

**Minutes  
Town of Belmont  
Belmont Municipal Light Board  
Virtual Meeting on Zoom  
Monday, March 15, 2021  
5:30pm**

**RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: May 26, 2021  
TIME: 2:49 PM

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

A meeting of the Light Board was called to order at 5:30pm by Chair Adam Dash.

Present: Chair Adam Dash, Vice Chair Tom Caputo, and Board Member Roy Epstein were present. Also present were General Manager Craig Spinale, Assistant General Manager Sam Osancevic, Energy Resources Manager Becca Keane, Energy Specialist Ben Thivierge, and LBAC Vice Chair Michael Macrae.

**II. 5:30 P.M. DISCUSSION ON GOVERNANCE**

Mr. Dash announced that there is an article on the Warrant to change the Board to a 5-member elected board. The MLB will vote for favorable or unfavorable action on the article at a future meeting, after the new member is elected on April 6.

**III. 5:35 P.M. 2021 DEMAND SIDE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMING UPDATE**

Mr. Spinale said that Belmont Light had held a public event for its 2021 demand side management (DSM) programs and that this presentation had been given to LBAC at their last meeting.

Mr. Thivierge introduced himself and stated that he works on DSM programs, which are programs for both residential and commercial customers. He gave a brief update on the MLP Solar Rebate Program, which began in 2019 with a pledge of \$100,000 from Belmont Light and an additional \$100,000 in matching funds from the State for the installation of solar photovoltaic systems by Belmont Light customers. The pledge had been increased to a total of \$235,000 since that time for a total funding amount of \$470,000. There is currently about \$28,000 left in the program, which has been very successful with 45 applications for systems to be installed, totaling about 356 kW on the Belmont Light side. Mr. Caputo asked how many systems there are in Belmont currently. Mr. Thivierge advised that it was about 360, with more pending bringing the number to 376.

Mr. Thivierge presented on the 2021 DSM programs (see below), outlined some results of the Public Forum, and highlighted existing programs and updates to them.

Mr. Thivierge first reviewed the existing programs:

Residential:

- Appliance Rebate Program
- Home Energy Assessment Program
- MyEnergyXpert
- Air Source Rebate Program

Commercial:

- Electrification Incentive Program: could be anything from installing EV chargers, updating refrigeration, etc. Hopes to expand.

General Access:

- Cordless Yard Equipment: customers eligible for 1 device.

He then outlined programs that have been expanded or adapted:

- Residential Battery Storage Rebate Program, which provides \$500 per storage system. This is a limited pilot program.

- Residential Weatherization Incentive Program. The update expands the reach of the program, targeting all customers but may be changed to target non-gas heating customers in the future (because of the Mass Save relationship). Customers must only submit invoices, and may be awarded \$500 for air sealing, and \$500 for insulation.
- Commercial Electrification Program: the program is currently offered to any business customers who are interested. Could be EV chargers, expansion of HVAC equipment, updating & updating refrigeration units, etc. Hope to expand this in the future.
- Cordless Yard Equipment Rebate Program: eligible equipment includes hedge trimmers, lawnmowers, etc. This is available to both Residential and Commercial customers. There is a \$500 rebate limit per customer.
- Residential Appliance Rebates: the update now includes induction stoves. An electric to electric induction change is \$100, gas to electric change is \$500, new construction \$500. For portable induction cooktops the rebates are 50% of cost, up to \$75.
- Heat Pump Water Heaters: the update dropped wi-fi requirement because some models do not have wi-fi which would exclude the customer from the rebate. Approved devices must now be on the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance Qualified Products List. Tier 1 or 2: \$250, Tier 3 or 4: \$500.

Mr. Thivierge talked about how the energy assessments pivoted to virtual assessments and how they also instituted self-assessments by homeowners.

Mr. Caputo asked why *cordless* electric yard equipment was identified rather than just electric. Mr. Thivierge explained that these types are more beneficial to Belmont Light and there also might be danger using a corded item. Mr. Epstein said that corded items also have a higher price point.

Mr. Dash asked if these programs were currently available. Mr. Thivierge said they were currently available and also pointed out that customer can apply for the rebates on the Belmont Light website.

