

RECEIVED

**WG+E**

WESTFIELD GAS + ELECTRIC

MAR - 4 2021

WESTFIELD CITY CLERK



whip city fiber

## Westfield Gas & Electric Municipal Light Board Regular Meeting Minutes February 3, 2021

Location: Gas & Electric Operations Center, 40 Turnpike Industrial Rd. Conference Room,  
Westfield, MA

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

### I. Call to Order

Chairman Roman stated that in accordance with Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting law, G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 20, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Municipal Light Board will be conducted via remote participation. The notice for this meeting invited members of the public who wish to listen to the meeting to do so by calling in telephonically to any of the numbers provided in the meeting notice. This virtual meeting will be audio recorded and, per the WG+E MLB Video Policy, the recording will be available on the WG+E website within one week. The Chairman asked if anyone, other than the Municipal Light Board, was recording the meeting. Hearing none the Chairman welcomed the public that may be listening to the meeting.

### II. ROLL CALL was taken as follows:

Present: Ward #1 Commissioner, Kevin M. Kelleher  
Ward #2 Commissioner, Ray Rivera  
Ward #3 Commissioner, Dawn Renaudette  
Ward #4 Commissioner, Francis L. Liptak  
Ward #5 Commissioner, Joseph B. Mitchell  
Ward #6 Commissioner, Robert C. Sacco  
Appointed Commissioner, A. Edward Roman

Absent:

Present: 7 Absent: 0

### III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

### IV. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR.

The Chairman noted that at the January meeting the MLB did not vote on a Vice-Chair and entertained nominations for Vice-Chair. Nominations were open for Vice Chair. A motion was made by Commissioner Liptak, seconded by Commissioner Sacco to nominate Commissioner Renaudette as Vice-Chair of the MLB. No other nominations were received, and nominations were closed.

On a motion by Commissioner Liptak, seconded by Commissioner Sacco, it was unanimously:

VOTED: To elect Commissioner Renaudette, Vice-Chair of the Municipal Light Board until the January 2022 meeting or until her successor is elected and qualified.

**V. READING OF THE RECORD:**

On motion by Commissioner Sacco seconded by Commissioner Mitchell, it was unanimously:

VOTED: To accept the minutes of the January 20, 2021 Regular Session Meeting of the Municipal Light Board as presented.

**VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** None

**VII. COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED BY GAS AND ELECTRIC:**

- a) **Acknowledgement – Amelia Park Children’s Museum** – Note from Ray Radigan, thanking WG+E for its sponsorship of the Penguin Plunge. The proceeds from this event will help the Amelia Park Children’s Museum.
- b) **Acknowledgement – Behavioral Health Network** – Letter from Susan West, Senior Vice President, Behavioral Health Network thanking WG+E for its support and sponsorship of its programs.
- c) **Acknowledgement – Greater Westfield Babe Ruth League, Inc.** - Letter from Daniel Welch, President, Greater Westfield Babe Ruth League thanking WG+E for its support in installing the new Baseball Scoreboard at Bullens Field.
- d) **Acknowledgement – Sons of Erin COVID Relief** - Letter from James Laverty, President, Sons of Erin thanking WG+E and the MLB for the COVID Relief program we utilized to assist the Sons of Erin organization.
- e) **Acknowledgement – Various COVID Relief Recipients** - A memo which provided excerpts from many customers thanking WG+E for financial assistance received from the COVID Relief Program.
- f) **Acknowledgement – Westfield Athenaeum COVID Relief** - Letter from Kathleen Deviny, Director of the Westfield Athenaeum, thanking WG+E for the credit on the utility bill to assist them during the COVID Pandemic.

