



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

RMLD Board of Commissioners

Date: 2022-11-30

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:**

Marlena Bitá, Chair; Philip Pacino, Vice Chair.

Remote Attendees: John Stempeck, Commissioner; David Talbot, Commissioner.

Members - Not Present:

Robert Coulter, Commissioner

Others Present:

Citizens' Advisory Board Representative: Ken Welter (Lynnfield).

RMLD Staff: Gregory Phipps, General Manager; Erica Morse, Executive Assistant; Julie Blackley, Communications Manager; Benjamin Bloomenthal, Director of Finance & Accounting.

RMLD Liasons: Joseph McDonagh, and Joseph Carnahan (Finance Committee)

Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Philip B. Pacino Secretary Pro Tem

Topics of Discussion:

Call Meeting to Order

Chair Bitá called the RMLD Board of Commissioner's (BoC) meeting to order at 6:05 PM and announced that the meeting would be held in person, remotely on zoom, and streamed live on RCTV and YouTube.

Opening Remarks and Introductions

Chair Bitá read the RMLD BoC Code of Conduct and asked all remote attendees to identify themselves. Vice Chair Pacino served as Secretary at the meeting.

Mr. Stempeck and Mr. Talbot participated in the meeting remotely on Zoom. Finance Committee Liaisons, Mr. McDonagh, and Mr. Carnahan attended the meeting and had no comment.

Executive Session

Due to scheduling conflicts, no executive session was held.

Public Comment

Citizens' Advisory Board

There was no comment from the Citizens' Advisory Board Lynnfield Representative.

Liaisons to the RMLD Board

There was no comment from the RMLD liaisons.

Public Comment

Philip Pacino expressed condolences to the family of Jim O'Leary. Jim O'Leary was a former commissioner on the RMLD BoC and Reading Finance Committee (1987-2022).

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The regular session meeting minutes were approved as presented.

Vice Chair Pacino made a **motion**, seconded by Chair Bita, that the RMLD Board of Commissioners approve the minutes of the May 3, 2022, and May 23, 2022, meetings on the recommendation of the General Manager. **Motion Carried: 3:1:1** (3 in favor; 1 abstained; 1 absent) Roll Call: Chair Bita, Aye; Vice Chair Pacino, Aye; Commissioner Stempeck, Abstained; Commissioner Talbot, Aye. Commissioner Coulter was absent from the meeting.

Commissioner Stempeck was experiencing technical difficulties at this time.

Communications Update

Julie Blackley, Communications Manager, presented a communications update to the BoC.

- Ms. Blackley discussed the newly redesigned newsletter, which is more professional and cleaner.
- Ms. Blackley noted the high open rate of 55% for residential subscribers and 39% for business subscribers, well above the industry average of 36%
- Ms. Blackley highlighted media coverage from the previous month, including Greg Phipps becoming the General Manager.
- Ms. Blackley reported a steady organic social media growth of 237% over the previous month.
- Ms. Blackley stated that Facebook was used for program updates and job advertisements, with a goal of assisting recruitment.
- Ms. Blackley reported on a joint initiative with the Reading Fire Department addressing electrical and fire hazards during winter, with plans to pilot similar initiatives in additional towns.
- Ms. Blackley discussed the customer survey awarded to Great Blue Research, scheduled for launch in early 2023, starting with residential and followed by commercial surveys.
- Ms. Blackley announced the addition of a translation button on the RMLD website for increased accessibility.
- Chair Bita inquired about the newsletter's inclusion in paper bills; Ms. Blackley clarified that it is only available online.
- Ms. Blackley mentioned the availability of a new historical calendar, which generated excitement.

General Manager's Report

Gregory Phipps, General Manager, provided a report to the BoC.

Website Communications

- Mr. Phipps discussed improving communication with customers and updating RMLD's website for a better digital experience.
- Mr. Phipps emphasized a focus on education and streamlined customer experience.

Talent Acquisition and Talent Management

- Mr. Phipps provided key personnel and human resources updates.
- Mr. Phipps stressed the importance of placing employees in the right roles with proper training.
- Mr. Phipps reported five internal promotions, two new hires, and 15 open positions being filled. An offer has been extended for the Director of Human Resources.

