



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

2018-09-22 14:05

Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

RMLD Citizens Advisory Board

Date: 2023-04-13

Time: 5:30 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); Jason Small (North Reading).

Members - Not Present:

George Hooper (Wilmington); Dennis Kelley (Wilmington)

Others Present:

RMLD Staff: Gregory Phipps, General Manager; Bill Bullock, Director of Integrated Resources; Julie Blackley, Communications Manager; Erica Morse, Executive Assistant.

Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Vivek Soni, Chair *Vivek Soni* Nov 20, 2023
Vivek Soni (Nov 20, 2023 10:41 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 5:30 PM and noted the meeting was being audio recorded.

RMLD Customer Survey Report

Materials: CAB meeting packet, (attachment 1)

Ms. Blackley presented the Customer Survey Report on behalf of Great Blue Research. Due to a scheduling conflict, Great Blue Research could not present the report.

Harnessing the power of data to help clients achieve organizational goals (slide 3)

- Provided information on Great Blue Research as outlined on slide 3.

Project Overview (slide 5)

- Discussed the recent survey conducted by Great Blue Research as outlined on slide 5.
- Discussed key points from the report.
 - Objectives
 - Methodology
 - Respondent demographics
- Highlighted areas of assessment
 - RMLD's ability to serve customers.
 - Identify areas for improvement.
 - Ways to Increase engagement.

Areas of Investigation (slide 6)

- Highlighted key areas.
 - Residential and commercial customer satisfaction.
 - Communication preferences.
 - Awareness of rebate programs.
 - Interest in renewable energy options.

Research Methodology Snapshot (slide 7)

- Discussed the Research Methodology Snapshot as outlined on slide 7.
- Question asked relative to number of meters.
 - Chair Soni asked how many meters RMLD has.
 - Mr. Phipps responded over 31,500 meters.
- Mentioned significance of research dates
 - Stressed the significance of the research dates relative to rate complaints.
 - Research dates coincided with RMLD's rate increase announcement.

Respondent Snapshot – Residential (slide 8)

- Discussed the Residential Respondent Snapshot as outlined on slide 8.
- Question relative to snapshot representation
 - Chair Soni asked how representative the snapshot was of the 31K meters.
 - The majority of respondents were 55+
 - This is slightly skewed because older adults are more likely to participate.

Research Methodology Snapshot – Commercial (slide 9)

- Discussed the Residential Methodology Snapshot as outlined on slide 9.
- Commercial customer representation
 - Commercial customers represent a smaller group compared to residential ones.
- Question relative to confidence level verses margin of error in the survey results
 - Vice Chair Welter asked about the high confidence level/significant margin of error.
 - Ms. Blackley noted that the numbers were within the normal margin of error.

Respondent Snapshot – Commercial (slide 10)

- Discussed the Commercial Respondent Snapshot as outlined on slide 10.
- Highlighted the survey sample.
 - 80% of commercial respondents were small companies (< 15 people).
 - Represented a relatively small portion of the load.
 - Commercial data was valuable, but not as crucial as residential for the survey.
- Discussed data implications.
 - Need to understand specific customer needs.
 - Need to educate customers about rebates and related matters.
 - Need for more in-depth research.
 - Need for further outreach to key accounts beyond the survey.
- Question relative to survey frequency
 - Vice Chair Welter asked about the frequency of conducting such surveys.
 - RMLD intends to conduct once every two years.
 - The goal is to establish a trend and allow RMLD to obtain increasingly better data.
- Highlighted commercial customer engagement.
 - Chair Soni emphasized the importance of engaging with commercial clients.
 - Mr. Phipps noted the need to understand both commercial and industrial classes.
 - Together, these classes account for more than half of the total load.
 - Need to engage with smaller commercial clients.

- Expressed interest in improving the engagement process.

