

Approved February 1, 2023

**Advisory Committee Meeting
Zoom Video Conference
Wednesday, January 25, 2023, 6:30 p.m.**

Those present from Advisory Committee included Shawn Baker, Doug Smith, Madison Riley, Rani Elwy, Gail Sullivan, David Prock, Bill Schauffler, Pete Pedersen, Al Ferrer, Jenn Fallon, Wendy Paul, Susan Clapham, Neal Goins, and Andrea Ward.

Chair Shawn Baker called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm and Vice Chair Doug Smith took roll call of Advisory members in attendance.

Citizen Speak

There was no one present for Citizen Speak.

Municipal Light Plant (MLP) FY24 Budget and Updates

Don Newell, Director, MLP, and Paul Criswell, Chair, MLP Board, were present to answer questions regarding FY24 budget and provide information on the ATM warrant article. Mission and vision statement were reviewed and a brief overview of MLP was provided.

Questions/Discussion

- Does the MLP have difficulty hiring people?
 - Not to the degree other departments have had. The MLP plans to increase staff by a couple of positions. There are very few highly qualified candidates.
- How does the MLP envision funding all the upgrading that is required for additional electrification? Will funds come from increased rates?
 - The MLP is a utility; by law the MLP charges rates for the services provided and receives a return on that. As demand increases (amount of electricity sold), revenue on that demand increases; the MLP uses these proceeds to fund the capital plan to maintain the distribution infrastructure that is needed. It is not an increase in rates but if the MLP sells 50% more electricity, our income goes up by 50%. EV chargers and things like that would not necessarily be the responsibility of the MLP. It is anticipated that because of increased demand, the MLP will keep rates at their current low level and still finance the expansion that's necessary to accommodate increased demand.
- Do you prepare an integrated resource plan?
 - The MLP regularly makes plans which anticipate five years out in operations, capital, and infrastructure; the five-year capital plan is reviewed annually. MLP looks beyond the normal expansion of the business. If it is possible or likely that demand will exceed what is expected, one of our goals is to analyze what if anything needs to be done above the normal expansion of the business.
- Is the five-year capital plan and operating budget available to Advisory?
 - Yes.
- Does the MLP charge the colleges the same rates as residential rates, considering that the colleges have highs and lows of usage?
 - The MLP is aware of this and charges rates accordingly. The MLP has separate rates for primary customers that are different than large general and residential rates. Wellesley College continues to "peak-shave" their own demand charge. Wellesley College is a partial primary customer, and their contract is different than the other two colleges.
- Can the colleges provide more renewable energy as they have a lot of land for solar panels?

- The MLP has worked with the colleges at different points in time when evaluating whether to build solar. The MLP would work with them on solar. The colleges receive pressure from students regarding renewable sources. Each college has its own environmental plans.
- Does the \$8 million savings from the proposed battery project represent the dollar amount over the life of the project?
 - Yes
- Is the MLP hedging out five (5) years?
 - Yes. The amount hedged goes down in the out years. The MLP tries to stay five (5) years out and hedges between 80 – 100% based on the needs. At certain times the MLP will hedge up to 100%, due to situations in the power supply market. The MLP tries to fit in green energy sources and leaves 10-20% to be able to take advantage of these. The MLP doesn't want to over- or under-subscribe. The MLP also takes advantage of long-term projects.
- Is the MLP modeling increased competition for non-emitting sources of power?
 - The MLP is working on a procedure for modeling this as there will be more competition in the future. The MLP is continuing to increase the skills to do this.
- A comment was made that the partnership with Energy New England is very important and it is good to have a partner. The MLP was asked if they are coming back to Advisory to present on Article 15 regarding the electric program and Article 31, as more information is needed about this article.
 - Yes, happy to provide any information. A little of that was presented previously. This is all non-tax impact. Article 31 is by the direction of the Select Board as they do the tax agreement with Citizen's Energy.
- A comment was made that the MLP is listed as a sponsor of Article 31.
- Is the \$8 million split with Citizens Energy?
 - Yes, the ratios are not 50/50 but they are fair and equitable to both parties.
- The 50% reduction in fossil fuel-based energy use is a law, not a goal; is that at the state level or town utility level?
 - It is at the state level and the MLP is comfortable that we can and will get there.
- A request was made for a table showing the WECARE data on collections and cash balances. This would be similar to the information CPC provides Town Meeting.
- A comment was made that the opt-out level is 9%, which means there is a 91% participation rate. Is there an on-going effort to reach people who can't opt out and shouldn't be opting in?
- Is there an alternative for the battery proposal where we could keep all the profits?
 - The MLP modeled that and solicited proposals which looked at doing it ourselves. Not only is there risk in terms of the money expended and whether the system can be operated successfully, there are also regulatory risks. If regulations change, then the money invested is lost. It is advantageous to the MLP for Citizen's Energy to take the regulatory risk.
- Article 37 raises the dollar limits for property which can be disposed of. Why is the MLP only going up to \$30,000 in that warrant article? This is different from the level which the town is requesting, \$50,000.
 - Yes, that can be addressed.
- What are the top three (3) reasons for the 8.3% increase in the operating budget even though it's a non-tax budget?
 - The incentive rebates that are funded through the WECARE program; the hiring of two (2) positions – one is a replacement and likely to cost more and the other is a new position – sustainability coordinator; and overall increases in the sustainability program.
- A request was made for information regarding sustainability and the value added.

