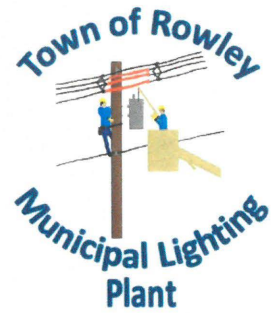


Rowley Municipal Lighting Plant



July 12, 2017 Commissioner's Meeting

7:00 PM – Town Hall Selectman's Room

Commissioners Present: G. Robert Merry, Robert Snow, Kenneth Keyes. Also in attendance was General Manager Daniel Folding, Office Manager Eric Grover

See attendance sheet for the public sign-in.

G. Robert Merry opened the meeting at 7:00 PM

Citizen Query

Nobody from the general public participated in this citizen's query.

Review and Approve Meeting Minutes

After reading the minutes from the regular meeting of May 17, 2017 provided, there were no corrections.

Snow made the motion to accept the regular meeting minutes of May 17, 2017. Keyes seconded the motion. All voted in favor at 7:03 PM.

After reading the minutes from the regular meeting of June 14, 2017 provided, there were no corrections.

Snow made the motion to accept the regular meeting minutes of June 14, 2017. Keyes seconded the motion. All voted in favor at 7:04 PM.

Approval of 2017 Write Offs

Manager Folding presented the board with a list of uncollectable revenue that needs to be written off the books for 2017. They are customers from our collection agency that have exhausted all their means of collecting or old customers with a +/- \$50.00 not being able to be collected through the RMLP.

Snow made a motion to accept the write offs from the manager ending 6-30-17 for \$545.89. Keyes seconded the motion. All voted in favor at 7:06 PM.

Employee Benefits Negotiation

G. Robert Merry asked Manager Folding how he wanted to handle this part of the meeting. It was agreed upon to listen to the employee group and then Folding would have some feedback. Mark Anderson handed out to the board a list of requests. Option one on the sheet couldn't happen because of the state law. Option two, a \$3.50 per hour merit COLA raise. Anderson explained the breakdown from his chart to the board. It was all the local surrounding towns, including Reading, to first class lineman's pay and health insurance payout. After going over the numbers, Rowley would come out to a \$1393.60 per work week and the average with all the other listed towns comes out to \$1579.56 and a raise needed to get to the average would be \$4.65 per person.

Anderson explained he felt we were above average seeing we received the reliability study award two years in a row where other towns listed haven't. Anderson said everyone works well, the continuity is in balance, and nobody is planning to leave, but there are other towns right now hiring these positions with a more attractive health insurance package. The crew works hard and does the best they can.

Folding echoed Anderson's remarks and would hate to lose anyone over the health insurance costs. Folding does disagree with one thing and that is attaching the rate of pay with an increase because it effects the rate of pay for standby, overtime and anything that is attached to their hourly wage.

Folding handed out a sheet with more information than what was presented by Anderson. It included more towns with the same number of meters along with the surrounding smaller municipalities. He stated the line superintendent and line crew was average and higher as some of the surrounding towns. The office staff is on the higher side of the scale when it comes to their positions. Folding didn't want to down play the cost of insurance with these numbers, he understands that. Folding recommended a raise for the line crew of 2% and for the front office a 1.5% increase. With that, maybe a health stipend could be used as a thought to help concur some of the costs and not tie it to the hourly wage.

The board went on to talk about the stipend. Merry asked if this was part of the opinion we received from counsel and Folding said yes. Folding said you can give an employee any kind of stipend and name it what you want and it is legal. Mark Bixby asked if it is like a merit raise, and Folding said no, it would be like longevity where it can be tied into anything not health insurance.

Folding threw out some figures reflecting a [60% RMLP /40% Employees] split with the health insurance. For a family plan, it would come out to \$2696.88 and a single plan would be \$1440.00 which would be a yearly payment to the employees. This could be a starting point with the group but Folding would leave that up to the board. Both Merry and Robert Snow know how a stipend works as they receive one, minus the health insurance. Snow asked what the \$2600.00 cost per hour would be and Folding said 19 cents. Snow wanted a more concrete number in a percentage rather than a cost. This came out to .004 for the family plan in insurance.

