

**MINUTES  
TOWN OF BELMONT  
LIGHT BOARD ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
In Joint Session with the  
MUNICIPAL LIGHT BOARD  
Remote Meeting via Zoom  
Monday, November 15, 2021  
5:30pm**

**RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: January 13, 2022  
TIME: 3:10 PM

**I. CALL TO ORDER.** Mr. Paolillo called the meeting of the Municipal Light Board to order at 5:30pm.

Present for MLB was Chair Mark Paolillo, Vice Chair Roy Epstein, and member Adam Dash.

**CALL TO ORDER.** Mr. Franck called the meeting of the Light Board Advisory Committee to order at 5:31pm.

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

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

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

May 22, 2020 Executive Session: *Mr. Epstein moved the approve the Executive Session minutes of the May 22, 2020 meeting. Mr. Dash seconded and the motion passed by rollcall vote with Mr. Paolillo abstaining.*

June 22, 2020: *Mr. Epstein moved the approve the minutes of the June 22, 2020 meeting as amended. Mr. Dash seconded and the motion passed by rollcall vote with Mr. Paolillo abstaining.*

January 11, 2021: *Mr. Epstein moved the approve the minutes of the January 11, 2021 meeting. Mr. Dash seconded and the motion passed by rollcall vote with Mr. Paolillo abstaining.*

October 25, 2021: *Mr. Epstein moved the approve the minutes of the October 25, 2021 meeting. Mr. Dash seconded and the motion passed unanimously by rollcall vote.*

**III. 2021 GREATBLUE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY PRESENTATION**

Catherine Veschi, Project Manager at GreatBlue, provided an overview of the project and its goals, their methodology, and areas of investigation. They collected a total of 543 responses with a 4% margin of error (4.8% is industry standard with anything less considered very reliable). Ms. Veschi provided a snapshot of the respondents with the majority being in the 35-54 years of age range. More males than females completed the survey this year, 64.1% are homeowners, and their income trended higher this year.

Key takeaways:

Smart Hub Platform: use and satisfaction increased this year, but many respondents were unaware that it exists. This calls for education about the tool.

Education on Energy Efficiency Programs: over a third of respondents were unaware of certain programs.

Education on TOU Programs: nearly 3/5 of respondents were unaware of the program, but there had been additional education after this survey was done.

Strategic Electrification: Fewer than 1/5 of respondents had an understanding of how this is beneficial.

Ms. Veschi reviewed the Organizational Characteristics data which showed that the average rating decreased from 88.9% in 2019 to 83.3% in 2021, which can be due to many factors including the pandemic. Overall utility satisfaction has gone down in much of their research, and she felt this was not something to be alarmed about.

The younger age of the respondents could be a factor too, as younger respondents tend to be more critical especially around energy efficiency and community involvement.

Customer Service ratings are consistently high, with 91.1% of customers who had an interaction being satisfied (up from 90.2% in 2019). Primary reasons for contacting customer service were billing questions, service installation, or paying a bill.

Field Service Satisfaction went down to 76.7% in 2021 from 92.3% in 2019, however the somewhat dissatisfied and very dissatisfied groups are very low. There were a lot of unsure/don't know responses which could be caused by many reasons (don't remember the interaction, and pandemic limits during interactions). Top reasons for field service visits were meter-related, installing service, or outage related.

Ownership Structure: 72.6% were aware of the structure which is a light decrease from 74.7% in 2019. She noted that nationally customers are usually unaware of the ownership of their utility providers.

Benefits of Public Power Utilities: reliable service, stable rates, and responsiveness to customer concerns were the most important features. She pointed out that environmentally responsible and using renewable energy resources are inter-related and if added together the total is over 50%.

Net Positive Rating (relationship measuring questions): This year 90.6% gave a net positive rating, which is in line with 92.5% from 2019. One important thing is there is an increase in people being an advocate of Belmont Light, rather than just satisfied, which is very good.

Overall Service Quality: 73.8% agreed that the level of service is matched by the rate charged, with a lot of not sure/don't know.

Rate Objectives: prioritizing increasing share of renewable & green energy is most important, followed by financial stability and least cost of service.

Energy Product & Service Offerings: For Green Choice, EV Charger Rebate, and Heat Pump Rebates about 1/3 to 2/5 of customers were not aware of their existence. Free energy audits and appliance rebates are more well known.

Belmont Light & The Community: about 40.5% are aware of Belmont Light's presence in the community. 26.8% remembered seeing Belmont Light at Town Day in past 2 years, while a lot also said none or don't know/unsure (again, the pandemic could have heavily impact these results).

Methods of Communication: people prefer to use the website, with an increase from 2019. Bill inserts and direct mail are also still popular. 17.5% said they follow Belmont Light on social media (an increase from 9.5% in 2019).

Willingness to Pay for a 100% Renewal Portfolio: there was an increase in those willing to pay \$13 more per month, as well as \$5-\$8, and a decrease in the \$1-\$4 range.

