

MINUTES
LIGHT BOARD ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Remote Meeting via Zoom
Wednesday, August 11, 2021
7:30 A.M.

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: November 3, 2021
TIME: 2:48 PM

I. CALL TO ORDER. Chair Travis Franck called a meeting of the Light Board Advisory Committee (LBAC) to order at 7:31am.

Present for LBAC were Chair Franck, Vice Chair Michael Macrae, Members David Beavers, Robert Forrester, Steve Klionsky, and Alexandra van Geel. Absent was Member Jonathan Abe.

Present for Belmont Light were General Manager Craig Spinale, Assistant General Manager Sam Osmancevic, Energy Resources Manager Becca Keane, Communications Coordinator Aidan Leary, and Energy Specialist Ben Thivierge.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

January 6, 2021: Mr. Klionsky moved to approve the minutes of January 6, 2021 as amended. Mr. Franck seconded and the motion passed 4-0 by rollcall vote with Ms. van Geel abstaining. Mr. Forrester had not yet joined the meeting to vote on this motion.

February 3, 2021: Mr. Klionsky moved to approve the minutes of February 3, 2021 as amended. Mr. Beavers seconded and the motion passed 5-0 by rollcall vote with Ms. van Geel abstaining.

April 7, 2021: Mr. Klionsky moved to approve the minutes of April 7, 2021. Mr. Franck seconded and the motion passed 5-0 by rollcall vote with Ms. van Geel abstaining.

III. TIME OF USE DISCUSSION

A. Public Forum #1 Recap and Pilot Discussion

Mr. Spinale summarized the first TOU Public Forum which was held on July 26, 2021, and asked if the Committee had any input about it.

Mr. Franck is worried that they will not get a good sample for the pilot and that people will not sign up if they find they will not benefit from the program. Mr. Spinale shares this concern and said they have some ideas on how to enroll people.

Mr. Franck said that he wants to see what happens with customers who *can* shift to realize the savings and that he is concerned that customers will not participate if they realize they can save without changing their behavior, which may cause the sample to be not diverse enough to give a good result. The Committee discussed this issue.

Mr. Beavers said it might be important for the next Forum to include information on how changing behaviors can affect savings. Mr. Spinale said they are already creating these types of examples.

Ms. van Geel suggested they do a random sampling rather than rely on only volunteers and calculate usage both with and without TOU and send the lower of the two bills so they are not negatively impacted by the pilot. This would provide better data without penalizing people in the program. She is concerned about the representative aspect of the data from a volunteer group.

Mr. Beavers felt that making something mandatory goes too far and that this question should be asked at the end of the pilot.

Mr. Spinale said Groton (MA) Electric Light Department has been working with a company named Renwai which takes historical data and categorizes customers. This allows better communication with customers to get them to participate in the pilot. Belmont Light is engaging this company to help with their data which should help them better pinpoint customers who should be in the pilot.

Mr. Macrae said that there are customers who may not “win” but will “stop losing” with TOU and doesn’t have a lot of concern that people will self-select for the pilot.

Ms. van Geel suggested that there be a set of matching customers who don’t participate as a control group. This will help to better compare the results of the pilot. Mr. Macrae expressed concern about the staff impact of doing this.

Mr. Spinale said the issue of some customers ‘overpaying’ needs to be better explained to the public. He also agreed with Ms. van Geel’s suggestion and said that Renwai does a before & after study. He is also concerned about staffing impact for the pilot.

Ms. Keane said that they expect the pilot will cost Belmont Light money and that once the quotas for each customer group are flushed out, they can determine how much it will hurt. She hopes that this can be done before the pilot launch.

Mr. Beavers proposed that these ideas be written down and circulated for each member to give input. Mr. Spinale said this is possible.

Mr. Klionsky asked if there were any volunteers for the pilot yet. Mr. Spinale said there are 25 interested parties although they have not determined what type of customers they are.

B. Public Forum #2 Outline

Mr. Spinale plans to spotlight the TOU results for specific groups and asked if others had suggestions. He asked that all members visit the TOU section of the website to become familiar with it.

Mr. Klionsky asked if it was okay for Committee members to participate in the pilot program. Mr. Spinale said members are citizens like anyone else so he feels it would be fine. Ms. van Geel said that she had recently gone through the Conflict of Interest training and feels this is not a good idea even just for appearances. Mr. Spinale said that if any member felt uncomfortable enrolling, Belmont Light will do the comparison for them. There was a discussion of the ethics issue.

Mr. Leary and Mr. Spinale did a short demonstration of the calculators for the group and answered several questions about it. Ms. van Geel suggested they use bar charts rather than pie charts.

Mr. Macrae suggested that instead of offering a simple slider, which a customer might use but won’t know how accurate or possible their choices are, perhaps there should be a selection showing the results of certain behavior changes so the customer has some context. Ms. Keane said they could write a context section with the slider and show devices and their impact.

Mr. Forrester said they should take another look at the central AC numbers – he feels it is underrepresented. There was a discussion of where this data came from.

