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Peter D. Dion, General Manager

WAKEFIELD MUNICIPAL GAS & LIGHT DEPARTMENT

BOARD OF GAS & LIGHT COMMISSIONERS MEETING

June 3, 2026

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

Peter Dion, General Manager
Mark Cousins, Finance Manager
Dave Polson, Engineering and Operations Manager
Joe Collins, Business Analyst
Olivia Tully, Business Analyst
Mike Capraro, 1st Class Lineman
Sylvia Vaccaro, Minute Secretary

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

CALL TO ORDER:

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

Members of the Public

None

Town Council Liaison

Not present

CHAIR REMARKS: Commr. Kallay

COMMISSIONERS REMARKS: None

Secretary's Report

Approval of May 13, 2026, Minutes before the Board for approval. Commr. Kallay and Commr. Allen provided minor edits

A motion to approve the May 13, 2026, minutes as amended was made by Commr. Prifti and seconded by Commr. Boettcher.

Vote: The motion was approved unanimously 5-0.

Old Business

General Manager's Report

Pete provided an update on the prior Saturday's significant windstorm. He noted that overall, the system performed very well. Most of the storm-related issues had been resolved, when at approximately 2:02 pm a meteor hit south of Boston. Being unsure of what was happening, people were dispatched immediately to different areas in the system to investigate. He noted that they were confident it was not an issue on our system because we had not received a single SCADA alarm, but staff heard the explosion and took it seriously. Within 40 minutes all major equipment had been checked. Commr. Daly inquired at what time crews were called in to respond to the storm. Pete noted that the on-call person responded immediately to the initial call, and within 45 minutes, additional personnel had been mobilized.

Pete stated that WMGLD received a letter, which was forwarded to the Board, from an individual who is not a Wakefield resident regarding the Lake Quannapowitt cleanup and the bathroom project at Veteran's Field. Pete explained that the bathroom is a Town project and the Light Department's role is limited to supporting the electric service to the structure. The letter raised questions about the lake cleanup. Pete noted that the Department has filed all required reports annually since the last cleanup project, which was overseen by a Licensed Site Professional (LSP), hired by WMGLD to direct cleanup activities and ensure compliance with state regulations. These reports are available on the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) website. Pete added that, based on advice from WMGLD legal counsel, the Department will respond to any additional requests only through the appropriate public records request process.

Commr. Kallay asked for an update on the recent customer issue that was added to the customer concerns log concerning the condition of a private way where a gas main had previously been installed. Pete stated that John Riley, Gas Superintendent, is coordinating with the Town's DPW on the matter. The Gas department's roadway patch remains in good condition; however, subsequent water department repairs resulted in several patches that have deteriorated and washed out. Because the road slopes toward Oak Street, debris from those areas has been carried downhill, creating concerns for residents. Pete noted that the Department has received pricing from its paving contractor for paving either a portion of or the entire private way. WMGLD is willing to contribute toward repairs if the Town elects to pave it.

Commr. Prifti inquired about the odor of gas at Farm and Water Streets. Pete stated that gas worker was not getting gas readings and determined it to be coming from the water pumping site. It was a sewage smell and not gas odor. Commr. Boettcher congratulated the Gas department and staff for earning the 2026 Silver System Operational Achievement recognition (SOAR) Award from American Public Gas Association. He noted that the department had previously received a bronze- level award and that advancing to the silver level represents a significant achievement.

Project Updates

A. **Energy Park**

Commr. Kallay asked if the switchgear had been delivered. Pete stated that it did come at the end of May. Testing under the current configuration for the next phase of the occupancy permit was on going so installation of the switches would wait until that work was completed. He also stated that it was decided to pour a larger pad, so that it would be easier and safer for staff to stand on the pad to operate the gear. Pete said that MMWEC and representatives from Peoples United Bank, who financed the project toured the Energy Park today. They were very impressed with the Energy Park and appreciated the opportunity to see firsthand the assets supported by their financing. Pete mentioned that during the upcoming American Public Power Association (APPA) conference in Boston, approximately thirty people from various utilities and vendors will be able to tour the Energy Park on June 28th. Representatives from WMGLD, Milton Cat and LightShift will be there to discuss the project.

Heat Pump Rate Results

Pete stated that the Department had waited to get through one heating season before reporting on these results. Olivia provided the Board with graphs summarizing the heat pump rate results for the first winter. The first graph illustrates the total dollar amount saved by customers participating in the heat pump rate. The second graph breaks those savings down by customer category, including single-family homes on Rate A, single family homes on Rate B, heat pump customers on Rate A, and all-electric apartments. Overall participating customers realized combined savings of $120,873. Pete explained that the analysis attempted to offset the heat pump rate discount by accounting for the additional electricity consumption from all- electric units. The discount was applied to the distribution portions of the electric bill, which reduced revenue. However, that reduction was partially offset by increased electric sales from customers using electricity for both heating and other end uses. To estimate the impact, staff compared all-electric apartment units with similar apartment buildings that use a combination of electric and gas service. The comparison was standardized across similar unit types, such as studio and two-bedroom apartments. The pie chart provided illustrates the resulting revenue impact and offsets.

Pete explained that while the heat pump rate discount totaled approximately 120,000, the net impact was lower when other factors were considered. One offset was the avoided cost of peak gas demand, which staff estimated at roughly $40,000. Another offset was the additional electric revenue generated by customers converting to all-electric heating rather than a combination of gas and electric. Commr. Prifti inquired if staff was recommending a change to the rate. Pete stated that it was not a recommendation to make an immediate change, but rather an illustration of how much the rate would need to be adjusted to base on the first year's results in order to make the program revenue neutral.
Commr. Allen asked if there were projections for this to taper and level off. Pete noted that this pilot program has only been in place for one full season and that the past winter was one of the coldest in recent years. He suggested that another year of data, to account for seasonal variation and provide a better basis for evaluating long-term trends.

Commr. Prifti asked Mark for an update on cash on hand position. Mark responded that the Department expects to meet its cash requirements because financing for the Energy Park has been secured and will be drawn upon.

Upcoming Board Meeting Topics

Commr. Kallay noted that the PURMA presentation has been moved from July to September. Pete noted that Commr. Boettcher had informed him about a spinoff from MIT called Green Bridge Labs that has been assisting other municipals. Joe and Raven met Solangel Fernandez from Green Bridge Labs, who will assist the department in one of the goals for this year. She will develop a working model to analyze the impacts of changes in the gas customer base. The model would evaluate business-as-usual scenarios as well as varying levels of customer reductions scenarios and evaluate the resulting effect on delivery charges and overall gas system costs. The focus is not solely on stranded gas costs but on understanding the broader financial impacts of a changing gas customer base.

New Business

Expanding the Natural Gas Moratorium

Pete noted that the existing gas moratorium, adopted in 2018, has had a significant impact. He recalled previous discussions regarding the Specialized Energy Code and concerns about whether some new residential projects could still qualify for gas service while complying with code requirements. Staff are evaluating whether to expand the moratorium to all new residential construction, thereby eliminating gas as an option for those projects. Although the effect on overall gas load is expected to be limited due to the relatively small amount of new single-family construction, the change would help avoid conflicts with the Specialized Energy Code and simplify implementation. Commr. Prifti inquired how this would affect tear downs. Pete clarified that a complete teardown where a new building is constructed, gas service would not be permitted under the expanded moratorium. However, if part of the existing structure remains and the project is considered a modification rather than new construction, existing gas service could remain, and the situation would be evaluated differently. Pete explained that there are approximately 106 customers on the gas service waiting list. To obtain gas service they would need to bear the installation costs to dig for the service and the Department would lay the pipe and make the connection. Going forward, he recommends further encouraging electrification by freezing new additions to the list and closing the discounted gas heat rate to new participants. Customers currently on the waiting list would be grandfathered into the program if they ultimately receive service, while the gas heat rate would be frozen and unavailable to future customers. New gas customers would instead be placed on the Gas Appliance gas rate, which is 20-30% higher. This approach would support the Department's strategic goals of increasing the number of customers using electricity for heating and cooling and reducing peak gas demand on the system. He noted that the list should be reviewed and updated to remove any inactive or uninterested customers. He also stated that a timeframe should be established requiring customers on the waiting list to install gas service within a specified period or become ineligible to remain on the list. Commr. Kallay expressed concern that customers on the list are treated fairly and given adequate time to afford and coordinate the contractor's work necessary to install the gas service. Pete said that staff will go through the list first and get back to the Board. The Board can then discuss and determine a timeframe. Pete also said staff will look at the modification of the rate and determine if a rate hearing is warranted