Reliability Drives Service Ratings (slide 12)

- Discussed RMLD's service ratings as outlined on slide 12.
- Highlighted customer satisfaction
 - Overall satisfaction with RMLD is significantly higher than the national average.
 - Noted areas of high satisfaction and areas of improvement.
- Question relative to lower rate ratings.
 - Vice Chair Welter asked if the lower rate scores were due to the messaging issue.
 - Mr. Phipps responded it's possible; RMLD has been in a decade of flat rates.
- Discussed customer consideration of rate comparison.
 - Mr. Phipps said, relatively speaking, RMLD rates are low.
 - Vice Chair Welter noted RMLD should be considered in relation to their alternatives.
 - Mr. Phipps noted that RMLD didn't communicate the comparison until after the fact.
 - Mr. Small asked if customers have thought about RMLD relative to the alternatives.
 - Ms. Blackley noted that certain customers do not care about the comparison, only that their bill increased, even if it's a small amount.
- Discussed customer perception of bill increases.
 - Mr. Phipps noted that RMLD takes any rate increase seriously.
 - RMLD is focused on low-cost rates.
 - Bills are going to increase due to rising loads and costs.
 - Customers care more about their total bills instead of rates.
 - Mr. Small noted that commercial customers are likely looking at other territories.
- Discussed rate communications.
 - Mr. Phipps stressed that messaging is crucial.
 - The second press release, which announced a lower rate increase, came after the survey data collection.

Key Study Findings: Boost Awareness of Rebates & Program Offerings (slide 13)

- Discussed findings relative to awareness of rebates and program offerings for residents as outlined on slide 13.
- Highlighted what was learned, the takeaways, and actionable strategy.
- Question relative to unexpected outcomes
 - Chair Soni inquired about any unexpected outcomes from the results.
 - There was a discrepancy in the numbers regarding solar interest.
 - Great Blue Research stated 19.9% of residential customers are interested in solar.
 - The actual number of people interested is ~ 300-400.
 - This is considered significant even if it's not a majority.

Key Study Findings: Offer Ability to Opt-in to Text Message Notifications (slide 14)

- Discussed the key study findings relative to customer interest in receiving text message notifications as outlined on slide 14.
- Highlighted the results.
- Noted that implementation for opt-in messaging is planned for 2024.

Key Study Findings: Further Educate Customers of Benefits of ASHPs (slide 15)

- Discussed the key study findings relative to customer education on ASHP benefits, as outlined on slide 15.
- Highlighted what was learned, the takeaways, and actionable strategy.
- Concerns raised around survey question.
 - Mr. Phipps raised concerns about the framing of the survey question.
 - Need to capture customers considering ASHPs when replacing their furnace.

- Presented ASHP data
 - Mr. Phipps stated that 1,200 furnaces are replaced annually.
 - There has been an average of 270-300 ASHP adoptions over the past two years.
 - Chair Soni said national data suggests ASHP sales are surpassing gas systems.
 - Indicated that the survey data might be lower than actual market trends.
 - Mr. Phipps attributed the discrepancy to potential double-counting of gas systems.
 - Mr. Bullock added that MassSave's installations are not always accounted for.
 - Estimated installations might be closer to 400-450.
 - Vice Chair Welter mentioned his personal experience being overlooked in RMLD's count but noted he was grateful for the rebates received.

Of Those Who Provided Poor Ratings, Majority Cite High Cost as Reason (slide 16)

- Discussed the reasons for poor ratings, as outlined on slide 16.
- High rates cited as the reason for poor ratings.
 - Of the 200 customers who provided poor ratings, high rates were cited as the reason.
 - 40% of residential customers cited high rates as the reason.
 - 20% of commercial customers cited high rates as the reason.
- The timing of the survey relative to implemented rate increase.
 - Chair Soni pointed out that this feedback was taken in January.
 - Mr. Phipps noted this coincided with the announcement of the rate increase.
 - Not satisfied feedback from 6% of customers is very low.

Increased Satisfaction with Customer Service (Slide 17)

- Discussed data on increased satisfaction with Customer Service as outlined on slide 17.

