

**Minutes
Town of Belmont
Belmont Municipal Light Board
Meeting
Monday, July 19, 2021
6:00pm**

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: August 18, 2021
TIME: 3:05 PM

- I. **CALL TO ORDER.** Chair Adam Dash called a meeting of the Municipal Light Board (MLB) to order at 6:00pm.

Present were MLB Chair Dash, Vice Chair Mark Paolillo, and Member Roy Epstein. Also present were Belmont Light General Manager Craig Spinale and Energy Resources Manager Becca Keane. Light Board Advisory Committee (LBAC) Chair Travis Franck joined remotely.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Epstein moved to approve the Minutes of the March 15, April 12 Executive Session #1 and #2, and May 17, 2021 Executive Sessions and the June 21, 2021 regular meeting. Mr. Paolillo seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

III. DISCUSSION ON TIME OF USE PUBLIC FORUM

Mr. Dash outlined the purpose of the Time of Use (TOU) public forums, as well as other educational activities.

Mr. Epstein asked if the proposal will be presented at the forum. Mr. Spinale said there would be a presentation and he outlined the educational activities being planned, highlighting the "Time of Use 101" website which will contain a calculator so people can see how rates will affect them. The public forum is a part of the collection of information and data that Belmont Light is gathering so they can make a recommendation on a TOU program to the Light Board.

There was a discussion of the logistics and plan for the public hearing, which is the first of perhaps 2 or 3.

Resident Phil Thayer suggested the forum be posted on the front page of the Town website. The Board agreed.

IV. GM UPDATE

- a) Update on Impact of Recent Storms:

Mr. Spinale gave updates on recent storms and power outages:

- Tuesday July 1, 2021, there was a possible micro-burst. One secondary pole came down and 13 customers were impacted, and power was returned quickly. Some other customers had wires pulled from the house which resulted in their being without power for 12-13 hours.
- Wednesday July 2, 2021, a fault in an underground circuit caused 955 customers to lose power. Everyone was restored within about an hour. Mr. Paolillo asked several questions about how calls are handled, and Mr. Spinale outlined the services of the new customer support vendor that Belmont Light started using, as well as the various avenues they use to help customers contact them.

b) MAPC Net Zero Grant Update: Mr. Spinale said the grant allows Belmont Light to dig into details of the Climate Roadmap the Town adopted in 2019. They have applied for the grant. Step one is to look at how the Town departments work together (to determine how to navigate the Town).

Ms. Keane explained that the grant is from the State and totals \$12,000 with half going to hire the Mass. Area Planning Council (MAPC) to help Belmont Light with best practices, prioritize goals, and work on the Road Map. The remainder covers Belmont Light staffing costs during this effort.

c) Municipal Broadband – Fujitsu Fiber Discussion: Mr. Spinale reviewed the history of the community broadband proposal. He said that 35% of their biannual survey respondents said they were very interested in this service, and another 30% said they are somewhat interested.

He explained that the initial Fujitsu report (which showed a negative cash flow) was using some incorrect assumptions which have been changed, including reducing certain expenses.

Mr. Paolillo ask what the benefit of Belmont Light providing this service would be. Mr. Spinale said it would allow customers to choose Belmont Light to provide their broadband rather than another vendor, and it would be a new business and revenue source for Belmont Light.

Mr. Spinale reviewed the new numbers of the Fujitsu report which showed positive cash flow.

Mr. Epstein asked if a cabled (hardwired) system was the best solution or would a Town wireless be better. Mr. Spinale said they could provide wireless with this system.

Mr. Epstein then said they would still need to buy broadband access from a third party (like Verizon) that would be an additional cost. He asked how that price is determined and feels this would be a considerable part of the operating costs.

Fujitsu suggested Belmont Light do an engineering review to flesh out the details of costs and how to offer the service. Mr. Spinale is concerned that Belmont Light is already working on several other large projects.

Mr. Paolillo asked if the service would be better with Town broadband, and Mr. Spinale feels it will be. Mr. Paolillo felt it was worthwhile to do the study to determine feasibility.

Mr. Epstein feels wires attached to houses seems archaic and questions if this will be used in the future. The Board and Mr. Spinale discussed this issue as well as other benefits it might bring to the Town (free wifi downtown, leasing of lines to other organizations, etc.).

It was decided to table this discussion until further notice because of existing Belmont Light projects, and the question of where the technology is going.

d) Accounts Receivable Balance Discussion: Mr. Spinale outlined the actions they have been taking to help customers in arrears. July 15 was the end of the moratorium on shut-offs so they are back to their 90 day shut off policy (except for protected customers). They have collected over \$100,000 in outstanding debt. They are concentrating on inactive accounts (customers who have left town but still have an open account). Outstanding A/R is about \$720,000 greater than 90 days.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Elshad Kasumov pointed out that Covid Relief Funds do allow usage toward broadband implementation. He supports municipal broadband service because of the additional choice, and it could be a source of revenue for Belmont Light especially since Comcast has terrible customer service which would encourage customers to switch to Belmont Light. He feels it could also attract business to the Town.

Travis Franck, LBAC Chair, agrees that broadband would be great because there is a value of privacy that you do not get with other providers, and he feels it would be a good revenue source.

VI. FUTURE MEETINGS

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| a) July 26, 2021 – Time of Use Public Forum | d) October 18, 2021 |
| b) August 16, 2021 | e) November 15, 2021 |
| c) September 20, 2021 | f) December 20, 2021 |

XII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Paolillo moved the adjourn the meeting of the Municipal Light Board. Mr. Epstein seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:56.

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny, Recording Secretary