- Projects are becoming larger, more complex, and more numerous. The MLP needs the ability to model, analyze the projects, and to plan the future with this new environment. Otherwise, the MLP will be completely reactive.
- A request was made for the WECARE data and the number of people opting to do more than the automatic enrollment amount and if this is an ongoing option.
 - Yes, that data can be provided.
- What does the MLP see happening with the forward capacity cost in the future as the 50% decrease in forward capacity cost is minimizing the overall budget increase to only 8%?
 - Years ago, someone took advantage of the then regulations regarding forward capacity cost in the industry and made a fortune at the expense of everyone. The ripple effect is now working its way out of the system, which is why this cost is coming down. The MLP hopes this situation won't happen again in the future. The MLP tries to build up a reserve fund to smooth out the effects of fluctuations in costs. The MLP can plan and try to minimize it and can work to manage and shave the peak. A significant part of the budget every year is the amount of money the MLP pays to buy power, which is then re-sold; this cost is outside the MLP's control. The MLP recently raised rates, but our rates continue to be less than those charged by some of the investor-owned utilities.
- When was last rate increase?
 - The MLP did a temporary increase to get through the capacity crisis. It's been 15-20 years since the last rate study and increase.
- Do you think the large increase related to customer service is a one-time increase and next year will be closer to normal?
 - Over the years, it will be closer to normal. The MLP is offering incentives to make it worthwhile for people to electrify; trying to get customers to electrify is a major goal.
- A request was made for MLP's current financial statement.

Planning FY24 Budget and Updates

Eric Arbeene, Interim Director, Planning; Jim Roberti, Chair, Planning Board (PB); Kathleen Woodward, PB; Patti Mallet, PB; and Tom Taylor, PB, were present and provided an overview of Planning and presented Planning's FY24 budgets.

Questions/Discussion

- Electronic permitting seems to be a tough goal; once the project gets off the ground, will things be easier?
 - It is a tough goal for right now. Permitting is mandated with timelines. Once Planning is fully staffed, we can streamline the process and make it quicker.
- Is it the best strategy to lower salaries for a senior planner, since there are currently two (2) unfilled positions?
 - Planning is working with HR and within the limitations of the Hay system.
- Does Planning have the bandwidth to do all the objectives listed on the chart, as it would seem to be a massive amount of work?
 - Yes, once Planning is fully staffed. Planning also talked about ways in which processes could be streamlined.
- What are the thoughts on workload management, given the two (2) open positions?
 - The preservation position is more for historical projects. Demolition review has many parts.
- Why is the \$200,000 designated to be used for updating the Unified Plan in the capital budget and not operating expense?
 - The last Unified Plan was a hybrid plan with the Select Board (SB); we are not sure that would be done again. There were strategic parts that the SB participated in. By statute,

the Planning Board must have control of a master plan for the town every ten years, and this covers the planning goals of the town. We will need to complete this process again in four (4) years. The core of the Unified Plan must include the Planning goals of the town. This project can't be done in-house.

- A comment was made that the town is growing, which means more permits are needed. Perhaps retired personnel could be utilized to do some of the work to free up time for the planners to focus on the planning work.
- Why don't we increase rates for permits? What is important and what do we want to spend taxes on going forward? A master plan looking at the future is important.
- A comment was made that we need to incentivize the employees.
- How do projects get prioritized and how many are strict deadlines? What can be most impactful at this time while trying to increase staff?

Council on Aging (COA) FY24 Budget and Updates

Deborah Greenwood, Director, COA; Tony Parker, Chair, COA Board; Kathleen Vogel, COA Board, were present and provided an overview of the COA and the COA's FY24 budgets.