Dissatisfied Due to Poor Communication and Customer Service (Slide 18)

- Discussed reasons for customer dissatisfaction as outlined on slide 18.
- Emphasized that the sample size for dissatisfied customers was small.

Find Email Newsletters and Website Valuable (Slide 19)

- Highlighted customers preferred communication methods as outlined on slide 19.
 - Mentioned RMLD's new presence on Facebook.
- Question relative to demographics
 - Chair Soni asked if there might be a demographic aspect to this preference.
 - Demographics may play a role.
- Emphasized the value of the newsletter, noting above-average engagement rates.

Want to Receive More Outage Restoration Updates (slide 20)

- Discussed customer preferences regarding outage updates, as outlined on slide 20.
- Discussion on recent outage
 - Chair Soni mentioned a recent outage incident.
 - Ms. Blackley confirmed its immediate report on Twitter.
 - Mr. Phipps specified details of the outage, which was caused by a tree,

Residents More Interested in Text Messages from RMLD (slide 21)

- Discussed customer interest in text messages from RMLD, as outlined on slide 21.

Email and Text Best for Peak Time Notifications (slide 22)

- Discussed customer preference for Peak Time Notifications, as outlined on slide 22.
- Highlighted the implementation of Opt-In System
 - Results demonstrated an urgent need to increase opt-ins as a goal for summer.

- The new text system aims to facilitate this.
- The overall goal is to get more participation in the Shred the Peak Program.

Some Aware of Payment Assistant Options (slide 23)

- Discussed customer awareness of payment assistance options, as outlined on slide 23.
- Noted COVID 19 payment pattern.
 - During COVID-19, there was a shift in payment patterns.
- Discussed payment patterns.
 - The majority of payments are made within 90 days.
 - There are few shut-offs reported.
 - Mr. Small noted seasonal differences in payment timelines.

More Residents Receiving Rebates than Businesses (slide 24)

- Discussed breakdown of customers receiving rebates, as outlined on slide 24.

Find Time to Restore Power Acceptable (slide 25)

- Discussed customer responses to outage restore times. as outlined on slide 25.

Increase in knowledge of ASHPs (slide 26)

- Discussed customer interest and knowledge around ASHPs, as outlined on slide 26.
- Emphasized increasing awareness of ASHPs.

Majority Unlikely to Install Solar Panels (slide 27)

- Discussed customer likelihood of installing Solar Panels, as outlined on slide 27.

Unlikely to Participate in Renewable Choice Program (slide 28)

- Discussed residential customer low likelihood of participation in Renewable Choice Program, as outlined on slide 28.
- Noted further effort is needed to increase participation.

Unlikely to Participate in Renewable Choice Program (slide 29)

- Discussed commercial customer low likelihood of participation in Renewable Choice Program, as outlined on slide 29.
- Noted further effort is needed to increase participation.

Anticipate Future Use of Home Energy Assessment (slide 30)

- Discussed future customer use of Home Energy Assessment, as outlined on slide 30.

Businesses Less Likely to Participate in EV and Solar Rebate Program (slide 31)

- Discussed likelihood of customer participation in EV and Solar Rebate Programs, as outlined on slide 31.

Some Interest in Time of Use Rates (slide 32)

- Discussed customer interest in Time of Use Rates, as outlined on slide 32.
- Half of residential and commercial customers understand "time of use" rates.

Considerations (slide 34 and 35)

- Discussed study considerations, as outlined on slides 34 and 25.
- Highlighted study recommendations
 - Increase awareness of rebate programs.
 - Introduce text messaging.

- Further educate customers on ASHPs

Discussion on Time of Use Rates

- Discussed metering system.
 - Mr. Phipps stated that RMLD's limited metering system hampers aggressive promotion of time of use rates.
 - A new system is in the pipeline to facilitate this.
- Highlighted reasons for disinterest in time of use rates
 - Discussed potential reasons for disinterest in time of use rates.
 - Disinterest is high among commercial customers, mainly small businesses.