The Chairman suggested that agenda item b) General Manager Search Process under Old Business be taken out of order and discussed at this time. On motion by Commissioner Kelleher, seconded by Commissioner Renaudette, it was unanimously:

**VOTED:** To discuss the agenda item General Manager's Search Process at this time.

HR Manager Beth Burns thanked the MLB members for the quick second review of the short list of resumes, which was completed on Monday. She reported that each of the Commissioners had made appointments to individually review the top eighteen (18) applicants with a goal of narrowing to six (6) applicants to be interviewed. Once the field was narrowed, the HR department contacted the applicants and informed them of selection. They were advised that if they accepted an interview their names would be made public. One of the applicants withdrew his name from consideration. The interviews will be in person unless due to travel or weather restrictions and an applicant requests a remote interview. Three interviews will be Wednesday, February 10<sup>th</sup> and two on Thursday February 11<sup>th</sup>, with the final selection on Friday February 12<sup>th</sup>. Commissioner Mitchell was interested in the vote totals that each may have received. Ms. Burns indicated that many of the 18 that were previously selected did not receive any votes. It was decided that the vote totals should not be provided. The MLB discussed if the names should be listed in the posting. Commissioner Mitchell advocated for posting the finalist names by this Friday so the public will know who will be interviewed. After further discussion it was decided to list the names alphabetically on the postings for both Wednesday and Thursday's meeting, which will be posted before Friday, February 5<sup>th</sup>. Commissioner Rivera noted that the public will be able to listen to the interviews by calling in to the numbers provided. Commissioner Sacco then indicated the format of the questioning should be discussed. The Chairman noted that not all questions will be applicable to all applicants. Commissioner Mitchell indicated that while some common questions can be used, he wanted to have each MLB member be able to follow up with questions. He noted that follow ups are good to further evaluate the applicants' response and background. Commissioner Renaudette agreed that some common questions can be asked but other questions need to be tailored to the individual candidate. Commissioner Mitchell noted that questions 1-5 are sufficiently broad to be posed to all candidates. Discussion followed if the HR subcommittee should meet to discuss the questions. Attorney Welch noted that if the subcommittee meets that the meeting would be subject to the open meeting law and need to be posted. The MLB discussed the questions from the interviews for the previous General Manager search process. Commissioner Rivera doesn't want to be limited to the written questions as he thought their scope was too narrow. After discussion, it was decided that each of the Commissioners would ask the questions as follows: Commissioner Kelleher #11, Commissioner Roman #1, Commissioner Mitchell #3, Commissioner Liptak #5, Commissioner Rivera #7 and Commissioner Renaudette #2. After these questions were responded to by the applicants each Commissioner would have an opportunity to ask individual questions in an open forum format. Commissioner Kelleher noted that each applicant will be allotted a 1 hour time limit. It was suggested that the interview meetings commence at 5:45 PM with the selection meeting on Friday at 6:00 PM.

## VIII. REPORTS FROM THE GAS & ELECTRIC:

### A. Action Required Items

- a) **2020 Drug and Alcohol Testing Annual Report.** The Manager reported that employees with either a commercial driver's license (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration) or those working on, or associated with, gas pipelines (Department of Transportation CFR Part 199) are subject to random drug and alcohol tests. During the year, WG+E was in compliance with federal and state testing requirements. In 2020, employees subject to Random Testing were tested at a rate of 50% drug and 10% alcohol. In total, twenty-three (23) employees were tested for drugs and four (4) for alcohol. Eight (8) pre-employment drug and alcohol test were also administered. Effective in January 2021, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) launched an information clearinghouse to better ensure that commercial drivers cannot conceal drug and alcohol violations by moving on to another job. The clearinghouse enables employers, or their authorized TPA, to identify drivers who committed a drug and alcohol program violation by running a query. Transportation Advisor had been identified with the Department of Transportation as our third-party administrator and will be responsible for monitoring and staying in compliance with this federal clearinghouse.
- b) **City Engagement Report.** The Manager summarized WG+E's ongoing support for and interaction with the City of Westfield. The Manager noted with COVID it had been a rough year and wanted to commend his coworkers for their efforts in supporting the community. Many participated in food drives, turkey drives and winter coat drives. The Department continues to actively participate in city meetings and events that promote the WG+E's on-going partnership with the City. Facebook was an important platform to connect with the Westfield community. Over the year, we saw our followers increase from 4,800 to 5,700. This audience is far reaching as we engage with our followers and get the benefit of their networks and community connections as well. Some of the many activities WG+E and its employees participated in were listed in the report. The WG+E MLB made significant donations to the Westfield Public Schools this year when they were so desperately needed. Remote and hybrid learning were a clear challenge and while we could not provide Whip City Fiber to all students, we did provide free hotspots around town, increased bandwidth to the schools, and financially supported personal hotspots through the Adopt-a-Student program. Commissioner Mitchell indicated it was an impressive report and hats off to the employees for their efforts.
- c) **Westfield Warm Status Report.** The Manager stated that to date, all customers that have requested additional assistance through Westfield Warm who were qualified under the financial guidelines for LIHEAP or Good Neighbor Energy and have attempted to make regular payments towards their account, have received financial assistance through Westfield Warm. Most customers receive a payment from the Westfield Warm Fund in the amount of \$100-\$500 depending on their average monthly bills. Letters to approximately 227 customers were mailed notifying each customer that funds from the Westfield Warm Program have been applied to their account. WG+E will continue to take additional Westfield Warm requests throughout the winter. The funds from Westfield Warm have been applied to customer's accounts, which are reflected on the

