

PRINCETON MUNICIPAL LIGHT DEPARTMENT
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BOARD OF LIGHT COMMISSIONERS
June 2, 2020
ZOOM PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM.

Present were: Commissioner/Chairman- Rick Rys, Commissioner- Chris Conway, Commissioner- Richard Chase, PMLD General Manager- Brian Allen, Residents John Mollica, Phil Gott, Corey Burnham-Howard, PMLD employees Brian Booth, Ashley Reddy and Karen Mammone

Agenda:

Commissioner Chase thought that the wording on the agenda "Review temporary candidates for Interim General Manager" was redundant and that the word *temporary* should be removed. The Board agreed to the minor change. The Board voted unanimously in favor (3-0) to accept the June 2, 2020 agenda as amended.

Commissioner Rys would like to change the wording in the section of Green Communities Discussion. It should say (1) META was extended to the fall (*not December*) 2020 and we can recover funds from META and (2) Commissioner Rys made a motion to split the energy audit funds only if the Stretch Code is passed (*not split the cost with the town on energy audits*). (3-0) approved.

Proposal from Rick White regarding search for permanent General Manager

Commissioner Rys went over Mr. White's 29-page proposal for services to find a new General Manager for the PMLD. (*A copy of the proposal is on file*) Mr. White suggests forming a steering committee with PMLD for the search. Mr. White outlined how he would approach the search and quoted \$9,000 for his services. There would be additional fees of approximately \$600 for advertising. Commissioner Conway reviewed the proposal and thought the quote was reasonable. Commissioner Chase thought PMLD should not rush into signing the agreement and hiring a permanent General Manager if there is a possibility of regionalizing with another town's municipal light department. Mr. Chase suggested that PMLD find an Interim General Manager as soon as possible. Commissioner Conway suggested looking at the two candidates interested in the interim position. Commissioner Chase agreed. Commissioner Rys went over the two resumes received. Commissioner Chase suggested posting on NEPPA's website employment page. Commissioner Rys will provide a job description for an Interim General Manager to Mr. Allen to post on the NEPPA website. Discussion was had regarding when and how to interview the two candidates that have delivered resumes to PMLD and have shown an interest in an interim position. Mr. Allen suggested the BOLC have a regular open meeting next week (as scheduled for June 10, 2020) then go into an executive session to speak with Mr. White and the two candidates individually for 20-30 minutes each, if they are available to attend. It was suggested by Mr. Gott to have the candidates ask the Commissioners questions because they could learn a lot about a candidate by the questions they ask.

Possibilities for regionalization of PMLD with another MLP

Commissioner Rys recently spoke with Managers from Sterling and Holden. He thought they sounded interested but this is a long process considering they will need to speak with their boards. In addition, their town residents would need to approve regionalization along with Princeton residents. There are many legal questions that will need to be answered if we decide to go down this route. Mr. Conway expressed his opinion that now is not the time to be having these discussions.

Public Session

Green Communities Discussion

Ms. Burnham-Howard informed the board the Green Communities deadline has been extended to December 2020 and the Municipal Energy Technology Assistance (META) has extended the deadline to the fall of 2020 for grants related to municipal building audit costs. It was suggested the Town and PMLD split the cost of the audits. Commissioner Rys made a motion to split the cost with the town on energy audits **only** if the Stretch Code is passed at Town Meeting. Commissioner Conway believes the town residents should have a say in regard to this issue and it should not be decided by the BOLC. Commissioners Rys and Chase voted yay with Commissioner Conway voting Nay (2-1 passed)

Mr. Allen's Resignation as General Manager

Mr. Mollica spoke about Mr. Allen leaving. He was not shocked at the announcement of Mr. Allen's departure because he did speak to the BOLC months ago (after Christine Trudeau's departure) regarding concerns he had with the BOLC and the handling of the department.

John Mollica: Mr. Mollica would like to know why Mr. Allen is leaving.

Commissioner Rys: Commissioner Rys said it will be a great loss.

Mr. Allen: Mr. Allen spoke about his personnel and professional differences with Commissioners Rys and Chase.

Mr. Mollica: Mr. Mollica asked if the primary differences are with policies.

Commissioner Rys: Commissioner Rys talked about the conflict between the BOLC and General Manager's responsibilities as well as differences of opinions regarding regulations and PMLD's future direction.

Commissioner Chase: Commissioner Chase thanked Mr. Allen for his accomplishments, knowledge, hard work and dedication.

Mr. Mollica: Mr. Mollica asked if Mr. Allen's performance was not up to par.

