

Paxton Municipal Light Department
578 Pleasant Street
Paxton, MA 01612-1300
Light Commission Meeting
January 30, 2024

- I. Call to order: The meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Orell at 5:31 p.m. Members present: Yvette Orell, Emerson Wheeler, Michael Benoit, and Tara Rondeau, Manager. Public Attending: Jeff Cormier, Kathy Card, Charlie Blanchard, and Charles Farrar.
- II. Approval of Agenda: Wheeler motioned to approve the agenda; Benoit seconded the motion amending it to move Agenda Item #5 before #3. Motion passed 3-0.
- III. Meeting with Recreation Department for Little League (LL) Lighting: Cormier gave some background, in 2021 PMLD's Foreman was replacing a bulb on one of the lights and noted that the crossarms on all lights needed to be replaced due to rot. The Foreman provided the Rec. Dept. with a quote that he had gotten for replacement lights of \$81,000. The LD Manager brought to the attention of the Rec. Dept. that Little League regulations required steel poles be used not wood. PMLD is not equipped to install poles of this style and height. The TA put out an RFP for a new lighting system that would meet the LL regulations. The lowest bid was \$161,000. The Town had set aside \$80,000 for the lighting and did not have the additional funds needed to replace the whole lighting system. They are all here to discuss what is the best way to proceed with the needed repairs, upgrades etc. to the existing lighting system with the funds available.

Cormier said that he spoke with Town counsel and so long as they were only performing maintenance on the lights, they would not need to install the steel poles, etc. The Manager disagreed with this since the regulations clearly state, "any upgrade or addition of lighting equipment to existing systems after July 1, 1992, must be done so that the systems will be in complete compliance with current standards". Since they planned to change the lighting to LED, that would be an upgrade.

Benoit explained to all present that he had been on the board of the Little League for roughly 15 years when his children were younger. He is familiar with all the rules and regs and is concerned about the Town's charter, insurance, as well as potential injuries to children. Benoit said that when he was on the LL Board, he felt the lighting was an issue due to the low pole height, but the funds were an issue then. He does not want to see any child get hurt due to inadequate lighting and he does not want rate payers to bear any liability. The Manager agreed and stated that she would like to help them out, she supports activities for children and would hate to see the children not have lighted fields to use. PMLD is not equipped or capable of installing the steel poles since they are 15' higher than our bucket reach. PMLD could not perform the labor for them, which is half of the cost. The Manager explained to them that if they chose to install wood poles or simply patch and repair utilizing PMLD to perform the work, the town would need to indemnify the light dept. for installing a lighting system that is not up to regulations.

The LL President stated that the field is not actually a LL field. It is a town field that LL rents. He has not had any contact with anyone in Little League that has shown any concern over the current lights or mentioned noncompliance. He did not think that it would be an issue.

The Interim TA said that he understood the Managers concerns and agreed but he had spoken with some other towns, Southbridge one of them, who have recently replaced their lighting with wood poles. He will reach out to the Town of Southbridge to confirm that the field he was referencing was in fact Little League. The Light Board asked the Manager to walk the field and

make note of all equipment that needs to be replaced due to rot. The Manager stated that she would do that with the Foreman and take pictures for everyone's reference. The Board will discuss this issue at a later meeting to see if any materials can be saved and to what capacity PMLD can assist.

Cormier, Card, Blanchard, and Farrar left the meeting.

IV. Approval of Minutes: Wheeler motioned to approve the December 20, 2023, meeting minutes; Benoit seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

V. Public Comment: None

VI. Manager's Report

A. Operations and Electric Systems Updates:

1. The linemen:

- Removed a fallen tree at the substation.
 - Straightened a pole on Winter St.
 - Continued tree trimming on Camp St.
 - Replaced the circuit board for the sump pumps at the substation.
 - Performed town wide line patrol after some high windstorms.
 - Repaired a streetlight on Grove St.
 - Ran secondary wire from the transformer to the meter socket for a new construction residence on West St.
 - Responded to a trouble call at Paxton Auto for low voltage, discovered that the issue must be internal.
 - Continued installing AMI meters.
2. They replaced the batteries in 2 of the line trucks.
3. The linemen completed the year-end inventory count.
4. They met engineers at the substation to go over URD wiring and battery location.
5. The linemen took the meter that was removed from a residence on Holbrook St. to Sterling Light and Holden Light for independent testing of accuracy.

Outages:

- o None

B. Office and Operations

1. Accounts receivable 90 days past due is \$14,717.15. Same time last year, 90 days past due was \$10,543.41.
2. PMLD is moving forward with pressing charges against the customer for electricity theft.
3. Starting Jan 1st PMLD is processing rebates in house. Anything \$100 or under will go on a customer's account as a credit, over that a check will be issued. If a customer has a balance past 60 days overdue, no check will be issued, they will only receive the credit on their account.
4. The Manager met with the Planning Board to discuss large battery energy storage system installations in Paxton. The Manager gave them a summary of what they are, what equipment is typically part of the system and how large they can be. Also, included were

some websites to use as resources for planning and zoning.

