



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

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Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

RMLD Citizens Advisory Board

Date: 2023-03-23

Time: 6:00 PM

Building: Reading Municipal Light Building

Location: Winfred Spurr Audio Visual Room

Address: 230 Ash Street

Session: Open Session

Purpose: General Business

Version: Final

Attendees: **Members - Present:**

Vivek Soni, Chair (Reading); Ken Welter, Vice Chair (Lynnfield); George Hooper (Wilmington); Dennis Kelley (Wilmington); Jason Small (North Reading)

Members - Not Present:

Others Present:

RMLD Staff: Gregory Phipps, General Manager; Erica Morse, Executive Assistant; Kathleen Rybak, Operational Assistant

Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Vivek Soni, Chair Vivek Soni Nov 20, 2023
Vivek Soni (Nov 20, 2023 10:42 EST)

Topics of Discussion:

All meeting materials can be found in the RMLD CAB Meeting Packet on the RMLD website.

Call Meeting to Order

Chair Soni called the meeting of the Citizens' Advisory Board (CAB) to order at 6:00 PM and noted the meeting was being audio recorded.

Approval of Minutes

Materials: RMLD Citizens' Advisory Board Packet (attachment 1)

The minutes of the July 28, 2022, meeting were approved as written.

Vice Chair Welter made a **motion**, seconded by Mr. Kelley, that the Citizens' Advisory Board approve the minutes of the July 28, 2022, meeting as written. **Motion Carried: 4:0:1** (4 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstain). *Roll Call: Chair Soni, Aye; Vice Chair Welter, Aye; Mr. Hooper, Abstain; Mr. Kelley, Aye; Mr. Small, Aye.*

Integrated Resources Report

Materials: Integrated Resources Report (attachment 2)

Mr. Phipps presented the Integrated Resources report to the CAB.

Outline (slide 2)

- Discussed the presentation outline, as referenced on slide 2.

Integrated Resource Division Key Drivers (slide 3)

- Discussed IRD's key drivers as outlined on slide 3.
- Discussed RMLD's Charter: Reliable, Low Cost, Non-Carbon (three key aspects)
 - Reliable power is the top priority.
 - Low cost doesn't mean inexpensive, but valuable.
 - Non-carbon is a significant goal for RMLD.
- Non- Carbon
 - RMLD is on track to meet its non-carbon targets for 2030, as noted below.
 - State requirement to source 50% of sales from non-carbon supply.
 - RMLD Policy 30 certificate retirement strategy.
- Current power supply portfolio.
 - RMLD has already achieved over 60% non-carbon compliance if all certificates were retired.
 - Discussed the percentage breakdown of non-carbon sources in the portfolio.
 - Non-Carbon sources include wind, hydro, solar, and nuclear.
- Reliable
 - There is a cost associated with ensuring reliability.
 - The organization is doing a great job in terms of reliability (uptime).
 - Highlighted various key actions taken to ensure reliability:
 - Fulfilling goals related to the distribution function.
 - Working on lines and upgrades.
 - Investments in infrastructure and data analytics.
 - Upgrading and incorporating new technology.
 - Strong line team and maintenance team in place.
- Customer Service
 - Emphasized strong customer service experience.
 - Operating hours of the customer service center are from 7:30 AM to 5:30 PM, Monday through Thursday.
 - Mr. Phipps noted that RMLD is different from other utilities where reaching a real person can be challenging.
- Non-carbon generation to enhance reliability.
 - Discussed the importance of customer engagement.
 - Actively seeking opportunities for in territory generation and storage.
 - RMLD is focused on sourcing new generation from non-carbon sources.

IRD Organization (slide 4)

- Discussed the IRD organization as outlined on slide 4.
- Organizational changes
 - Bill Bullock is the new Director of IRD.
 - Customer service has been reorganized to fall back under IRD.
- Customer service team
 - 5 individuals who are customer-facing and handle customer messaging.
 - Customer communications are tied to IRD's programs.
- Chair Soni asked about differences in roles and responsibilities among IRD roles. Mr. Phipps explained the various positions.
- IRD Specialists: Retail focused.
 - Customer-facing
 - Customer interactions
 - Rebate design
 - Incentive processing

- Customer communication
- IRD Analysts: Wholesale focused.
 - Data intensive role
 - Power supply invoice processing
 - Power supply portfolio and forecast.
- IRD Engineer: Generation focused.
- Overlap between IRD Specialists and Analysis
 - Both roles focus on forecasting, which impacts the entire organization.
 - Rate design happens between the roles, where load and revenue are linked.
- IRD's expanded focus.
 - Will include projects as well as industrial residential programs.
- IRD Analyst recruitment
 - Targeting candidates outside the utility industry (finance or insurance).
- IRD Engineer recruitment
 - Role has been open for over a year.
 - Looking to fill this role due to the new focus on within-territory generation.
- Intern Recruitment
 - Recruit 3 interns for the summer months and beyond.
 - Emphasized the availability of solid candidates.
- Generating interest from candidates by positioning roles effectively (LinkedIn etc.)
- Chair Soni noted the importance of timing in recruiting potential candidates.