Employee Survey Update

- Mr. Phipps shared results from the first quarterly employee survey.
- The survey was focused on what the company should continue doing and what should be changed.
- Mr. Phipps said that the intention is to take the key themes from the survey and develop responses to them.
- One key theme that came up repeatedly was the need for more communication, but the fact that communication has improved was widely acknowledged.
- Mr. Phipps emphasized that a significant number of employees responded, and many of those responses were signed rather than anonymous. This demonstrates improved communication and increased trust within the organization.

Customers

- Ms. Phipps mentioned early discussions with two new apartment buildings, potentially adding 500-1000 residential customers in RMLD's service territory.
- Mr. Phipps confirmed RMLD is actively engaged in attracting new customers, including five new industrial customers, which could add up to 80 megawatts of new load by 2025.
- RMLD appeals to manufacturing companies who use a significant amount of energy, because of the Department's relatively low rates, and ability to accommodate and encourage new customers to come in.
- Mr. Phipps discussed the new Wilmington substation and possible modifications to accommodate new load growth.
- Mr. Phipps emphasized the pursuit of grant funding for infrastructure investments and rate stability.

Winter Reliability

- Mr. Phipps addressed winter reliability concerns, emphasizing that RMLD is aware and prepared for potential load reductions and rolling blackouts. RMLD has a procedure in place that is reviewed by ISO New England twice a year.
- Chair Bitz asked about a notification timeline. Mr. Phipps responded that RMLD would typically be aware about a week in advance.
- Mr. Phipps mentioned that communication mechanisms would be updated to inform customers of any necessary load reduction.
- Mr. Phipps emphasized that the topic of winter reliability is being discussed not to cause alarm or concern, but to let the audience know RMLD is aware and remains vigilant.
- Vice Chair Pacino asked about additional load affecting the taxpayers. Mr. Phipps confirmed that new customers and load growth will bring additional tax revenue and economic development to towns within RMLD's service area.

APPA Legislative

Mr. Phipps presented a request for approval to attend the APPA Legislative Rally in 2023.

- Mr. Phipps highlighted the importance of state and federal regulatory and legislative activities on utility operations, including RMLD's.
- Mr. Phipps mentioned RMLD's adherence to MA Department of Public Utilities policies and the influence of the 2021 climate bill (S9) on molding RMLD's Policy 30.
- RMLD is a member of the American Public Power Association (APPA) and participates in their legislative emphasis through the New England Public Power Association (NEPPA).
- Mr. Phipps explained the goal is to influence legislative items at both federal and state levels to benefit RMLD and its customers.
- Mr. Stempeck inquired about APPA's position on bond sequestration; Mr. Phipps directed him to the APPA website's policy positions page for details on each legislative item.
- Mr. Phipps added that General Managers attending conferences engage with local Senators and House of Representatives members to influence regional and federal items.

Vice Chair Pacino made a **motion**, seconded by Chair Bitz, that the RMLD Board of Commissioners approve Gregory Phipps's travel to, and attendance at, the APPA Legislative Rally in Washington DC, from Monday, February 27, 2023, to Wednesday March 1, 2023. **Motion Carried: 4:0:1** (4 in favor; 0 abstained; 1 absent) Roll Call: Chair Bitz, Aye; Vice Chair Pacino, Aye; Commissioner Stempeck, Aye; Commissioner Talbot, Aye. Commissioner Coulter was absent from the meeting.

Policy Review

Policy 10 Fraud

Mr. Phipps presented the new fraud policy (Policy 10) to the BoC.

- Mr. Phipps introduced a new fraud policy, which stemmed from earlier discussions at a commission meeting last spring and a fraud memo dating back to 2010.
- The purpose of implementing this policy was to fulfill the request of financial auditors who asked RMLD to put a more formal policy in place relative to fraud. This policy would cover employees, leadership, Commissioners, and subcontractors who interact with RMLD.
- The scope of the policy is broad, but it specifically focuses on defining fraudulent activities.
- Mr. Phipps mentioned that considerable time was spent working through the definition of fraud, as it was not a straightforward task. The policy was developed with the help of internal opinions and legal review to ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness.
- One of the key elements of the policy is the inclusion of whistleblower protection, as requested during the spring meeting. This provision can be found in Section 8 of the policy.