Mr. Epstein asked if Belmont Light lost any programs by moving away from Energy New England (ENE). Mr. Thivierge responded that Belmont Light still works with ENE, who is in fact the rebate administrative for most programs. He explained that Belmont Light contracted with the Massachusetts Municipal Wholesale Electric Company (MMWEC) for the Connected Homes program only.

Resident Phil Thayer: commented that he thought these programs are fantastic and congratulated Belmont Light.

Mr. Macrae thanked Belmont Light for offering the programs and their ease of use. He is worried about the availability of home energy air insulation rebates for customers who have totally moved away from gas for heating. He suggested that as more people move to heat pumps it might be good to consider other programs to help them. Mr. Thivierge said they are already discussing options but there are currently budgetary obstacles.

Mr. Caputo feels the biggest challenge is letting people know the programs exist. He asked if there were more opportunities to get the word out about them. Mr. Thivierge indicated that they were trying to do that but are working to adapt to the virtual world (they would normally have been at live events like the farmer's markets, etc.). Mr. Spinale reiterated that there has been a public forum.

Resident Darrell King: expressed concern that 100 ampere service might not be enough as people switch over, and there might need to be assistance for people to update their panels. Mr. Thivierge said it was being considered.

#### **IV. 5:45 P.M. GM UPDATE**

##### *a) Net Zero Planning Grant Project With MAPC*

Ms. Keane updated the group, explaining that Belmont Light was kicking off a new grant project alongside the Belmont Energy Committee to help with climate action planning. She said this is a partnership with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). The scope of the project is to get help with updating the emissions inventory and to strategize on methods to implement strategies laid out in the Climate Action Roadmap. Belmont specific meetings are coming up and Ms. Keane wanted to invite a number of individuals to participate. She invited people to email her if they are interested in participating. She stated that the grant is for \$4,000 and the project will unfold over two years.

*b) Cooperative Response Center*

Mr. Spinale explained that currently at 4:00 p.m., the phone system goes to the Dispatch Center at the Police Department (to receive no power calls, etc). This becomes an issue during power outage events because the Dispatch Center gets swamped. Mr. Spinale said they need to get customer data ASAP. Belmont Light is bringing on an answering service, Cooperative Response Center (CRC) starting March 31st. This company was partially chosen because due to their Minnesota location they are unlikely to experience the same power outage events that east coast may be dealing with and the dialect is closer to the Boston area one. They are a large vendor with many customers and have the experience to handle customers' needs. He feels this will greatly improve customer service.

Mr. Caputo asked if people at the call center will have context about the problem, or will they just take the information. Mr. Spinale said they will see Belmont's internal mapping so they will have an understanding of where and how large the outage is. Belmont Light will update CRC with information on when power will return. Mr. Spinale mentioned that this also frees up the 9-1-1 system for emergency situation use rather than Belmont Light issues.

*c) GreatBlue Research Survey*

Mr. Spinale outlined the bi-annual research study that Belmont Light conducts with GreatBlue Research to get feedback on a variety of questions. This year it will start in late May. Customers will receive phone calls from GreatBlue, as well as some electronic surveys. Once complete, Belmont Light will present the results to the MLB. Mr. Dash felt these surveys are extremely helpful for making policy.

*d) Operational Update*

Mr. Spinale reviewed a number of large-scale power outages that occurred in February:

- Thursday, February 18<sup>th</sup> a large racoon got into a power transformer at the 450 Concord Ave. substation. This size of outage was about 2,000 customers, who were out for about 2 hours. He went over the work involved in resolving this issue.
- Tuesday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> an outage in the Hittinger Street substation was caused by a cable failure at the Belmont High site. Equipment didn't operate as designed so about 3,000 customers were impacted for about one and a half hours. Because they had to de-energize the sub-station there was a short second outage.
- Friday February 26<sup>th</sup> an outage was caused by another cable failure, which unfortunately impacted some of the same customers that experienced the previous outage at the Hittinger Street substation (660 customers).