A motion was made by Commr. Prifti to freeze the list of customers that have applied for gas service as of June 3, 2026, until a decision is made on potential moratorium on single family dwellings and seconded by Commr. Boettcher

Vote: The motion was approved unanimously 5-0.

Employee Survey Goals

Pete stated that he had a conversation with Great Blue Research, and one of the questions they posed was: What are the Board's goals for the survey? Specifically, they asked what the Board hoped to learn from the results and what actions it would take based on the findings. He mentioned that the survey will cost approximately $15,000. He explained that the survey company could measure several areas, including employee satisfaction, employee engagement, workplace satisfaction and trust. Pete emphasized that before proceeding, the Board should determine its goals and define what outcomes it expected from the survey. Commissioners discussed the importance of maintaining employee anonymity, particularly given the utility's relatively small workforce. Pete explained that the survey would primarily be conducted electronically, although paper surveys and individual interviews could also be offered. He noted that Great Blue Research specializes in surveys and has established methods for protecting confidentiality and administering them effectively. Commr. Kallay expressed interest in reviewing the sample survey questions before moving forward. She also requested samples of survey results and reports so the board could better understand the type of information that would be produced, what insights might be gained, and what actions organizations have taken in response to survey findings. Commr. Allen inquired whether Great Blue Research could assist the Board in interpreting the results and facilitating discussions about potential organizational improvements based on the survey. Pete clarified that Great Blue Research is a survey company. They will make recommendations based on their findings only. They do not facilitate discussions about improvements or help implement changes resulting from the survey. Commissioners discussed the potential inclusion of open-ended questions would provide the most useful feedback.

Any other matter not reasonably anticipated by the Chair

Pete advised the Board that the employee association voted to dissolve and begin the process of joining IBEW Local 369. The transition is expected to be completed by next month. Management met with union representatives to discuss the transition and develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU). The existing collective bargaining agreement will remain in effect through June 30, 2027.

Commr. Kallay referenced the legislative updates included in the Board book that had not been discussed during the meeting and asked whether any Commissioners had additional questions or comments. Pete stated the important issue to the Department right now is the Affordability Bill. The Governor has released a draft proposal, and the House has also issued own version. The Senate has not yet released its complete proposal, although staff believe they have a general understanding of what it is likely to contain. Once all three versions are available, the legislation is expected to move into a conference committee process where differences between proposals will be reconciled and common language developed. The target date for final action is no longer necessarily July 1st.

Commr. Daly inquired about a microgrid grant that she had forwarded to Pete. He stated that the opportunity was reviewed but was not considered useful because the project is already well into testing and commissioning. Dave explained that reducing transfer time between operating modes is a major focus. Vinnie has been involved with the testing and day-to-day activities. A key challenge is balancing faster times, and overall system stability. The team is working to remain below the required 10-second transfer limit while maintaining stable operations.

Commr. Daly mentioned an ongoing proceeding at Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities (DPU) concerning utility pole attachments. It was noted that unauthorized attachments are relatively common and can be difficult to prevent entirely.

Executive Session

None

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Commr. Boettcher at 8:28 pm and seconded by Commr. Daly.

Vote: The motion was approved unanimously 5-0.