Vice Chair Pacino made a **motion**, seconded by Commissioner Stempeck, to move that the RMLD Board of Commissioners approve Policy 10: Fraud (Revision 0), as presented, on the recommendation of the General Manager. **Motion Carried: 4:0:1** (4 in favor; 0 abstained; 1 absent) Roll Call: Chair Bitá, Aye; Vice Chair Pacino, Aye; Commissioner Stempeck, Aye; Commissioner Talbot, Aye. Commissioner Coulter was absent from the meeting.

Mr. Stempeck left the meeting following the Policy 10 discussion.

Policy 20 Family Medical Leave Act

Mr. Phipps presented Policy 20 to the BoC.

- The main objective of the update was to reflect recent changes at both the state and federal level concerning parental leave, Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and Massachusetts law.
- Mr. Phipps noted that the update did not change the context of the policy but made it more consistent with current laws and regulations.
- The policy revisions aim to broaden and clarify certain sections, such as Section 1B, where FMLA and Massachusetts law were added to clarify the prevailing laws and regulations used to interpret and implement Policy 20.
- Mr. Phipps emphasized that these changes were insignificant and mostly administrative.
- The policy is crucial for the organization and ensures consistency with current laws, allowing for smoother interpretation and implementation as laws change over time.

Vice Chair Pacino made a **motion**, seconded by Chair Bitá, that the RMLD Board of Commissioners approve Policy 20: Family Medical Leave Act (Revision 4), as presented, on the recommendation of the General Manager. **Motion Carried: 3:0:3** (3 in favor; 2 absent) Roll Call: Chair Bitá, Aye; Vice Chair Pacino, Aye; Commissioner Talbot, Aye. Commissioners Stempeck and Coulter were absent from the meeting.

Policy 26 CDL Alcohol and Drug Testing

Mr. Phipps presented Policy 26 to the BoC.

- Mr. Phipps explained that the policy has served its purpose and will continue to do so, with no recommended changes except for some minor formatting revisions. Content-wise, the policy remains unchanged.
- Chair Bita asked whether the policy had been reviewed less than a year ago and if the reviews were conducted on a rolling basis. Mr. Phipps clarified that reviews are done every three years, and the policy Chair Bita is referencing is the Drug-Free Workplace Policy (Policy 6).
- Mr. Phipps added that Policy 26 is reviewed during union negotiations and is included in union contracts.

Vice Chair Pacino made a **motion**, seconded by Commissioner Talbot, that the RMLD Board of Commissioners approve Policy 26: CDL Alcohol and Drug Testing (Revision 1), with no changes, expect for minor formatting revisions, as presented, on the recommendation of the General Manager. **Motion Carried: 3:0:3** (3 in favor; 2 absent) Roll Call: Chair Bita, Aye; Vice Chair Pacino, Aye; Commissioner Talbot, Aye. Commissioners Stempeck and Coulter were absent from the meeting.

Scheduling

- The BoC discussed the upcoming meeting and warrant schedule.
- The next BoC meeting will be held on December 14th, 2022, at 7:30 PM.

Adjournment

At 6:52 PM Vice Chair Pacino made a motion, seconded by Chair Bita, that that the Board of Commissioners adjourn regular session. Note: Roll call vote required.

Materials

All meeting materials can be found on the RMLD website (www.RMLD.com) in the BoC meeting packet.

Board Materials Available but Not Discussed

Accounts Payable / Payroll Questions through November 25, 2022
 July 2022 Financial Statements
 Surplus and Scrap Material Report October 2022

A true copy of the RMLD Board of Commissioners minutes
 As approved by a majority the Commission.

Philip B Pacino
Philip B Pacino (Jun 20, 2023 11:04 EDT)

Philip B. Pacino, Secretary Pro Tem
 RMLD Board of Commissioners

As approved on June 15, 2023