RMLD Integrated Resource Planning (slide 5)

- Discussed IRD resource planning as outlined on slide 5.
- Organization Charter
 - Discussed RMLD's key drivers and core principles.
 - Reliable, low-cost, non-carbon.
- Mission Statement
 - Update over the course of the year to align with core principles.
- Forecasting
 - Everything in the organization ties together through load (kWh sales), starting with forecasting.
 - Discussed the significance of forecasting within the organization.
- Load Forecasting
 - Includes load forecasting at a macro level and on a customer class basis.
 - Data analytics plays a crucial role in handling load forecasts
 - Driven by certain assumptions that are essential for planning.
 - Impacts various aspects of RMLD operations.
 - Energy efficiency programs
 - Incentives
 - Customer engagement.
- Electrification & Distribution Network
 - Discussed options and implications related to electrification.
 - Will take several years to accommodate increased load due to electrification.

- Transition to electric fleet
 - Noted the possibility of adjusting the timing of deliveries.
 - Mentioned the expected travel distances for electric vehicles.
- 34.5 KV Circuit
 - Mentioned a 34.5 kv circuit in Wilmington located across Route 93.
 - Connects to an area with one of RMLD's storage battery systems.
- EV Adoption and Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP)
 - Highlighted the impact of EV and ASHP adoption on the organization.
 - Adjustments in forecasting will be required.
 - These changes will take more than a decade to fully materialize.
- Peak Forecasting
 - Chair Soni inquired about peak forecasting and management.
 - The IRD team is responsible for peak forecasting.
 - RMLD prepares for peaks by charging the single battery storage system.
 - Automating the forecasting process to enhance accuracy.
 - The IRD team still can use their expertise as well as forecast tools.
- Solar Energy and Customer Engagement
 - Mr. Kelley asked about excess solar energy from residential customers.
 - RMLD buys excess solar energy back at an energy rate.
 - There is strong incentive program in place.
- Discussed the possibility of implementing hourly time-of-use rates and the integration of storage systems.
- Software Development - New Hampshire Electric Cooperative
 - Plan to have access to their software.
 - Exploring options for charging and discharging.
- MDM (Meter Data Management) / AMI (Advanced Metering Infrastructure)
 - Mentioned the need for an MDM system.
 - Discussed the ongoing development of the AMI system.
 - Emphasized the interconnectedness of these initiatives within the IRD loop.

Hydro Renewal – Gravity (slide 6)

- Discussed the Gravity Hydro Renewal as outlined on slide 6.
- Vice Chair Welter noted this item was approved at the previous BoC meeting.
- Project Background and Update
 - Both facilities are in Connecticut.
 - RMLD has been purchasing power from the Wyre Wynd facility for over ten years.
 - The contract expired last summer due to licensing delays caused by COVID 19.
 - Currently in a 36-month contract while awaiting license renewal.
 - Looking to extend the contract and combine it with Connecticut #5.
- Environmental Considerations
 - Highlighted the importance of licensing regarding fish passages.
 - Gravity is responsible for the environmental aspects
 - Required to purchase from reputable sources capable of maintaining the assets.
- Contract Details
 - Both facilities are associated with Gravity Renewables.
 - Noted the combined total output of the facilities.
 - Important to balance hydro, wind, and solar power sources geographically.

- Contract Terms
 - Chair Soni asked about the contract terms and the annual increase.
 - 2% annual increase with a longer duration due to the 40-year licenses.
 - The contract extends to 2055.
- Due Diligence and Environmental Management
 - Mr. Hooper asked about due diligence (drought seasons and other factors).
 - The facilities are over 100 years old, with evolving environmental conditions.
- Gravity Renewables
 - Excellent track record
 - National presence
 - Experienced team in managing assets and environmental considerations.
- Environmental Considerations – Fish Ladders
 - Chair Soni asked about measures to make the turbines fish friendly.
 - Mr. Phipps confirmed that Gravity is considering alternative turbine designs.
 - Gravity is committed to environmentally and economically friendly solutions.
 - The company will avoid traditional fish ladders if possible.
- License Confirmation
 - Chair Soni asked if the contract was contingent on receiving the license.
 - The contract was structured to wait for the license to be granted.
 - Initially a 36-month term
 - The contract is waiting for the official license.
- Certificates and Compliance
 - Mr. Hooper asked if the facilities have associated certificates.
 - Both facilities generate certificates.
- Role of certificates in RMLD operations.
 - Certificates serve both an economic and compliance function.
 - Used to comply with RMLD's internal policy 30.
 - MA state law requires RMLD to retire 50% of their certificates by 2030.
 - Starting in 2030, RMLD will only buy certificates associated with energy.