State Initiatives on Metering Systems

- Chair Soni referenced the GRID Management Advisory Committee (GMAC) meeting.
- Mr. Phipps mentioned updates on grant applications tied to metering systems.
- Mr. Phipps noted the importance of staying engaged in state-level discussions.

Communication Strategies

- Highlighted the need for more targeted communication with commercial customers.
- RMLD is making an effort to better customize commercial newsletters.

Previous 2020 Survey

- Chair Soni inquired about follow-ups from the 2020 survey.
- 2020 Survey Follow-Ups
 - The previous survey set the stage for Policy 30.
 - Increased coordination with the customer service team for consistent messaging
 - The last survey set benchmarks. The current survey is more action oriented.

Wrap-up and Action Plan

- Immediate follow-ups have begun based on the survey.
- Emphasized the need for continued action.
- Chair Welter's question relative to margin of error will be addressed at the BoC meeting.

Hydro Quebec (HQ) Update

Materials: CAB meeting packet, (attachment 2)

Mr. Bullock provided an update on HQ to the RMLD CAB.

Hydro Quebec (HQ) (non-carbon) (slide 1)

- Discussed current transmission capacity and contract.
 - Provided an overview of the current energy contract.
 - RMLD has use rights to ~ 9.9 MW of transmission capacity from HQ.
 - (5.623 MW Firm).
 - Capacity was sold to an energy provider for use in the forward capacity market.
 - RMLD would receive an energy contract in return.
- Highlighted HQ background
 - Provides 10% of New England's Energy Supply (Electricity).
 - Chair Soni noted that HQ likely wants to provide more than 10%.
 - RMLD wants to build a strong direct relationship with HQ.
- Discussed new proposal highlights.
 - Discussed new proposal details.
 - HQ presented the best offer among various parties.
 - Energy rates are significantly lower than current rates.
 - Includes clean energy standard certificates, which can be sold.
 - RMLD will still sell its use rights but now will get energy in return.

- RMLD now has the option to buy energy and certificates at a discounted rate.
- Discussed the historical context.
 - Historically, RMLD would sell its use rights without receiving energy in return.
 - RMLD has been renewing these transmission use rights contracts since the 1980s.
 - RMLD has the largest share among MLPs; out of 2000 MW Total Capacity.
- Highlighted new contract features.
 - Discussed the new contract features.
 - Offers energy around the clock, with no seasonality.
 - Significant benefit over typical seasonality of hydro energy.
 - Noted that the 49,900 MWh/yr is approximately 6 MWs.
- Questions relative to use rights.
 - Chair Soni asked about future use rights.
 - Mr. Phipps noted that as of now HQ is not creating any more use rights.
 - Vice Chair Welter asked if the use rights are sold back to HQ.
 - Currently RMLD sells use rights to National Grid.
 - With the new proposal, RMLD will sell use rights to HQ.
- Highlighted benefits and future opportunities
 - Mr. Phipps emphasized the financial benefits of the deal.
 - Potential for enhanced reliability.
 - Opportunity for future renewal or extension of the contract.
- Question relative to a Request for Proposal (RFP) and other potential offers
 - Vice Chair Welter asked if an RFP was sent out.
 - Confirmed an RFP was sent out.
 - Mr. Phipps mentioned another competing bid.
 - The value was approximately 2/3 of the HQ offer.
 - Did not include energy.
- Question relative to Municipal Light Plant (MLP) participation
 - Chair Soni asked if other MLPs were participating.
 - Mr. Phipps confirmed there are about 12 participating in similar deals.
 - ENE is facilitating and all MLPs are getting hydro energy.
 - MWECC had facilitated a similar deal for another group of MLPs a year ago.
- Discussion Conclusion
 - Mr. Phipps noted that this deal will effectively replace the National Grid Contract
 - Offer is a third more valuable than other offers in terms of:
 - Rights
 - Access to energy
 - Certificates

Vice Chair Welter made a **motion**, seconded by Mr. Small, that the RMLD Citizens' Advisory Board vote to accept the General Manager's recommendation to execute a new contract with Hydro Quebec, for energy and associated certificates under a five-year contract, starting January 2024. **Motion Carried: 3:0:2** (3 in favor, 0 opposed, 2 absent). *Roll Call: Chair Soni, Aye; Vice Chair Welter, Aye; Mr. Small, Aye. Mr. Hooper and Mr. Kelley were absent from the meeting.*

General Manager Update

Mr. Phipps provided a GM update to the CAB.