5. The Manager and Foreman attended a one-day seminar at AMC on battery energy storage systems. It was geared more towards fire fighters but there was still some useful information. The Manager informed the Planning Board about the training, and the chair attended as well.
6. The first week of January, our auditors performed the year-end inventory audit. We received a 100% accuracy assessment. To recognize their efforts and show our appreciation, we had a pizza luncheon.
7. There are more problems surrounding MMWEC and member satisfaction. Tomorrow an Executive Session Board meeting was called to discuss MMWEC strategies, etc.
8. The Manager has been voted in as the VP of MEAM.
9. Cherie is back at work full time.
10. The Manager will be going to Washington DC on Feb 26th and 27th with MMWEC to meet with State Representatives and Senators for the APPA legislative rally.

VII. Final Budget:

The Board was provided with a copy of the budget prior to the meeting. As requested, wage charts for the linemen, office staff and manager were also provided.

Current Year (FY23): Operating revenue exceeded the budget by \$285,481. Non-operating income is \$110,656 higher than budgeted. This is due to an increase in Reserve Trust investments. Overall expenses are \$313,189 higher than budgeted due to increased transmission costs and a higher year end pension expense adjustment than anticipated.

Next year (FY24): What changed from the preliminary budget: slight increase in the PPC charges to cover the added expenses which increased by \$266,763 to reflect \$165,000 in added transmission costs, \$40,000 in Berkshire Wind expenses for turbine repairs and another \$50,000 was added into the pension expense to cushion the potential year-end adjustment.

Benoit asked that a 10-year capital plan be included with next year's budget so they can ensure the budget coincides with capital purchases and PMLD's major improvements and equipment needs are being met. The Manager explained that she has been working on one, it has become more complicated with projecting future electricity needs for the Town of Paxton with all the state's mandates and increased climate initiatives. Getting pricing on substation transformers has been delayed since sizing requirements are unsure right now. The Manager is working with MMWEC engineers to try and get a better projection of what PMLD's needs will be 10 years and 20 years from now. Benoit suggested a solution might be 2 transformers.

The Manager explained to the Board that she has been working on proposed changes to the current rate structure as requested by the board. That will be completed within the next couple of months.

Benoit made a motion to accept the final budget as presented. Wheeler seconded the motion. Motion passed 3-0.

VIII. Other Business:

1. Benoit asked when the AMI meter installations would be completed. The Manager explained that the linemen are dividing the work up between installations and regular maintenance so that they do not fall too far behind, especially with trimming. Benoit suggested a July 1st goal. Orell stated maybe some kind of incentive for getting it done by the goal date.
2. The Manager is meeting with the company that the town has hired to complete the new by-

law revisions. They would like to know what PMLD would like included in their subdivision bylaws. The Manager explained to the board that currently the Town bylaws just state that all utilities must be underground and other specs should be per the Light Departments requirements. The Manager has not found any historical documents that state what methodology has been used in the past to determine placement of streetlights, etc. The Manager feels that this should be something that the Town should be directing to the light dept. not the other way around since the Town has to approve all streetlights before adopting them. Benoit suggested the Manager mention streetlight height, the placement of lights in cul-de-sacs and intersections etc.

3. The Manager had provided the Board with an article published by DeLorean and MMWEC on the substation battery partnership between DeLorean and PMLD. Benoit suggested the article be placed on the company website.

4. Orell suggested that the board discuss a COLA for the Manager and/or a wage increase. In her opinion, the board should provide a COLA now and discuss whether a merit increase would be valid after they do the managers evaluation in the spring. Benoit asked when the last time they gave the Manager a wage increase was. It was January 1 of 2023.

Since no one was prepared for this discussion, it was agreed to discuss it after the evaluations were completed. Orell asked the Manager to send them each an evaluation form to be prepared for the next meeting.

Orell moved to give the manager a 5% COLA retro back to January 1, 2024, and discuss a merit increase after the next evaluation.

Benoit made the motion to provide the Manager with a 5% COLA retro back to January 1. Wheeler seconded the motion. Motion passed 3-0.

IX. Adjourn: Benoit motioned to adjourn; Wheeler seconded the motion. Motion passed 3-0.

The meeting adjourned at 7:38 pm.

The Next Meeting is March 12th, 2024, at 5:30 pm.

Approved Minutes Submitted on behalf of the Paxton Light Commission

by Tara Rondeau on 3/21/24 Tara Rondeau