

BOZRAH UTILITIES COMMISSION
Minutes of Special Meeting
July 22, 2020
City of Groton Council Chambers / Zoom 9:00 A.M.
CORRECTED 10/28/2020

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Hedrick called the meeting to order at 9:01 A.M.

ROLL CALL

Present: Chairperson Keith Hedrick

Commissioners: Seymour Adelman, Bill Ballinger, Scott Barber, Paul Duarte, George Scully, Dick Tanger, Robert Zuliani

Absent: Jeff Godley

Staff present:

Director of Utilities Ronald A. Gaudet
Executive Administrator Noemi Walencewicz
Executive Administrative Assistant Maureen French
General Manager of Operations Mark Biron
General Manager of Customer Service Tina M. Daniels
General Manager of Projects and Planning Bruce Kruszewski
General Manager of Key Accounts Len Mediavilla
Manager of Engineering Randall S. Surprenant
Electrical Engineer Santhosh Suresh
Office Manager Ruth Ellen Ouimet
Director of Finance Ronald Yuhas

Chairperson Hedrick welcomed returning Commissioner Bill Ballinger to the Bozrah Utility Commission and expressed his appreciation to the Commissioner for joining.

In response to State of Connecticut Executive Order No. 7B “Protection of Public Health and Safety During Covid-19 Pandemic and Response – Further Suspension or Modification of Statues”, dated March 14, 2020, suspending in-person open meeting requirements, all public meetings will be closed to the public at this time. If you wish to address the Commission, please send written communication to directorsoffice@grotonutilities.com by 8am on the date of the meeting will be read during the public communications portion of the agenda.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Zuliani moved, **Commissioner Barber** seconded that the minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 22, 2020 be approved.

Motion passed with 7 ayes and 1 abstention (Commissioner Ballinger)

3. COMMUNICATIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Chairperson Hedrick identified the three thank you notes received.

Commissioner Zuliani asked where the NAA money comes from. Director Gaudet stated it comes from the tax. They apply to the state and get approval.

Commissioner Barber wants the NAA money allocated for BLP to go to a customer in their territory. Director Gaudet noted the funds were given to all applicants. Commissioner Zuliani noted this was in the discussed in the previous minutes. Commissioner Barber will address his concerns during the New Business portion of the meeting.

4. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

There were no Public Communications received.

5. MONTHLY FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Office Manager Ouimet presented the following financial highlights:

The financial summary is brief in consideration of the budget discussion to follow later in the meeting.

Preliminary FY20 net income after return to GU is 8% under budget at \$109K. Revenue excluding pass-through is on target with the budget. Commercial loads increased 11% from last year. Other Operating costs are 4% over budget resulting from less focus on capital work than budgeted.

Utility Financial Services Overhead Study found increases needed to the Bozrah Light & Power overhead rates to more fully collect of capital additions. Mark Beauchamp performed the study with recommended rates of 40% on labor and 20% on services. These new rates are budgeted in FY21.

6. PROJECTS/INIATIVES UPDATE

A. Customer Service- Review of Rules and Regulations

General Manager Daniels reported that there are no changes to the Rules and Regulations, and said they are reviewed annually.

B. Operations Update

Director Gaudet gave an overview on A/R due to COVID – BL&P is running 2-3% higher than normally.

General Manager Biron reviewed the statistics in Connecticut. There are 62 people hospitalized with only one (1) person hospitalized east of the CT River. The infectivity rate is less than 1%.

GU has not had a positive case of COVID. All operations staff are back to normal schedules. The buildings are still locked down. Employees are required to wear a mask and social distancing is in place. GU will continue to sanitize the Operations, Municipal and BL&P areas. Vendors are required to complete a questionnaire upon entering any of our buildings. Attendance is taken daily and reconciling every absence of GU personnel to ensure not COVID related. GU employees can be tested at any time. The Governor has announced new travel restrictions and there are 33 states now considered hot spot states. Human Resources works with individual employees who have traveled to one of these states.