Mr. Hooper made a **motion**, seconded by Vice Chair Welter, that the Citizens' Advisory Board recommend that the Board of Commissioners vote to accept the General Manager's recommendation to execute a contract with Gravity Renewables for energy, including associated certificates, from Gravity CT #5 and Aspinook Wyre Wynd hydro facilities, contingent on appropriate environmental due diligence. **Motion Carried: 5:0:0** (5 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstain). *Roll Call: Chair Soni, Aye; Vice Chair Welter, Aye; Mr. Hooper, Aye; Mr. Kelley, Aye; Mr. Small, Aye.*

3Q 2022 Certificates Quarterly Report (slide 7)

- Discussed the 3Q 2022 Certificates Quarterly Report as outlined on slide 7.
- Certificate Operations
 - Certificates operate on a six-month delay.
 - Actions in the third quarter of 2022 affect the first quarter of 2023.
- Certificate Strategy
 - Maintain a balance of certificates by acquiring them from various sources.
 - Retire a portion of the certificates each quarter to ensure compliance with policy 30.
- Certificate Sales and Retirement
 - In the previous year, RMLD retired 26% of all sales.
 - Last summer had a lower balance due to increased sales from warm weather.
 - The previous year's acquisition of certificates was higher to align with their sales.

- This year retirement increased to 29%.
- Certificates represent a substantial portion of RMLD's portfolio's value.
 - \$2m in certificates on a \$65m portfolio

General Manager Report

Mr. Phipps presented a GM update to the CAB.

Personnel Update

- Team morale and performance
 - Overall positive morale within the organization.
 - The team is working well together.
 - There is a sense of energy and optimism.
 - The line team has been busy with construction and is performing admirably.
- Positive aspects contributing to the team's morale.
 - System reliability (both physical and cybersecurity)
 - Success of RMLD's power supply portfolio.

New Customers

- Highlighted the focus on recruiting new customers.
 - Includes those involved in prototype demo units and manufacturing.
 - Plans for a pilot production facility in the Ballardvale area.
 - Emphasized goal of promoting in-territory generation to support the mission.
- RMLD's rates are very competitive.
- Highlighted the positive relationships between RMLD with the towns they serve.

Project Momentum

- General
 - RMLD continues to have momentum in various projects.
 - Highlighted battery storage projects that are moving forward smoothly.
- Maple Meadow project
 - Aims to develop a 10 MW solar site on a landfill.
 - Vice Chair Welter asked about Methane gas on the site.
 - Mr. Phipps said no and explained that it was a burning landfill.
 - Progress in obtaining EPA approval to acquire the property without historical liabilities.

Customer Survey

- Results
 - The initial results are positive.
 - There is an increase in customer satisfaction.
 - Emphasized awareness of air source pumps
 - Mentioned ongoing education efforts.
 - Noted the need for further work on solar awareness.

Financial Audit

- Schedule
 - The financial audit is scheduled to begin in March and be completed in May.
 - The same firm as in previous years will be conducting the audit.

Staffing and hiring

- Hiring Plans
 - Chair Soni inquired about hiring plans and the goal to hire 10 more people.
 - RMLD will likely reach around 90 employees, out of a budgeted 100.
 - RMLD is being cautious with hiring.
 - Some of the hiring is to fill positions left vacant due to retirements and departures.

Resolution for Kathleen Rybak

The CAB presented a resolution to recognize Kathleen Rybak for her dedicated service to RMLD.

- Mr. Hooper expressed his gratitude and appreciation for Kathleen's assistance during his time as chair, highlighting her efficiency and helpful reminders.
- Vice Chair Welter thanked Kathleen for her assistance in onboarding and helping him quickly adapt to his role.
- Mr. Kelley expressed his gratitude, noting Kathleen's thoroughness and her ability to keep the board on track.
- Mr. Small reiterated the sentiments shared by the other members, recognizing Kathleen's contributions to the CAB.
- The GM and the CAB members unanimously expressed their appreciation for Kathleen Rybak's dedicated service, efficiency, and support.

Chair Soni read the resolution, seconded by Mr. Hooper, that the RMLD Citizens Advisory Board thanks Kathleen Rybak for her dedicated service to the CAB and the great support to the Chairs of the CAB for the past 10 years in running the CAB meetings. She has been very efficient and helped keep us on track with the CAB. We wish her all the best. **Motion**

Carried: 5:0:0 (5 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstain). *Roll Call: Chair Soni, Aye; Vice Chair Welter, Aye; Mr. Hooper, Aye; Mr. Kelley, Aye; Mr. Small, Aye.*

Scheduling

- The next CAB meeting will be held on April 13th at 5:30 PM.
- Mr. Hooper will be covering the next Board of Commissioners meeting.

Adjournment

Mr. Hooper made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Kelley. **Motion Carried: 5:0:0** (5 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstain). *Roll Call: Chair Soni, Aye; Vice Chair Welter, Aye; Mr. Hooper, Aye; Mr. Kelley, Aye; Mr. Small, Aye.*

The CAB meeting adjourned at 7:16 PM

As approved on November 15, 2023.