Snow asked Folding the increase he suggested again. Folding said 2% and Snow threw out to the board 2.25%, which comes out to 94 cents per hour. Snow said he is proposing 2.25% across the board for all employees and to do away with the stipend. Snow asked the other board members for input and they were still thinking over the whole thing. Keyes asked if this puts us in line with other towns and Sean LaBelle stated it only 94 cents and we were asking for \$3.50. This doesn't include inflation for the first six months of the year being 2.40% as stated by Bixby. LaBelle stated 2.50% and the stipend would be much better. [Mark Anderson had to leave as there was a trouble call.] Keyes asked if the 2.25% would help with the insurance and the answer was no. Brian Herdman added this reason is why the group tried to tie in the hourly rate with the raise, and they understand the increase on percent, but at the end of the month we are doing the same job as a person in Groveland and they are making more money than us. Herdman also stated we were only asking for \$4.65 and that is still below the figure with the health insurance.

Folding said he feels the way to go is the stipend but it is up to the board as they are decision body. LaBelle said he thinks the 2.50% to cover the cost of living and a slight increase in pay along with the stipend. This is still putting us below other towns. LaBelle said he thinks we are above average and Folding agreed with him.

Keyes asked what the rundown of the numbers for the health insurance stipend would be. Folding stated \$2696.88 for the family plan and \$1440.00 for the single plan. Herdman stated again the towns used in the comparisons by the employees are towns that either are hiring or towns that just filled a spot for first class lineman. He stated nobody is threatening to leave the RMLP, this was just what is going on in other towns. Plus, if someone is to leave or retire, Rowley isn't very attractive to come to with the insurance premiums being so high. It seems the town is either unwilling to or doesn't want to change the percentage across the board. Folding stated he would hate to lose employees over this, but the fact is this is happening to all the different departments in Rowley.

Snow once again threw out to the board 2.25% for the group across the board. Keyes asked how many people were on the family and single plans, 6 family, 1 single, and 1 doesn't receive it. Folding said it would cost a total of \$16,181.28 to the department each year if they went this route with the stipend. This would give the department a 60/40 split as listed above. LaBelle asked if this would be taxed and the answer is yes.

LaBelle stated the group would be in favor a 2.50% and the stipend. Merry said he didn't know how the whole stipend thing would work out and Snow said he wasn't prepared to talk about a stipend as he hasn't evaluated the whole thing. LaBelle asked Folding again what the total percentage of the stipend came out to be and he said .004%. LaBelle stated he would like to go with 2.50% but really keep the stipend instead of adding on the .004%.

For quite a few minutes, the board looked over their material. Snow stated what separated us was he presented a figure of 2.25% and the group would like 2.504% which is a difference of .254%. Snow hasn't heard from his other members and Merry stated he could go with the 2.50% which we have done in the past. Both Merry and Snow didn't feel comfortable with the stipend and would like more information on it. LaBelle threw out the figure of 3.50% across the board without the stipend. Merry said he could offer 3.00% which would bring us to a \$1.46 and we wanted to start at 3.50%, which is still below average. Snow said he would be willing to go to 2.50% and that is all because he understands the dangers of the job and wants to retain employees. Herdman said we gave you the numbers and we are still not even in the ballpark. LaBelle said we are happy with 3.50% because we are happy to work and stay here. He said we would settle for 3.50% just to stay, it is enjoyable to work for Dan and Mark, but he doesn't want to see someone come through his door and say they are leaving, I love it here, but I must leave because of the price of insurance. Sandra Naugler stated we are just settling for 3.50%. LaBelle said we all have been with the town for at least ten years. Snow understands the health insurance issue. He knows the town is locked in at 52.50% and we are 47.50%. LaBelle understood that he just wanted to make sure this is what was the best for the RMLP itself. Herdman stated we understand your hands are tied, but we are looking for an alternative to offset the cost for this issue. Herdman stated he thought 3.50% was fair from both sides.

Snow said he felt firm last year with a percentage of 2.25% but he is willing to go to 2.50% this year because the dangers of the job and for Folding to keep employees and this is his view as a commissioner. He stated he hasn't had enough time to mill over the stipend. Merry said 2.50% and Snow confirmed that. Bixby said the cost of living wasn't supposed to be as high and LaBelle said we have been at 99.9% reliability. Naugler said she felt we are fair and not asking too much.

