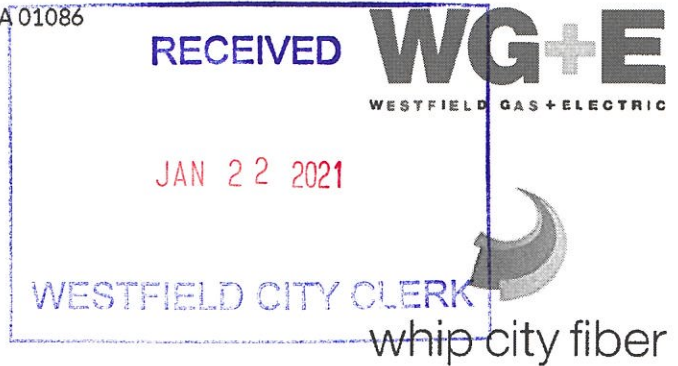


# Westfield Gas & Electric Municipal Light Board Regular Meeting Minutes January 6, 2021



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 Sacco 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 #4 Commissioner, Francis L. Liptak  
Ward #3 Commissioner, Dawn Renaudette  
Ward #5 Commissioner, Vacant  
Ward #6 Commissioner, Robert C. Sacco  
Appointed Commissioner, A. Edward Roman

All Commissioners and other attendees participated remotely.

### Absent:

Present: 6 Absent: 0

## III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE. None due to remote participation.

## IV. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR:

Nominations were open for Chair. A motion was made by Commissioner Liptak, seconded by

Commissioner Kelleher to nominate Commissioner Roman as Chairman of the MLB. No other nominations were received, and nominations were closed.

On a motion by Commissioner Liptak, seconded by Commissioner Kelleher, it was unanimously

VOTED: To elect Commissioner Roman, Chairman of the Municipal Light Board until the January 2022 meeting or until his successor is elected and qualified.

Chairman Roman presided over the meeting.

#### **V. READING OF THE RECORD:**

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

VOTED: To accept the minutes of the December 2, 2020 Regular Session Meeting as presented.

To accept the minutes of the December 2, 2020 Executive Session Meeting as presented, but not release to the public at this time.

#### **VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:**

Brent Bean, City Council President and Liaison to WG+E, addressed the MLB noting that under Old Business the filing of the Ward 5 vacancy is to be discussed. He offered to answer any questions as to the process to be followed at tomorrow night's joint meeting at 6 p.m. to fill the Ward 5 vacancy created by Commissioner Flaherty's resignation. Three individuals have expressed a desire to fill the position. Each of them will speak for 3 minutes to provide an overview of their backgrounds and why they would like to serve. There will be no question and answer period. This would be followed by nominations and then vote in alphabetical order each of the City Council members and the MLB members. Voting will continue until one candidate receives a majority of the full body, which would be 10 votes.

Joseph Mitchell addressed the MLB indicating that he was one of the persons that had submitted his interest in filling the vacant Ward 5 MLB seat. He indicated that he had previously served as the City's Advancement Officer and had appeared before the MLB on various occasions in that capacity. He wanted to meet face to face with the MLB, but due to the current pandemic and the remote meetings is unable to. He wanted to express his level of interest in the position.

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

- a) **Acknowledgement – Fort Meadow E.C.C** - A card from Fort Meadow Early Childhood Center, thanking WG+E for the materials it recently donated to their school.

- b) **Acknowledgement – St. Vincent de Paul Society** – A note was received from Kate Taibbi, President of the St. Vincent de Paul Society thanking WG+E for its generosity in donating 70 plus turkeys for their food bank. She thanked WG+E for its continued support to the Westfield community and the Manager commended his coworkers for their generosity supporting this worthwhile cause.
- c) **Acknowledgement – The YMCA of Greater Westfield** – Letter from Andrea Allard, CEO, thanking WG+E for its donation to the YMCA of Greater Westfield.

### VIII. REPORTS FROM THE GAS & ELECTRIC:

#### A. *Action Required Items*

- a) **Sub-Committee Assignments.** The Manager provided a list of the 2019 MLB Sub-Committee assignments and contact information for each commissioner and City Council liaison. The Chair suggested this matter be tabled until next meeting after the Ward 5 vacancy is filled. Also, he as Chair will serve Ex Officio on all committees so he will not be Chair of Finance subcommittee. All agreed.
- b) **Quarterly Powerline Publication.** The Manager discussed the Powerline Newsletter which is being forwarded to customers in their January bills and posted on the Department's website. The Powerline speaks to the availability of the Department's COVID Relief Program. The Manager's letter also highlighted the MLB's action in allocating \$500,000 to the COVID Relief Program. The Manager stated that the calendar year 2020 rate comparisons shown illustrate that WG+E's rates have been well below other investor-owned utilities locally and in the Boston area. Projected savings was also shown for the remaining winter period as well. The Manager's letter highlighted WG+E's efforts maintaining its electric and gas systems. The letter reported on the challenges during the COVID pandemic and appreciates the efforts of all staff to maintain WG+E's systems and offerings. Note was made of the Diamond Reliable Public Power Provider received from the American Public Power Association which is the highest rating that can be awarded. A similar award was also received from the American Public Gas Association. Commissioner Kelleher inquired as to how much of the COVID Relief money has been expended. The Manager indicated about 60%.
- c) **Outage Management System Upgrade.** The Manager reported that the Department routinely handles numerous large-scale power outages each year, relying on the knowledge and experience of Operations personnel to quickly determine the appropriate course of action, often based upon information received through countless customer phone calls. Although the efforts put forth by our personnel are admirable, newer technologies exist which can automate the outage notification process and allow respondents to address each situation more quickly and efficiently. Several years ago, WG+E invested in automated meter reading technology which, in addition to eliminating the need to have our meters manually read each month, can provide consumption data and rapid notification back to the system when an electric meter loses power. The Department is now prepared to leverage this investment toward the implementation of a highly automated outage management and trouble ticketing system. For the past

several months several key personnel from various disciplines within the Department have worked together to identify the breadth of functionality sought in a proposed system, drafted an agreed to scope of work and sought out recognized vendors capable of providing a turnkey product from which to seek proposed solutions. After advertising a request for proposals, the group interviewed 3 vendors and unanimously selected a preferred vendor. We are now working to finalize a contract with the selected vendor, DataVoice. Commissioner Liptak asked if the new system could indicate to customers how long an outage would take to repair. John Leary, IT Manager, responded that the system allows WG+E to be proactive to detect an outage and tell customers how long it might be out. The system would allow customers to receive updates and information as to the status of an outage.

- d) **Network Management Report.** IT Manager John Leary reported that WG+E's Information Systems Department is responsible for providing a high level of network uptime performance between and within WG+E facilities. In 2020, the network was operating properly 99.94% of the time during regular business hours. On Tuesday August 4, 2020, tropical storm Isaias came through the area with short but sustained winds over 50 mph. Damage was severe throughout Western Massachusetts. We had over 6000 customers affected throughout the area. The Operations Center remained up and active and all customers were restored within 48 hours.
- e) **Telecom Reliability Report** IT Manager Leary reported that his department is also responsible for providing network uptime for internet and data communication services for commercial and industrial customers, the City of Westfield, and WG+E residential customers. The report also includes the Hilltowns and there were some bumps in the road during 2020. There were some challenges related to the fiber line out of the City of Springfield. During 2020 the network operated 99.379% of the required time. Downtime was a result of weather-related incidents and reliability of the Axia/KCST connection using the shared municipal network ring we have in place with HG&E and CELD. We are moving away from this ring infrastructure to an MPLS design for all Hilltowns in 2021. Commissioner Sacco inquired as to where the MPLS fiber lines are running for the Hilltowns. Mr. Leary indicated the Hilltowns will be fed bidirectional once all MPLS work is completed. One line comes out of Springfield north on Rt 91 and the other out of Greenfield on Route 2.
- f) **Monthly Financial Reports.** Finance Manager Kline reported that the monthly year-to-date numbers are very strong and reflect actual amounts. Through the month of November 2020, the Gas Division gain exceeds the original budgetary estimate by \$1M, while the Electric Division gain is currently \$1.7M more than the original forecast. The surpluses have allowed WG+E to fund the COVID Relief efforts and increase funding of the stabilization funds. Chairman Roman indicated strong income and balance sheet and he had no questions. Commissioner Sacco asked what conditions are expected for next year. Mr. Kline indicated he does not anticipate as much excess income because we had deferred some income from 2019 into 2020 which enhanced profitability. This year we will likely put a greater amount of overages into the stabilization funds rather than deferring a significant amount of funds into 2021. Commissioner Rivera asked if customers are provided additional relief through Westfield Warm to help due to the

COVID pandemic. Mr. Kline indicated that customers that contact WG+E, in addition to the relief provided by WG+E, are directed to LIHEAP and the Salvation Army's assistance programs. Commissioner Liptak asked if more information should be provided through the newspaper to let the public know of WG+E's efforts to help the customers and that should be evident prior to the ILOT discussion next year. The Manager indicated that the word is getting out through multiple sources including the Westfield News and social media. Chairman Roman asked how much the bad debt reserves have been increased. Mr. Kline indicated the reserves were increased from approximately \$30k a month to \$60k monthly and our balance is close to \$1m. We expect to be writing off more bad debts this year due to the economic challenges COVID has caused. Chairman Roman indicated he never saw a reserve he didn't like and encouraged continued growth of the Department's reserve for bad debt. Mr. Kline indicated he would continue to speak to MBK about this issue.

**B. Informational Items:**

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

**IX. OLD BUSINESS:**

- a) **COVID-19 Update**. The Manager reported that since early March, WG+E has been addressing the numerous challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has caused. Throughout this effort, the Department has proactively taken steps to keep our customers, employees and their families' safe, while still operating at a high level of service during these uncertain times. COVID-19 updates have been provided to the Municipal Light Board previously. WG+E's Incident Management Team continues to meet remotely on a weekly basis to discuss newly established CDC and state guidelines and requirements, help the Department adapt to the ever-changing situation and maintain high levels of communication with our employees and customers. Our efforts continue to place a priority on health and safety, while maintaining most of the services our customers are used to receiving. An employee self-certification system has now been fully implemented. Terminations due to non-payment remain on hold and outreach efforts continue to be implemented to increase customer awareness of our debt forgiveness program. As of late December, the Department has provided COVID relief bill credits totaling close to one half of the \$500,000 allocated for this purpose. Over \$312k has been expended. This level of activity is in step with expenditure targets at this point of the program. Customer contact efforts will be managed to help ensure our personnel are not overrun with a sudden spike in applications or funding is suddenly depleted. Commissioner Kelleher asked how quickly COVID test results are turned around when an employee is tested. Beth Burns, HR Manager, indicated it varies depending on where the employee receives the test. It can be 2-4 days.

- b) **General Manager Search Process.** Chairman Roman asked how many resumes have been received. Beth Burns indicated 54 were received during the application period which ran from November 23<sup>rd</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>. Commissioner Renaudette stated that the Board has to review resumes individually and not together as a group. Commissioner Sacco agreed and stated each Commissioner will have to pick their top choices and then have Beth Burns correlate them. He further indicated he would prefer to have HR do a preliminary review as to who meets the qualifications specified by the MLB. Commissioner Rivera stated the preliminary review performed by HR should utilize a checklist as to who met the job description criteria. Beth Burns indicated last time she provided a cover sheet that contained check marks next to the specified qualifications each candidate met. Commissioner Kelleher indicated that he felt it was the responsibility of the MLB members to determine qualifications and eliminate candidates and not staff. Commissioner Sacco agreed each MLB member needs to go thru resumes and can use HR's cover sheet as a guide. Chairman Roman agreed with Commissioner Kelleher that it is the MLB members' responsibility to decide on candidates, noting that some experience may not be clear on a resume. Commissioner Rivera indicated he didn't want resumes formally scored by staff but instead the Board would go through them. Commissioner Sacco stated he'd like to use HR's checklist for each candidate as a guide to help his review. He also stated he wants to ensure applicant's identities remain confidential until the MLB narrows the list to a small group of finalists. Due to Open Meeting Law constraints, there is a need for each Commissioner's review to be performed individually prior to the next scheduled meeting and not during a meeting of the MLB. The Manager noted that the MLB will still need to narrow down the number of candidates for the finalist to be interviewed and a search committee of 3 or less could convene in that this number wouldn't represent a quorum of the MLB. Commissioner Sacco indicated that over the next 7 to 10 days each Commissioner should individually review the resumes at the Operations Center and pick up to their top 10 candidates. After that occurs, the MLB will determine the process it will utilize to reduce the number of applicants to a short list to be interviewed. The MLB set January 20, 2021 as the date a 7:00 pm meeting will be held to determine next steps. Chairman Roman indicated that the new Ward 5 Commissioner needs to be included in the candidate selection process.
- c) **Ward 5 MLB Vacancy.** Chair Roman noted that a joint meeting of the MLB and City Council is scheduled for December 7<sup>th</sup> at 6 p.m. by teleconference. The notice posted by the City Clerk notes that each candidate will be given 3 minutes to speak. There are three very qualified candidates, Meghan Kane, Joseph Mitchell and Brian Richards. City Council President Brent Bean had spoken to the process in open session. Commissioner Sacco indicated that he and Chairman Roman had each individually spoken to each candidate and urged the other members to reach out if they wanted to.

**X. NEW BUSINESS:** None.

**XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION:**

On the motion of Commission Sacco, seconded by Commissioner Renaudette and on the basis of a roll call it was:

VOTED: To adjourn the regular meeting of the Municipal Light Board meeting and enter into executive session for the purpose of for the purpose of discussing trade secrets and competitively sensitive information the disclosure of which will adversely affect its ability to conduct business in relation to other entities making, selling or distributing electric power and energy and conduct strategy session and negotiations with nonunion personnel, as noted on the agenda, and not to reconvene the Regular Session after adjournment from Executive Session.

Roman	"aye"
Kelleher	"aye"
Rivera	"aye"
Renaudette	"aye"
Liptak	"aye"
Sacco	"aye"

Motion passed 6-0. 0 absent

Chairman Roman stated that the Municipal Light Board would be entering into executive session for the purpose of trade secrets and competitively sensitive information the disclosure of which will adversely affect its ability to conduct business in relation to other entities making, selling or distributing electric power and energy and conduct strategy session and negotiations with nonunion personnel, as noted on the agenda and would not reconvene the Regular Session after adjournment from Executive Session.

**XII. ADJOURNMENT**

Chairman Roman declared the regular session portion of the meeting adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD.

Attest:

  
A. Edward Roman, Chairman

**Documents Presented at  
 REGULAR SESSION January 6, 2021**

Municipal Light Board Regular Session Meeting Minutes – December 2, 2020			
Municipal Light Board Executive Session Meeting Minutes – December 2, 2020			
Acknowledgement – Fort Meadow Early Childhood Center	Fort Meadow Early Childhood Center		
Acknowledgement – St. Vincent de Paul	from Kate Taibbi, President of the St. Vincent de Paul Society	December 2, 2020	
Acknowledgement – YMCA of Greater Westfield	Andrea L. Allard, CEO	November 24, 2020	
Municipal Light Board Members 2020 – Revised January 22, 2020			
Quarterly Powerline Publication			
Outage Management System Upgrade	Anthony J. Contrino, General Manager	January 6, 2021	
Network Management Annual Report	John Leary, Information Technology Manager / Bruce Richardson Network Manager	January 2021	Information Technology Information Technology Reliability IT-3.0
Telecommunication Services Reliability Report	John Leary, Information Technology Manager	January 2021	Information Technology Telecommunications Provider Strategy ORB-7.0
November 2020 Financial Report	T. Fouche, Accounting Manager	January 6, 2021	Financial Annual & Quarterly Reports
Utility Issues	John W. Welch	January 6, 2021	Regulatory & Governmental Affairs Gas/Electric Regulatory Issues, RGA-1.4; RGA1.5
Utility News/Pulse Line	Beth Burns, HR Coordinator/Records Manager	January 6, 2021	Communications/Customer Service/Community Affairs Media Relations – CCA-1.6
Utility Course Update 2020 Seminars/Workshops	Beth Burns, HR Coordinator/Records Manager	January 6, 2021	Administration and Organization WG+E Training & Development, AO-3.6
COVID 19 Update	Anthony J. Contrino, General Manager	January 6, 2021	Administration and Organization Emergency Situation Management, AO-4.3
State Ethics Commission Advisory 13-1			