet every other week with the National Grid team. There are 12 manholes that need to be placed. Currently 2 are in with 10 to go. They are trying to install one a week but have recently run into permitting issues that have delayed the schedule by one week.

Comm Boettcher commented that one customer reached out to him and was appreciative about the communication around road closures, although one other customer said we were not communicating enough information.

Pete Dion replied to refer people to either Facebook or WMGLD website. He also stated that Jen McDonald, Town Communication Specialist, as well as a WMGLD group and the schools are all in attendance at the bi-weekly meetings. The current methods of communication include; Reverse 911, Facebook, WMGLD website, as well as, signboards.

Commissioner Phil Courcy stated he attended WMGLD's National Drive Electric Event on September 19, 2019 and commended Sylvia and Kate Roy on a great job.

## **Public Comments**

Joe Dorney requested a copy of the operating budget. Mark Cousins replied that he will have it available for Mr. Dorney to pick up at the WMGLD office.

**Secretary's Report:**

**Approval of Minutes:**

Approval of minutes from the September 4, 2019 meeting was before the Board for approval.

Chairman Warchol offered minor corrections.

**A motion** to approve the minutes of the September 4, 2019 meeting with the proposed edits was made by Commissioner Chase and seconded by Commissioner Courcy.

**Vote: the motion was approved unanimously**

## **Old Business:**

### **Project and Program Updates**

#### **National Grid 345 kv project**

The General Manager advised that all the gas main is in. We are now in process of doing tie ins and services. WMGLD is on schedule to complete this work by November 15, 2019

Commissioner Boettcher inquired if WMGLD has received any push back about the gas moratorium on multi-family units. The General Manager stated that there has been little push back because of the fact that staff has stayed in front of this issue and clearly communicated with the public and developers. Commissioner Boettcher also asked if the IOU's could possibly negatively impact us? The General Manager stated not directly, unless they increase the tariffs. WMGLD takes 75% of gas from pipeline and 25% from National Grid and increases to 85/15 in the winter. The biggest issue is the pipe coming into Massachusetts is not adequate for the region's needs.

#### **Solar Program**

General Manager explained that we have 115 kw out of an approved 183 kw have been committed. There are 62 kw now online. The applications continue to flow in. Commissioner Kallay expressed that The Federal Investment tax credit drops from 30% to 26%. Commissioner Boettcher suggested that we provided communication to our customers about this change and the effective dates.

#### **Electric Vehicle Program**

WMGLD participated in the National Drive Electric event held on September 19, 2019 at WMGLD. There were 3 dealers that took part in the event and about half a dozen people attended. Commissioner Kallay inquired if WMGLD will be acquiring any SUVs. General Manager, Pete Dion stated that he would like to replace the gas and substation vans, however as of now there are no EV utility vans available.

### **Energy Efficiency Programs**

Commissioner Warchol initiated discussion on the residential energy efficiency program. The Commissioners reviewed the proposed new rebate and incentive changes as well as the General Manager's proposal to increase the budget from \$45,000.00 to \$80,000.00 with an annual review. Mark Cousins will provide the current rebate and incentive status on the Commissioner's Dashboard. Discussion ensued about enhancing our current energy audits. The General Manager is researching ENE's audit offerings and will be in discussions with MMWEC about their current audit program. Commissioner Warchol stated the rebate and incentive program for C & I will be discussed at next month's meeting.

**A motion** to approve the new rebates and incentives with discussion next month about establishing the budget was made by Commissioner Kallay and seconded by Commissioner Chase. The vote was unanimous.

## **New Business**

### **NTSB Report and Recommendations on Columbia Gas Incident**

The General Manager reported that operationally WMGLD performed well. There was an issue with Dig Safe, where something was not properly marked. From an operational prospective we received high marks. There is another information request due next week. WMGLD also conducted an emergency preparedness town wide drill based on a gas dig in scenario. The DPU inspector was also in attendance. This tabletop drill will now be performed on an annual basis.

### **Solar and EE Program Financing**

Mark Cousins, Finance Manager, advised that he had discussions with The Savings Bank and The Coop about potentially offering solar customers a discounted rate for a home equity line for solar panel installation. WMGLD is also looking into potentially paying closing costs on these loans. The bank's normal credit policies would apply. This would be a residential offering only.

### **General Manager's 2020 Goals**

Commissioner Warchol suggested to set the General Managers 2020 goals before 2020. Commissioners Courcy and Chase will be the working group to review and discuss these with Pete Dion and present these goals at the December 2019 Board meeting.

### **Adjournment:**

**A motion** to adjourn was made at 9:15p.m. by Commissioner Courcy and seconded by Commissioner Kallay.

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