Outage Information: 21% do not look for outage information (which includes those not needing to look for information). Of those looking, social media and the website's outage map were the most popular. The text and website reporting tools saw a decreased satisfaction of 72.2%, down from 80% in 2019 (much of this is from don't know/unsure, as well as unfamiliarity with the tools).

Website Ease of Use: this decreased, although nearly ¾ are satisfied and many fall into the don't know/unsure category.

Smart Hub: satisfaction increased for those who have used it in the past (non-users removed). 83.2% were satisfied with the ease of finding information. Many non-users said they were unsure why they didn't use it, and others said they were unaware of the tool. Of those who had suggestions for changes, 8.4% said it is not easy to navigate.

Conservation Rate: 26.3% of respondents are unwilling to pay more for conservation for new and enhanced efficiency programming, almost 1/3 said they don't know or are unsure. Of those willing to pay more, many would pay up to \$3 extra on their bill. 18.8% understood what this issue is about which is consistent with other surveys they have done.

View of Belmont Light: as a leading utility, many people said don't know/unsure, which makes sense because most people don't know how one utility compares to another. Is Belmont Light seen as a trusted energy advisor? There is a slight decrease here, which is within the margin of error.

TOU Programs: Respondents were largely unaware of TOU rates, with a little over ¼ being very or moderately aware of them. Just over 50% were likely to opt-into this program. She noted that there had been more outreach and education on TOU after the survey was done and if asked today she would expect these numbers to be higher.

Discussion:

Mr. Dash said that once the Smart Hub app is set for autopay there is not much reason to use it again. Regarding the decline in feelings towards Belmont Light, he pointed out that the pandemic has caused lower satisfaction with government on many things and asked if GreatBlue had seen this elsewhere. Ms. Veschi said this is definitely true for overall satisfaction, communications, etc.

Mr. Dash was heartened to see increased support for a 100% renewable portfolio. Ms. Veschi said this is the trend, especially in Massachusetts.

Mr. Franck noticed the large increase in undecided/unsure responses and asked for her insight on this. Ms. Veschi said there are many reasons including methodology (online vs. live), respondents who haven't used a tool like the website recently may not remember their experience and choose the unsure response, etc.

Mr. Paolillo pointed out that more work needs to be done to educate about strategic electrification, and asked Mr. Spinale & LBAC to come back to the Board with a plan to inform residents about current activities, as well as what they can do to support Belmont's climate action efforts. Mr. Spinale agreed to do this.

Mr. Klionsky said it is very hard to get through to people who are barraged with information. Ms. Veschi said this is a problem, plus different generations prefer different contact methods which complicates the effort.

Phil Thayer asked Ms. Veschi if she is aware of the Mass. Climate Action Network's survey of MLPs. Ms. Veschi said she was not but would look into this. Mr. Thayer said Belmont Light was one of the top 2 MLPs.

#### **IV. GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT**

a. *Time of Use Pilot Update:* Mr. Spinale reported that there are 2 remaining weeks for applicants. They have about 110 customers who have asked to join and 22 or so who are interested. They are comfortable with the customers and expect to get meaningful data. He pointed out that Rate A customers who have no devices are very interested to participate.

Mr. Paolillo asked if the mix of customers is what they wanted. Mr. Spinale said there are more Rate A customers which they are happy with. He explained how they had set the participate goals.

b. *Outage:* one large tree branch came down, causing a power outage on Friday afternoon because a rain and windstorm. About 600 customers were impacted. A secondary problem was some damage to a switch which was repaired. This outage affected the Royal Road/Thomas Street area, plus Waverly Street & Beech Street, out to Trapelo Road.

Mr. Epstein asked if the switch that failed was new or old equipment (or is that irrelevant). Mr. Spinale said it wasn't very old but there wasn't anything that was special about this equipment.

Mr. Macrae said the line crew that came get the power back on in his neighborhood was excellent.

#### **V. LBAC LIAISON REPORT**

Mr. Franck said that Belmont Light signaled that they would be looking into battery storage again, and that the Chenery solar installation started today. This should be completed by the end of the month.

#### **VI. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Phil Thayer said that the Chenery solar installation is a great example of collaboration between different Town departments as well as a public/private partnership.

## VII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

**Motion:** *Mr. Epstein moved that the Municipal Light Board go into Executive Session to discuss trade secrets or confidential, competitively-sensitive or other proprietary information. Mr. Dash seconded and the motion passed unanimously.*

**Motion:** *Mr. Macrae moved that the Light Board Advisory Committee go into Executive Session to discuss trade secrets or confidential, competitively-sensitive or other proprietary information. Mr. Klionsky seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.*

The Municipal Light Board and Light Board Advisory Committee moved into Executive Session at 6:27pm.

## VIII. FUTURE MEETINGS

December 20, 2021

January 24, 2022

February 28, 2022

March 28, 2022

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny  
Recording Secretary