customer's next invoice. Approximately \$48,000 has been applied to WG+E accounts to date, with a balance of \$7,000 remaining. The annual Westfield Warm funding of \$55,000 continues to be adequate. If the remaining funds are insufficient, a request will be forwarded to the MLB for additional funding. Commissioner Rivera asked if any monies were carried over from the prior year. The Manager indicated that all money from last year had been expended.

- d) **2020 Electric Services Installed.** The Manager presented a report which showed in 2020, a total of 71 new electric services were installed, 55 residential and 16 commercial. Three (3) continued subdivisions contributed to many of these new services. After posting a low of 30 new services in 2011, there has been an average of 44 new services installed annually over the past ten years. The 2020 services installed represent a significant increase in total number of new electric services installed when compared to 2019.
- e) **2020 Gas Services Installed.** The Manager provided a report with respect to gas services installed in 2020. In 2020 all service applications with a signed contract and received prior to November 15<sup>th</sup> were installed. A total of 96 new gas services were installed this year; 86 residential and 10 commercial. Over the last 10 years, an average of 130 services has been installed annually.
- f) **2020 Gas Leak Compliance Report.** The Manager reported that locating, controlling, and eliminating gas leaks throughout the distribution systems is critical to safe and efficient operations. WG+E remains in compliance with state and federal regulations for leak management, in fact WG+E repairs gas leaks within timelines that are much more rapid than state mandated timelines. At year-end 2020, WG+E had a total of 8 leaks on record. This represents a decrease from the 33 recorded leaks at the end of 2019, and just short of WG+E's zero leak goal. Commissioner Kelleher commented that the year-end total for gas leaks this past year is impressive.
- g) **2020 Traffic Light Report.** Mike Lee, Operations Manager reported WG+E continues to provide prompt inspection, maintenance and repair services, including emergency response, for all municipally owned traffic lights within the City of Westfield. WG+E continues to respond to traffic light problems caused by either motor vehicle damage or maintenance requirements on system components. In 2020, a total of nine (9) vehicle accidents resulted in WG+E repairs. WG+E does bill the insurance companies of the operators for reimbursement. Eighty (80) inspections were performed and thirty-three (33) configure and repair requests were completed. Mr. Lee indicated that much of the work has been brought in house which has reduced costs. In addition, with the construction of the bridges in the downtown corridor new traffic lights had been installed which also cuts down on maintenance costs.
- h) **2020 Capital Electric Projects Report.** Operations Manager Mike Lee provided a report relating to all capital electric project results for 2020. Throughout 2020, there were 19 electric projects planned regarding new construction, upgraded services, or upgrades to the distribution system. Mr. Lee indicated that due to COVID the

mobilization of contractors was impacted and delayed. Even with the restrictions placed on the crews, a significant quantity of work was still completed during the year. Commissioner Sacco asked if the Hampden Ponds electric upgrade was completed. Mr. Lee indicated that due to COVID restrictions this work had been delayed into 2021. All electric capital additions and upgrade projects performed by WG+E during the calendar year were noted on the report. Commissioner Mitchell asked the reason for the 144% over budget for the electric breaker project. Mr. Lee indicated that 3 of the breakers were scheduled for 2019, but had to be carried over into 2020. As a result, 6 breakers, rather than 3, were completed in 2020 to complete the entire breaker replacement project.