None of the outages were unusual but they sadly happened close to each other. Mr. Spinale explained that they took a close look at that substation and will replace some equipment to help avoid future issues.

Mr. Dash asked about the windstorm the previous night, but Mr. Spinale said that nothing substantial happened.

**V. 6:05 P.M. LBAC LIAISON UPDATE**

*a) Time of Use (TOU) Update*

Mr. Macrae outlined the continued work that LBAC has been doing regarding various time of use (TOU) scenarios. At the most recent meeting, LBAC continued rate design discussions, including what the pilot program would look like, as well as a public forum for education and outreach to customers. Mr. Dash summarized what TOU is and some of the questions surrounding this topic. He advised that the plan is to have a temporary pilot program to see what the impact would be.

Mr. Spinale mentioned that LBAC and Belmont Light would bring a full recommendation to MLB regarding rates, which will contain very specific information. Mr. Epstein asked about a date for the pilot. Mr. Spinale responded that it looks like early July because of issues with scheduling for NISC, Belmont Light's enterprise resource vendor. He said they are also looking deeply at their data and some of the complications of collecting and transferring data to Belmont Lights billing system. He explained some of the issues surrounding missing data and how it is more important with a TOU system. This is another reason why they're doing a pilot, to identify any potential problems.

Vice Chair of LBAC Mr. Macrae asked Mr. Spinale to discuss the duration of the pilot. Mr. Spinale explained that the Belmont Light team wanted 150 customers to make a 1-year commitment so that all seasons are represented in the pilot. After the pilot, he feels they will have enough data to make a good decision about whether or not to implement a town-wide TOU rate. Mr. Epstein asked that it be well advertised so that the pilot participants reflect the general uses of the town, not just certain types of customers. Mr. Spinale agreed that educating customers is extremely important for the program's success.

#### **VI. 6:10 P.M. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES DATED DECEMBER 23, 2020**

*Mr. Epstein moved to accept the minutes of December 23, 2020 as amended. Mr. Caputo seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously (3-0).*

#### **VII. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Shae Brams, senior at Belmont High School: asked about the Chenery Middle School Solar Project, wondering if the Board knew the status of the project. Ms. Brams said the Climate Action Club at BHS had met with School Superintendent Joh Phelan who said there would be a roof inspection and an inspection report, followed by a memorandum of understanding (MOU). Mr. Dash said they are aware of the project and he discussed some of the challenges. Mr. Spinale advised that the roof inspection was delayed due to snow but that it had been performed. He said Belmont Light has not received the inspection report on the roof condition but that the Facilities Department would send it as soon as it was available.

Phil Thayer: asked when the Chenery roof was inspected. Mr. Osmancevic replied that it had been inspected on March 1, 2021 but that the report had not been produced by the inspection team. Mr. Thayer then asked when the MOU was sent to the Superintendent of Schools. Mr. Spinale said it had been sent on Friday, March 5, 2021. He said he has not heard back from the Superintendent about the MOU but advised that there were some questions that Town Counsel was going to look at which might be causing the delay. Mr. Thayer asked Mr. Dash to speak to Town Counsel to move quickly because there is a time limit for the Planning Board to consider the proposal.

Roger Wrubel: expressed concern that there were a lot of things *not* happening and there were no good reasons why. He is frustrated and feels it illustrates government's inability to move when needed. Mr. Epstein felt the comment is not fair, given that there have been several unrelated challenges – not that people are dragging their feet. He highlighted that the inspection had been performed only two weeks prior and said he was confident that all Town departments were being diligent on the issue. Mr. Wrubel asked that they have the report by the next meeting. Mr. Dash asked Mr. Spinale to speak with Superintendent Phelan for the MOU and the Facilities Department for the roof report and reassured the meeting that there is forward motion. Mr. Spinale will follow-up and said that it appears that the report has not been provided to the town yet but he would encourage the Facilities Department to nudge the roofing company.

#### **VIII. FUTURE MEETINGS**

- a) April 12, 2021
- b) May 17, 2021
- c) June 21, 2021

*Mr. Epstein moved to enter Executive Session. Mr. Caputo seconded the motion and the motion was passed unanimously (3-0).*

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny