



September 18, 2023
 STERLING MUNICIPAL LIGHT DEPARTMENT
 REGULAR SESSION
 MEETING MINUTES



DATE: September 18, 2023

LOCATION: SMLD, Rear Board Room
 50 Main Street, Sterling, MA

BOARD MEMBERS: Joe Curtin (Curtin), Chairman
 Eric Darlington (Darlington), Vice Chair
 Andy Gonsorcik (Gonsorcik), Clerk

SMLD STAFF: Matt Stelmach (Stelmach), General Manager
 Bill Underhill (Underhill), Network Coordinator
 John Kwasniewski (Kwasniewski), Staff Accountant

MINUTES: Patty Page

5:05 pm. Meeting called to order; Curtin stated that the meeting is subject to audio recording. Roll Call Attendance: Darlington present, Gonsorcik present, Curtin present.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Board members in attendance pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

Safety Announcement - Equipment in office.

Approval of Agenda - Darlington made a motion to approve agenda with the following minor edits. Move Kwasniewski to the beginning and change the date of the meeting minutes to be approved to July 25, 2023. Gonsorcik seconded, no discussion, all in favor, Gonsorcik aye, Darlington aye, Curtin aye. (3-0).

YTD Budget vs. Actual – Kwasniewski reviewed the Budget vs Actual for Electric and Fiber divisions from 1/1/23 thru 6/30/23.

1. Electric variances:
 - a) Station Expenses - Increase of \$60K is due to an NEC maintenance service agreement prepayment true up that was made in Q2 23.
 - b) Maintenance of Overhead - Increase of \$100K is due to tree trimming expenses in 2023.
2. Fiber variances:
 - a) Wholesale Fiber - Increase of \$26K is due to invoices from Cogent in 2023, no activity from them for the first half of 2022.
 - b) Customer Installation Expenses - Increase of \$31K is due to stock items purchased for the Northgate project.

Manager's Report

1. The meeting will be recorded for testing purposes only utilizing the new Meeting Owl webcam. The Board will decide if they want future meetings aired on SLCT after reviewing.
2. Warrant was available for review.
3. Tree trimming bids are out and due 10/2/2023. Hoping for more bids, but have 1 already. SMLD and Sterling crews do minimal trimming when necessary and in emergencies.
4. Stelmach, Gonsorcik, and Kwasniewski will be attending the Berkshire Wind Climb on 9/19/2023. This had been rescheduled due to the weather.
5. Stelmach will be at the MEAM General Membership meeting in Littleton on 9/20/2023 and will be attending the NEPPA GM Roundtable meeting in Reading on 9/27/23.
6. A system load graph was presented to the Board showing the impact of battery discharge over a 4-hour window on a peak day.
7. Manager's Vehicle – was serviced recently but clearly there is a need for a new vehicle in the near future.
8. Department of Energy – Form EIA-861 describing SMLD energy purchase and sales is submitted to DoE each year. DoE had questions on the cost of the controlled service program. As Stelmach was analyzing, he discovered that this program may no longer be of benefit to SMLD given the cost. Stelmach will be looking at it in more detail to determine the true cost of controlled services and the true savings provided.
9. Still looking for property for storage of equipment/materials (was previously a land RFP). SMLD is in the process of engaging an engineering firm to take a high-level look at the land behind SMLD buildings and the Town Hall and complete a feasibility study.
10. Board members were reminded that the Light Commissioners Group have scheduled a Zoom meeting on 9/28/23 to discuss municipal solar projects.
11. The town of Groton, MA will be moving to a 100% time-of-use rate for residential customers. Energy charges will be significantly higher during peak periods.

Unfinished Business

- a) ERP Billing Software – The contract with NISC is signed. SMLD will stick with our current mapping and outage management system because it appears to be significantly better than what was offered. Rollout of financials in May 2024. Billing/service in November 2024. Shrewsbury has already rolled out NISC and West Boylston is next so we will have local support. There is an issue with the existing provider, Meridian – they auto-renewed the contract for 1 year. In the past, they always reached out beforehand. Meridian plans to charge liquidated damages for terminating the contract. Stelmach will be meeting with them to discuss further.
- b) 2015A Update – MWECC – Commercial operation scheduled for the end of October. Issues remain with liquid fuel flushing and the natural gas service. Believe they will have resolved soon. Still no penalties from ISO.
- c) Website – Heard from 3 vendors after the RFP, only received 2 proposals. There is a large cost disparity between them. One vendor proposes to use static HTML – they will design, implement, and maintain the website with no updates by SMLD staff allowed. We send them the updates and they bill accordingly. The other vendor (less expensive) - uses WIX which is known to be less flexible. SMLD staff would be trained and required to perform all updates in-house. Curtin asked about delaying choosing a vendor. Stelmach said if they put out the RFP again, one vendor would drop out. Stelmach noted that the first vendor using static HTML would be the best choice and that he is not concerned about updates. Much of the website information such as outage maps, rebate info, and billing are held on linked sites. The SMLD Facebook feed could also be included and used by staff for immediate notices.

New Business

- a) Sterling Fair Report – Mr. Underhill stated that the Sterling Fair effort was very successful. Line crews and LAMB delivered free Wi-Fi at the fair. Police/Fire had their own network, vendor's had their own as well (QR code was given for scanning). The vendors were very impressed and pleased with the Wi-Fi. Calix provided the hardware. Software to manage was new (went live Friday before the Fair). Calix helped at the fair, as well as SELCO. Minor issues worked out. Initially the Wi-Fi routers were too far apart and two had to be relocated. 482 devices connected, even though many were unaware that there was Wi-Fi available. There was a great deal of interest at the Fair booth for LAMB. SMLD crews are to be commended for getting all this accomplished in a relatively short time frame. SELCO did drone footage of the installation. Calix would like to do a press release, as their president/CEO was impressed with LAMB. Overall, lots of praise for the work done by the SMLD/LAMB team. Additionally, Stelmach will do a cost analysis to budget in the future and is considering free Wi-Fi at the Town Common, Memorial Park, and expand it at the town beach.
- b) Fiber Update – Mr. Underhill updated the Board on the number of customers: 296 customers installed. There were 31 installations in August – all while doing the Fair and Northgate. Pass rate is about the same, and the take rate is at about 30%. There are 421 interested. September billing total was \$22,837.70. Crews ran 432 fiber down Chace Hill, Worcester, and Campground. Chace Hill and Wiles must be completed by 9/30/23 per terms of the grant. Most of the fiber has been pulled to Northgate building 2. Still working on getting Sholan Terrace online. SMLD did not receive the ReConnect 4 Grant due to claims that certified financials were not provided. The feeling is that Sterling is not quite rural enough to qualify. Stelmach will continue looking into financial opportunities.
- c) Vehicle Replacement – In 2023, replace the F250 (purchased). The digger is ordered for a late 2024 delivery. The bucket truck needs to get ordered to make delivery for 2025. Will not hit expenses until paid (we do not prepay). Next year, another buck truck order for 2026 delivery. The manager's vehicle will need replacement. The forklift can be put on hold and revisited. 2025 the next digger will be ordered for 2027 delivery. Currently the F350 will not need to be replaced.
- d) YTD Budget (see beginning of minutes).
- e) SMLD Employee Handbook – Jobsite smoking policy is was not addressed. Stelmach provided some examples of policies and has asked the HR company reviewing the handbook for comment. There is nothing in the collective bargaining policy regarding smoking. Curtin recommended rolling out the new policy with the new handbook. Darlington recommended checking the Fire Department policy.
- f) General Manager Probation Period – Curtin commented that it's been an excellent probation period and an excellent hire. Gaining and earning the respect of all employees. Darlington made a motion to move from successful probation to the three year contract, Gonsorcik seconded, no discussion, all in favor. Darlington aye, Curtin aye, Gonsorcik aye. Vote 3-0.

APPROVAL OF PAST MINUTES: Darlington made a motion to approve the 7/25/2023 regular session minutes as written, Gonsorcik seconded, no discussion, all in favor. Darlington aye, Curtin aye, Gonsorcik aye. Vote 3-0.

Customer Comments: Mr. Joseph King attended the meeting had asked about local emission factors. Do solar farms really reduce emissions? Stelmach provided a graph which had been presented at the July board meeting indicating that the majority of Sterling's energy sources are non-carbon. Stelmach noted that SMLD does not retain the environmental attributes of those resources though. The renewable energy credits are typically sold by the generator. SMLD will not pass that cost to the customers at this time.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS AND SCHEDULE NEXT BOARD MEETING: Future agenda items to include unfinished business items on this meeting agenda as well as adding the Employee Handbook. Next meeting October 18, 2023 @ 5 pm.

At 6:37 pm Darlington made a motion to go into Executive Session (1) under M.G.L. Chapter 30A: Section 21(a), (to discuss trade secrets or confidential, competitively sensitive or other proprietary information provided in the course of activities conducted by a governmental body as an energy supplier.) 9.1 Jewett Road Solar. Gonsorcik seconded, no discussion, Roll Call Vote, Gonsorcik aye, Darlington aye, Curtin aye. All in favor.

ATTEST:



Andrew Gonsorcik, Clerk

DATE:

12/5/2023

BOARD APPROVAL FOR RELEASE:

10/18/2023