Electric Engineer Manager Surprenant noted there is a five (5)-person operations crew in BL&P. Continuing reconductoring work on South Road and supporting calls.

Commissioner Zuliani questioned where personnel goes to get COVID tested and how quick are results in. General Manager Biron said Physicians One but there are many testing sites. So far, results are in in a few days as local or state lab results come back quicker.

7. OLD BUSINESS

None

8. NEW BUSINESS

A. Proclamation for Ralph Winslow

Chairperson Hedrick read the proclamation for Ralph Winslow and welcomed Bill Ballinger back to the Commission.

B. Proposed Schedule of 2021 Meetings (Quarterly, fourth Wednesday)

January 27, 2021 at 9:00 am

April 28, 2021 at 9:00 am

July 28, 2021 at 9:00 am

October 27, 2021 at 9:00 am

Commissioner Barber inquired on the location of the meetings. The 2021 meetings will be held at the Bozrah Senior Center.

C. Commissioner Adelman questioned where calls go when there is an outage. General Manager Daniels stated that there is an in-person customer service representative between the hours of 7:00 am – 5:30 pm and receives calls for BL&P and GU territories; and after 5:30 pm until 7:00 am there is an answering service. Director Gaudet reminded the Commission that customer service representatives are physically working in different places, i.e. remote. Commissioner Adelman described his concern in detail. There was a power outage at AEN Asphalt and provided the address to the customer service representative but was told it was not BL&P territory. It was determined that the address provided was Lebanon Road, but the physical address in the database was listed as Route 87. The address confusion was resolved and General Manager Daniels will update the address in the system. Commissioner Barber asked for a list of preferred customers. General Manager Daniels will provide a list to Commissioner Barber. Director Gaudet reminded the Commissioners to immediately reach out to him directly to address any concerns.

D. Commissioner Barber reminded the Commission that he would like the NAA award to be awarded to a BL&P customer. There has been some correspondence between Stacey Lawton from SCADD, Utility Finance Manager Xiang and Communications and Community Outreach Manager Bouges regarding their application for the Award. General Manager Daniels will reach out to Communications and Community Outreach Manager Bouges. Director Gaudet stated that GU supports energy upgrades but SCADD didn't meet a qualifying requirement to be awarded the NAA.

E. Commissioner Barber stated his concern with the 3% increase instituted in April, during a pandemic and the unemployment subsidy is ending. He asked if there is any plan to reverse the increase next year. Director Gaudet stated that BL&P has issued a purchase order for a Cost of Service Study and until the study is complete the schedule of increases, if any, is determined by the Commission. Commissioner Barber said he is speaking for the residents in his town who are struggling to pay their bills, and would like to plan if the pandemic continues. Director Gaudet reminded the Commission that BL&P's rates are 18% below competitor; Eversource, and would like to keep the lines of communication open to BL&P ratepayers to avoid situations similar to other utility companies. Chairperson Hedrick reminded the Commission that we are not turning off power to customers until October 1, 2020. General Manager Daniels' customer service team has made phone calls with customers that are 31+ days overdue and will continue to contact. Commissioner Barber asked if the rate increase was an issue with GU customers. Commissioner Scully noted that a public hearing for a Groton rate increase for Water was held during the pandemic with a start date of October 1, 2020 with no issues from the ratepayers. Commissioner Barber inquired about TVCC

assistance. General Manager Daniels informed the Commission that TVCC will only provide assistance to those who have made attempts to pay their bills. Commissioner Barber will refer ratepayers with concerns to Customer Service.