Mr. Spinale suggested mid-to-late September for the next Forum. Mr. Franck suggested the 3rd week of September and that it should be remote.

Mr. Spinale said they are looking at November 1, 2021 at the earliest to start the pilot.

IV. POWER SUPPLY DISCUSSION

A. Hedged Power

Mr. Spinale said this is on the agenda because they wanted to do a mid-year checkup on their hedged power.

Mr. Spinale reviewed their policy which is to be 80% hedged for power (currently under 76%). Ms. Keane explained that she and Mr. Spinale will look into increasing the hedge.

B. REC Discussion

Ms. Keane provided the 2020 Energy Portfolio wrap up. They exceeded the renewable goal and hit other goals. Most of the renewable energy certificates (RECs) came from the market with only 14% coming from PPA’s. She answered questions from the Committee about the numbers and how they are presented.

Ms. Keane also presented the actual transactions and categories. There was discussion about the information and how it is presented.

Mr. Spinale said they are on target to achieve this year's goals.

Mr. Macrae said he is concerned about saying Belmont Light uses 100% renewable, but that buying discount vintage RECs as cheaply as possible is disingenuous and also doesn't really grow the renewable field. He wonders what Belmont Light will do once they achieve 100% and should they continue to buy RECs from existing resources.

Mr. Franck asked if Belmont Light doesn't buy the REC, will someone else. Mr. Macrae said he would have to look into this. Mr. Macrae and Mr. Franck discussed this.

Ms. Keane said there are a couple of things driving up the RECs prices, including legislation in Maine and an underproduction of hydro last year. She explained the nuances of buying different RECs.

Mr. Beavers said he believes they had previously decided that they want to get more bundled contracts so it's less confusing. Mr. Macrae agreed with Mr. Beavers and prefers this approach since it's more open so they can really match usage with procurement and point to impacts. There was a discussion about this issue.

Mr. Macrae would like Belmont to be a leader in procurement strategy and provided some examples to build a portfolio based on usage, time, etc., rather than just shooting for the 100% target.

Mr. Franck reminded the group that one goal was to support New England renewables in their procurement practices. He feels they have sought out bundled contracts and wants to continue to support the industry in this area. He feels that RECs can be replaced as contracts come up and that perhaps this should be more clearly outlined in the strategy.

Mr. Macrae said he feels signing a new contract that builds new renewable energy projects is preferable.

Ms. Keane suggested that she and Mr. Spinale get some general quotes about resources that fit that definition and sketch out different REC plans and see what the results are. Mr. Macrae liked this suggestion.

Mr. Macrae would be in favor of repealing the 100% procurement target so they could focus on direct impact, strategic procurement that are directed at projects.

Mr. Franck supports achieving 100% by doing it in a meaningful way and wants to continue procuring bundled RECs and seeking opportunities for improvement.

Mr. Macrae left the meeting at this point.

The group discussed this issue, how to proceed, and rate impacts. Mr. Spinale said once they reach 100% next year, it might be worth looking at the policy to see what their next steps are.

V. CHENERY SOLAR PROJECT UPDATE

Mr. Osmancevic said there has been another roadblock. In early July the Facilities Director informed them that the issue with the roof flashing appears to be more severe than previously thought. The cost to repair quote was about \$60,000 so he asked Belmont Light to hold off on construction. There is risk of damage to the panels if the flashing is repaired after installation. Facilities is also trying to get other quotes on the repair.

Mr. Osmancevic also said that the Department of Energy Resources (DOER) did approve the grant. An energy assessment is still needed, and he is working on this. He asked if they should risk getting the installation done regardless of the roof issue or wait. There is a limited window of 1 year to use the grant funds.

Ms. van Geel asked what the process would be if other quotes are about the same. Mr. Osmancevic said the energy assessment would be scheduled. After that there are no obstacles to accessing the grant funds so SunBug could get the required permits and schedule the installation. Ms. van Geel asked for more clarification about funding for the roof flashing repair. Mr. Osmancevic said he couldn't give a clear answer since the money would not be coming from Belmont Light funds and the project would be overseen by the Facilities Department. Ms. van Geel felt it is important to understand this situation and asked if SunBug could be asked if they could remove some panels during the flashing repair. Mr. Osmancevic will ask but thinks SunBug will not be open to this since it is not in the scope of the project.

Mr. Osmancevic said another risk is that SunBug is not willing to store the panels for an indefinite period of time. They may charge storage fees or ask that Belmont Light store the panels.

Mr. Beavers asked if the DOER grant could be used for something else if this project does not proceed. Mr. Thivierge said if Belmont does not use the money for this project, it is gone.

Resident Phil Thayer said he believes there will be a lot more information once the contractor he recommended is able to look at the situation. He also suggested the abutters be notified to let them know that this is a continuation of the 2017 project, which was almost unanimously supported.

VI. FUTURE MEETINGS

- September 15, 2021
- October 13, 2021
- November 10, 2021

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Klionsky moved to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Beavers seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:54 am.

Respectfully submitted by,
Susan Peghiny