Discussed Station 2 and Lynnfield parking space use

- Noted the short-term license for Station 2 town parking space usage.
- An error was identified regarding the duration of the license.
- This error will be corrected in the final document, as discussed with Lynnfield.

Discussed concerns regarding the regional network.

- Expressed concerns about the fragility of the regional network.
 - Emphasized potential energy supply limitations due to:
 - Retiring generation assets.
 - Natural gas supply issues.
 - Clarified that there isn't an imminent crisis.
 - Preparations are being made for potential challenges ahead.
 - Mentioned past discussions on similar topics and concerns.
 - Load reduction in cold winter months
 - Mystic generation station's impending shutdown (May 2024).
 - Economic support for the Everett Terminal (LNG natural gas)

Future Planning and Storage Initiatives

- Discussed plans to integrate more storage into the network for resilience and stability.
- Further discussed the potential Station 2 storage system.
 - The site was inspected for possible storage system integration.
 - RMLD may not own it but might employ an ESA type structure.
- Question relative to storage
 - Vice Chair Welter asked if the parcel would only have storage.
 - Mr. Phipps confirmed storage only.
- Question relative to fencing
 - Chair Soni asked if the area was fenced in.
 - Mr. Phipps noted that the area is ~ 19K Sq Ft with half fenced.
- Discussed matters related to property access and legal considerations.
 - Noted property ownership versus legal access.
- Discussed plans for Lynnfield Town Hall Battery Storage
 - Discussed plans for potential battery storage at the town hall.
- Discussed generation and storage capacities.
 - Chair Soni noted limitations on storage size, particularly the 5 MW limit.
 - Chair Soni mentioned a conversation with Jack Smith from ISO NE.
 - Mr. Phipps noted a recent conversation RMLD had with ISO NE.
 - Discussed concerns related to asset connection into the network.
 - Discussed the role of distribution versus transmission.
 - Discussed implications of exceeding certain generation and storage thresholds.
 - Highlighted the corresponding regulations.
 - RMLD's goal is to provide reliable, low-cost, non-carbon power to customers while working within the regulatory framework.

Infrastructure Planning

- Discussed RMLD's connections to two transmission systems and upcoming projects.
- Emphasized the focus on reliability.
- Discussed plans for storage system placement.
 - There is a need for storage assets on transmission systems.
 - ISO NE is putting ten 30 MW systems throughout the network.
 - RMLD's goal is to be one of these places.

Weatherization Program

- Discussed the weatherization program.
 - Will commence later in the year.
 - Primarily focused on air sealing and insulation.

Maple Meadow Project

- Discussed the ongoing Maple Meadow project.

- 10 MW solar/storage initiative.
- Outlined a tentative timeline for the project.
 - September 2023: Acquire Land
 - End of 2024: Storage Uni
 - End of 2025: Solar Array
- Environmental and logistical factors present challenges.
 - Noted RMLD is aggressively pursuing land.

Scheduling

- The next CAB meeting will be held on June 15, 2023. At 5:30 PM.

Adjournment

Vice Chair Welter made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Small. **Motion Carried: 3:0:2** (3 in favor, 0 opposed, 2 absent). *Roll Call: Chair Soni, Aye; Vice Chair Welter, Aye; Mr. Small, Aye. Mr. Hooper and Mr. Kelley were absent from the meeting.*

The CAB meeting adjourned at 6:31 PM

As approved on November 15, 2023