Questions/Discussion

- A comment was made that it would be helpful to have comparable data for the few towns around us regarding the percentage of the population aged over 60 and comparing it to Wellesley's 22% over 60.
- There was a discussion about the restroom and entry doors.
 - An injury occurred on the entry door because the door does not retract if it hits something or someone. The timer was set at 6 seconds before closing and this was not enough time for many people to move through the entry. FMD has extended the time to stay open to 20 seconds. The manufacturer makes a retractable door and had discontinued the non-retractable mechanism shortly after the current doors were installed at the Tolles-Parson building. COA has requested that FMD consider replacing the door mechanism or doors with a retractable version. The bathroom doors do not have an assistive door feature and the doors are very heavy. FMD will be taking the assistive door devices from Town Hall and installing them at the TPC when Town Hall closes for renovations.
- Has there been any discussion of opening the Tolles Parsons Center after 4 p.m. for meetings and community use?
 - It is the Select Board's building. There will be meeting space available when Town Hall closes. There have been requests for morning hours or after 4 pm hours, especially for use of the fitness center. The building will need to be open for additional hours to fulfill the mission plan and vision statement for the COA; this will be part of the strategic plan.
- What is the cost to fix the entrance door as it is a safety issue?
 - The company's replaceable unit is \$6,500 per unit. There are two (2) doors so it would be \$13,000 total. Volunteer greeters are watching the front door and can assist people.
- There was a discussion and update of the Tolles Parsons Center's kitchen. COA provided FMD with a list of uses for the kitchen and FMD is studying this. Town Meeting voted \$25,000 for the study of the kitchen. The review is moving through the town process for capital project reviews and prioritization. The history of the kitchen was provided.
- Do you know if seniors who are eligible are taking advantage of the benefits of the Affordable Connectivity Program for Wi-Fi access?
 - We don't know how many people would need this service. But some clients don't have a computer and don't want them. The COA has laptops available for loan.
- Are there funds available if someone is not eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program?

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- Yes, the COA has funds for which someone could apply. The COA has discussed outreach but doesn't have the capacity for outreach at this time.
- Does the COA have all the volunteers it would like to have and what do they do?
 - The COA has a great volunteer coordinator. The COA has about 70 volunteers. They are doing some intergenerational work, bringing in high school students to volunteer in the afternoons.
- Is the COA capturing the concerns of the population, for example, aging in place concerns?
 - The COA's strategic planning needs to involve the town and include town representation.
- Is the COA losing people purely because of compensation and getting locked in a step up in responsibilities?
 - It's a combination of things depending on the individual and the position. It's all about finding the right people and those who want to do the work involved.
- A comment was made that the theme for Advisory could be how the town can support the COA.

Administrative

- Next week's agenda was reviewed.

Minutes Approval

Madison Riley made, and Jenn Fallon seconded a motion to approve the January 18, 2023, minutes.

Roll Call Vote

Neal Goins - yes

Jennifer Fallon – yes

Andrea Ward - yes

Doug Smith – yes

Al Ferrer - yes

Wendy Paul – yes

Pete Pedersen - yes

Madison Riley – yes

Rani Elwy - yes

David Prock - yes

Christina Dougherty - yes

Gail Sullivan – yes

William Schauffler – yes

Susan Clapham - yes

The January 18, 2023, minutes were approved, 14 to 0.

Liaison Reports

CAC/Gail Sullivan– provided follow up information and clarification to the discussion about the January 11, 2023, draft minutes.

Schools/Rani Elwy - An update of the recent School Committee meeting was provided – School Committee voted to be a cosponsor on Article 17 (DEI equity plan); it was emphasized that this is not a budget item for the schools, and they are not spending money on this. February 7 there will be a neighborhood forum on the Sprague fields. Next week there will be a presentation from teachers on standards-based grading.

DPW/Pete Pedersen – provided an update of article write ups and questions for DPW.

Planning/Madison Riley – provided an update of the recent Planning meeting where the Wellesley Office Park changes were discussed. There was also a discussion about the 20 Oakland Street legal situation.

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Adjourn

Bill Schaufler made, and Jenn Fallon seconded a motion to adjourn.

Roll Call Vote

Neal Goins - yes
Jennifer Fallon – yes
Andrea Ward - yes
Doug Smith – yes
Al Ferrer - yes
Wendy Paul – yes
Pete Pedersen - yes
Madison Riley – yes
Rani Elwy - yes
David Prock - yes
Christina Dougherty - yes
Gail Sullivan – yes
William Schaufler – yes
Susan Clapham - yes

The meeting was adjourned at 10:17 p.m.

Meeting Documents Reviewed

<https://www.wellesley.ma.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/1966>

- FY24 Planning Presentation to Advisory
- COA FY24 Operating Budget
- FY24 COA Power Point presentation 1/25/23
- MLP Advisory Presentation