- i) **2020 Capital Gas Projects Report.** Throughout 2020, there were gas projects planned for new construction, upgraded services, or upgrades to the distribution system. The Department did amazingly well, having completed much of the planned gas capital work this past year, especially considering the ongoing COVID pandemic and the restrictions this has caused. The Operations Manager stated that, generally, the estimation process for capital projects has proven very close to actual costs.
- j) **2021 Capital Gas & Electric Construction Plans.** The Operations Manager presented an overview of potential capital electric and gas projects anticipated for 2021. Commissioner Kelleher asked if they were budgeted estimates. Mr. Lee responded that budgeted estimates were provided and once engineered the cost would be better defined. As in the past, projects can be impacted on occasion by such matters as City or State project scheduling. The 23 electric projects, 11 gas projects and 8 telecom projects are listed in order of priority. On the electric side, to enhance reliability, an existing substation transformer will be replaced and stored as a spare on site once the new transformer is installed. The project will take several months to complete as it can take up to a year to receive a substation transformer once ordered. Planned gas projects vary and much of the gas capital budget will be used to fund cast iron replacement. The Telecom Division expects to significantly fund the expansion of Whip City Fiber to new customers within Westfield. Commissioner Liptak inquired if the expansion FSAs have been identified. Mr. Lee indicated the specific areas for expansion have not yet been identified, but we do have a budget item for future FSAs. Commissioner Sacco asked if the budget was for construction of new FSAs or within existing FSAs. Mr. Lee indicated funding has been set aside for both. The marketing group is putting together a plan to reach out to potential customers to determine the interest levels within various FSAs. Commissioner Rivera inquired as to the status of the CAF II funds. The Manager indicated the funds continue to be received and held in their own bank account until 95% of the Hilltowns are built out, which we expect will take place
- k) **DPU Termination Regulations.** Business and Finance Manager Jay Kline indicated that this annual report is provided for reference purposes and that there have been no changes to the regulations from the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities. WG+E's termination timelines are more customer friendly than those required by the DPU. The Manager puts forth the process annually to the MLB to which WG+E must comply prior to the upcoming termination season are paid.

- l) **Monthly Financial Reports**. Business and Finance Manager Jay Kline noted that the monthly and year-to-date purchased power expenses and net income figures presented in this report reflect estimated amounts. Through the month of December 2020, the Gas Division gain exceeds the original budgetary estimate by \$1.0m, while the Electric Division gain is currently \$1.4m more than the original forecast. Are looking at some deferrals but not at the magnitude of last year, as well as a cast iron reserve fund and transformer replacement. Mr. Kline then indicated the year-end financials still need the actuarial pension and OPEB numbers from PERAC. Commissioner Sacco asked about the financials for Whip City Fiber. Mr. Kline spoke to the timing issue between the time money is expended, billed to the Hilltowns and then receipt of payment. This effort is going well and even with WG+E's bond payments in the mix, the revenues received from WCF, including the hilltowns, will allow for continued expansion, based on cost to benefit analyses. Chair Roman stated the Department had an extremely good year.

**B. Informational Items:**

- a) **Utility Issues**. Report was presented and accepted.
- b) **Utility News/Pulseine Articles** was presented.
- c) **Utility Courses Update** – was presented.

**IX. OLD BUSINESS:**

- a) **COVID 19 Update** - The Manager indicated that the Department's Incident Management Team continues to meet weekly and monitor state mandates and vaccine availability. WG+E has been investigating having a vaccine clinic for employees much like it has done for the flu shots. The CARES act allowed for 80 hours of paid leave for COVID related issues that expired on December 31<sup>st</sup>. In a continued effort to promote safety and good health, WG+E has chosen extending this benefit through the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter for its employees. As to the COVID relief program, WG+E has expended all of the \$500k generously authorized by the MLB. Commissioner Rivera noted that once the shut off moratorium expires some of the receivables will be paid. Commissioner Mitchell indicated that the Department should transition back to normal practices and then see if more relief is necessary. Commissioner Sacco requested further information on the receivables with Residential and Commercial accounts categorized by amount owed. It was noted that in the past some larger accounts could make up the majority of receivables. Commissioner Kelleher agreed that the Department should pause such relief efforts for a few months then see where receivable balances are after the moratorium expires.
- b) **General Manager Search Process** –Discussed earlier in meeting.