- F. Commissioner Barber received a letter of concern from a solar customer in the BL&P territory who had a solar system installed and wasn't happy because he felt he wasn't being treated fairly by BL&P. He continued to state the customer is reaching out to State Representatives for assistance in handling this matter. Director Gaudet reminded the Commission that BL&P does not socialize the cost of solar and doesn't net meter. If there is correspondence from a State Representative we will inform the Commission immediately.
- G. Commissioner Barber inquired about the Pilot Program. Director Gaudet and Finance Director Yuhas said Bozrah's First Selectman, Carl Zorn indicated he would circle back with the Utility following his presentation in January; and he has not yet done that. Director Gaudet reminded that Commission that Bozrah has 2,700 customers and for every \$2,700 the program is increased it will be an additional \$1 per customer per year.
- H. Commissioner Barber inquired about the Town of Bozrah installing sidewalks if they would be able to receive the NAA award if lighting was installed at the same time. Finance Director Yuhas said that the Town of Bozrah is considered a non-profit and if they follow the process as an approved project there should be no reason they wouldn't get the award.

9. ACTION ITEMS

- A. **BUC-20-7-01** Consideration of and action to adopt a Resolution appointing Commissioner Scott Barber as a Member Representative and Alternate Member Delegate to the Connecticut Municipal Electric Energy Cooperative (CMEEC) and the Connecticut Transmission Municipal Electric Energy Cooperative (TRANSCO) Board of Directors

Commissioner Adelman moved, **Commissioner Ballinger** seconded that the Bozrah Utilities Commission approve Action Item BUC-20-07-01.

Chairperson Hedrick said that Ralph Winslow leaving provides a vacancy, and Scott Barber is already on CMEEC as an Alternate.

Motion Carried.

- B. **BUC 20-7-02** Consideration of and Action to Approve the Operating and Capital Budgets for Bozrah Light and Power Company for Fiscal Year 2020-2021 as presented by Management

Commissioner Duarte moved, **Commissioner Zuliani** seconded that the Bozrah Utilities Commission approve Action Item BUC-20-07-02.

Director Yuhas thanked Ruth for her efforts with the budget and did an overview of the budget and indicated that **GU Overhead** benefits increased from 83% to 103%. Commissioner Barber asked if the LED Conversion was completed and Director Gaudet confirmed. He then asked why there was only a decrease of \$3K; Finance Director Yuhas said the number was based off of last year, and he would look at it. There was a question about a change to overhead costs and Chairperson Hedrick said there is an initiative to minimize overhead and the intent is to assign

people to a direct project and not overhead. Commissioner Scully asked how vehicles are charged in Bozrah. Director Gaudet said Bozrah is using the GU Vehicle Replacement Fund.

The Capital Bonding was reviewed with a six (6) year Capital Project Plan and a request to borrow **\$4M** over the next twenty (20) years. Commissioner Barber was concerned with the twenty (20) year extension for a six (6) year plan. Finance Director Yuhas said the City of Groton will issue bonds for Bozrah specifically; Bozrah reimburses only for the true cost and no additional money.

Commissioner Barber said he had strong reservations about approving a budget that the Commission received only a day ago. Commissioner Ballinger, Zuliani and Adelman agreed, and discussed the possibility of holding a Special Meeting to approve. Commissioner Zuliani said the budget could be approved and later adjusted if needed. Director Gaudet said the budget creates a benchmark for the year in an operating plan, and there is no significant change in the 2021 budget compared to the 2020 budget. He said some work has been sliding back because of the pandemic situation, but the work that gets done gets charged to Bozrah.

Chairperson Hedrick reminded the Commission there is a Motion and a Second on the floor. Commissioner Barber said he could not vote on a budget that he only received 20 hours prior. Finance Director Yuhas promised an earlier presentation next year. He said there will be a meeting two weeks prior to the July Regular Meeting for review. Commissioner Zuliani said in the defense of the staff, it is a complicated budget and it required a lot of work; he complimented the staff.

Chairperson Hedrick called for a vote on the Bozrah budget.

Motion passed with 5 ayes and 3 abstentions (Commissioner Adelman, Ballinger, and Barber)

10. EXECUTIVE SESSION

None

11. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, at 10:27 A.M. **Commissioner Barber** moved, **Commissioner Scully** seconded a motion to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned.

Attest:

Paul A. Duarte
Clerk