Commissioner Rys: Commissioner Rys said he was very pleased with his outstanding performance.

Mr. Mollica: Mr. Mollica said Mr. Allen is a very honest straight forward person. Sorry to see him go. He would like to see Mr. Allen reconsider leaving. We will not get another Mr. Allen to run the light department.

Commissioner Rys: Commissioner Rys agreed.

Mr. Mollica: Mr. Mollica said fiscally PMLD was almost bankrupt and now the budget is much improved by Mr. Allen's time here. We do not realize what we have until it is gone. You could always count on him. Who will want to step up into our small community to do what needs to be done at the level he has done it?

Commissioner Conway: Commissioner Conway agreed with Mr. Mollica and there should be lessons learned with the three Commissioners. What has happened this past year should not have happened.

Commissioner Chase: Commissioner Chase said Mr. Allen has built a great team.

Mr. Gott: Mr. Gott spoke and said their needs be mutual respect even if you disagree. He is also sorry to see Mr. Allen go.

Mr. Mollica: Mr. Mollica said people need to respect each other's roles.

Mr. Booth: Mr. Booth asked Commissioner Rys and Chase to explain why they said several times that PMLD is inefficient. He would like them to explain what they mean. PMLD is far above any light department that he is aware of in efficiency. The response time is phenomenal, there has been tremendous windstorms with no calls and that is phenomenal. As an employee here it is tearing the department apart that Mr. Allen is leaving and that the BOLC makes comments like that.

Commissioner Rys: Commissioner Rys said for the number of customers we have a lot of staff.

Mr. Booth: Mr. Booth said that is false. The ladies in the office do double, triple the work of other light departments. The linemen are three guys with a Foreman. It is worth fighting for. This place is slowly being dismantled.

Mr. Allen: Mr. Allen spoke of the mess the system was in in 2004 when he was hired as the General Foreman among other things. Mr. Allen explained how the department with new linemen rebuilt the system, so it was much stronger. Prior to 2004, PMLD was considered a joke, a laughingstock among municipal light plants. As time passed, word got out that PMLD had changed. The linemen were professionals. The equipment was upgraded. The shop was reorganized. The number of outages decreased substantially. The linemen participated in the Northeast Public Power Lineman's Rodeo in 2014 and took first place. Princeton was respected as a light department. When Mr. Allen took over as General Manager in 2011, it was a very difficult time. There was \$3,000 in the reserve accounts and a wind turbine with a failed gearbox. Mr. Allen explained that he always had a board who supported him with the direction that he believed PMLD needed to go. Mr. Allen believes that the decisions made were successful in getting the PMLD into the recovered financial position it finds itself today. When Mr. Allen's contract came up for extension in October of 2018, Commissioner Rys voted "no". Mr. Rys voted "no" because he did not believe Mr. Allen was "progressive" enough. Mr. Allen explained that when Commissioner Chase was running for office, he said what was going on at PMLD was appalling. Mr. Allen explained how that was personally insulting. Decisions were made for the benefit of all the ratepayers. Mr. Allen went on to explain that for seven years he has had a BOLC approved budget and has never gone over budget showing his level of fiscal responsibility. Mr. Allen explained how he had worked hard on securing a long-term energy contract with NextEra Energy for financial stability. That contract has helped the PMLD rebuild financially and Mr. Allen is in sharp disagreement with Mr. Rys and Mr. Chases' decision to change the terms of the contract. Considering these and other differences and conflicts, when a career opportunity came up, he believed he needed to take it. Mr. Allen explained that he does not believe the respect is there for all he has done as the General Manager or his 30 years in the business.

Commissioner Conway: Commissioner Conway thanked Mr. Allen.

Commissioner Rys: Commissioner Rys was glad he got his feelings and emotions out there.

Commissioner Chase: Commissioner Chase thanked him for his service and building a team.

Meeting Times

Commissioner Conway suggested going back to having meetings at PMLD. There is plenty of space even if residents want to attend. Mr. Gott thought that would be great. Commissioner Conway would like to have face to face meetings with everyone. Commissioner Rys thought it was safer having the meeting this way (ZOOM format) and thought it encourages more participation. Commissioner Chase thought the meetings should stay this way until the COVID-19 situation settles down more. Mr. Allen said it can be done here it is just the matter comfort levels. Everyone's opinion needs to be respected. Commissioner Conway would like to have it on the next agenda.

At 5:51 PM the Board voted unanimously in favor (3-0) to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,

***Karen Mammonne
Recording Secretary***