- X. NEW BUSINESS:** Commissioner Sacco had been contacted by an existing customer who is moving and was asked for Social Security number. The Manager indicated that while social security numbers are requested for the purpose of a credit check, the social security numbers are not retained by WG+E.

**XI. ADJOURNMENT**

On the motion of Commission Mitchell, seconded by Commissioner Liptak it was unanimously:

VOTED: To adjourn the regular meeting of the Municipal Light Board meeting.

Chairman Roman declared the regular session portion of the meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD.

Attest:

  
 A. Edward Roman, Chairman

**Documents Presented at REGULAR SESSION February 3, 2021**

Municipal Light Board Regular Session Meeting Minutes – January 20, 2021			
Acknowledgement – Amelia Park Children’s Museum	Ray Radigan		
Acknowledgement – Behavioral Health Network	Susan C West, Senior Vice President	January 12, 2021	
Acknowledge – Greater Babe Ruth League, Inc.	Daniel Welch, President Greater Westfield Babe Ruth League	January 9, 2021	
Acknowledge – Sons of Erin COVID Relief	James Lavery, President Sons of Erin	December 7, 2020	
Acknowledge – Various COVID Relief Recipients	Memo COVID Relief Program	January 2021	
Acknowledge – Westfield Athenæum COVID Relief	Kathleen Deviny, Director Westfield Athenæum	December 24, 2020	
2020 Drug and Alcohol Testing Annual Report	Beth Burns, HR Coordinator/Records Manager	February 3, 2021	Administrative & Organization Drug & Alcohol Testing Program AO-3.5
City Engagement Report	Lisa Stowe, CX, Marketing, Communications Manager	February 3, 2020 (sic)	Communications\Customer Service\ Community Affairs City Key Accounts Summary Report CCA-2.9
Westfield Warm Program – Status Report	A. Paton, Customer Accounts/Collections Manager	January 25, 2021	Financial Low Income Customer Assistance
2020 Electric Services Installed	Patrick M. Levesque, Utility Supervisor	February 3, 2021	Electric Utility Business Electric Service Installation EUB-3.1
2020 Gas Services Installed	Greg E. Freeman, Utility Supervisor	February 3, 2021	Gas Utility Business Gas Service Installation EUB-3.3
2020 Gas Leak Compliance	Patrick Levesque, Utility	February 3, 2021	Gas Utility Business



Westfield Gas & Electric Municipal Light Board  
 Regular Meeting Minutes  
 February 3, 2021  
 Page 9

Report	Supervisor		
2020 Annual Traffic Light Report	Jody M. Boucher, Utility Supervisor	February 3, 2021	Gas Leak Control GUB-6.1, GUB-6.2 Communications/Customer Service/ Community Affairs Traffic Light Repair CCA-4.2
2020 Capital Electric Projects Report	Greg E. Freeman, Utility Supervisor	February 3, 2021	Electric Utility Business Electric Upgrade and New Projects
2020 Capital Gas Projects Report	Greg E. Freeman, Utility Supervisor	February 3, 2021	Gas Utility Business Gas Upgrade and New Projects
2021 Capital Gas and Electric Construction Plans	Greg E. Freeman, Utility Supervisor	February 3, 2021	Electric / Gas Utility Business New, Upgrade & Reconstruction Project EUB-3.0; EUB-4.0, EUB-5.0; EUB-10.0; EUB-11.6; GUB-3.2-12; TUB-4.0
DPU Termination Regulations	A. Paton, Customer Accounts/Collections Manager	January 25, 2021	Residential Termination Regulations Department of Public Utilities Consumer Division
December 2020 Financial Report	T. Fouche, Accounting Manager	February 3, 2021	Financial Annual & Quarterly Reports
Utility Issues	John W. Welch	February 3, 2021	Regulatory & Governmental Affairs Gas/Electric Regulatory Issues, RGA-1.4; RGA1.5
Utility News/Pulse Line	Beth Burns, HR Coordinator/Records Manager	February 3, 2021	Communications/Customer Service/Community Affairs Media Relations – CCA-1.6
Utility Course Update 2021 Seminars/Workshops	Beth Burns, HR Coordinator/Records Manager	February 3, 2021	Administration and Organization WG+E Training & Development, AO-3.6