For quite a few minutes, the board looked over their material. Snow asked Keyes what his thoughts were. Keyes asked if 2.50% do anything to cover the insurance? Naugler said it is in line with what everyone else is bringing and we are settling for 3.50%. Snow asked Merry what he thought and Merry said last year we averaged 2.75%. LaBelle said we would be willing to keep the 2.50% but the stipend would have to be included that Folding included. Snow isn't comfortable with the stipend thing for now, as he wasn't prepared to talk that portion over.

Folding asked if we could just talk about a percentage now and keep the stipend for another date? Snow was agreeable to that and Folding said we could get some more options and would this work with the group. LaBelle asked the question on how the stipend would work as far as receiving it this year, he doesn't want it pushed back to a later date, just how was it going to work? Snow once again said he wasn't comfortable with the stipend idea right now, we will look and think it over. Folding said he put forth the stipend idea to the board at the last minute. Snow again said he is willing to go to 2.504% as a raise and he hasn't heard from his other two colleagues. Merry said he could go with the 2.504% and look at the stipend later and not run into a stone wall. Snow said the stipend thing was sprung upon him and he would like to look it over and do some more thinking on it but it could be done in the future. LaBelle said this isn't the time and place to be crunching numbers why don't we table the stipend for now as Folding has done a lot of research on

it, it sounds like we are onboard with it but if you, *being Snow*, wanted to mull it over, Anderson has some good insight as he had to leave, maybe we should table it for next month? Herdman said it wouldn't be in our best interest because as Folding said it would be a lower percentage than what would we get with the stipend, or without it, it should all be ironed out this evening. Naugler asked if you would give us 3.50% this year and give the stipend a thought for next year. Snow said he wanted to give everyone across the board the same and be the same and he thought that was fair. LaBelle said we would be on board with tabling it for a month and if you, *Snow*, say you don't want any part of the stipend, then we could live with that.

Merry said if he looked over Folding's recommendations, at 2.0% looks to be in line with the surrounding towns and it doesn't look like we are going downhill here. LaBelle stated the numbers Folding used are last year's numbers, and he proceeded to give the rates of the other surrounding towns. These new numbers were the reason why we settled for 3.50% this year.

For quite a few minutes, the board looked over their material. Snow asked the board if they would like to table this till the next meeting. Merry said he would like to look at the stipend option a little more. LaBelle said we would be willing to settle for the 2.50% and the stipend, if two of the commissioners don't have an opinion, then we could table it for the next meeting. He said we were going along with what Folding proposed at the start of the meeting. LaBelle said that if the stipend isn't on the table, then we are going to be looking at more of a percentage. We are willing to settle for 2.50% and the stipend which is still below what we are looking for. Both Merry and Snow agreed upon 2.504% tonight. LaBelle said Folding considered the stipend with council and wanted to make sure everything was legal. Snow said he started at 2.25%, then moved to 2.50%, and then added the .004% to that. He understands he wants to keep retention and knows the dangers of the job.

Again, Merry said he is willing to vote in 2.504% tonight and Snow agreed with him. They asked how Keyes felt and was cut off by LaBelle who said he thinks we aren't ready to say yes to that tonight without knowing what the stipend could bring. Which if we even settled for the 3.50% it is still lower without the stipend. Merry said he would be willing to table the stipend issue for now and do some more research and maybe come back to it next year. LaBelle said we are best in reliability but keeping pace for the averages.

Snow asked the question if it is the commissioners that were going to make the decision on raises? Merry stated that is the way he sees it. Snow said we have heard our recommendations and asked if we were a bargaining unit, which we aren't. There is no union negotiation, and you have come in to ask to talk to us and he respects that but he understands it is the commission that will make the decision. LaBelle asked if it could be up to the manager. At this point Folding shook his head no. Snow said he has taken the suggestion of the manager. LaBelle stated we have been non-union and Bob knows everything is fine and good, we enjoy the discussions going both ways but we don't want to tie our hands. Snow said he worked with us on percentage tonight and knows where we stand. Naugler stated Merry said 3.00% tonight. Snow again stated 2.504% and LaBelle said we are willing for 2.50% and the stipend. Snow said the decision lies with the fellow commission or Folding.

Snow made a motion to table the stipend and study more about it and there is there hasn't been anything decided on percentages. Keyes seconded the motion. All voted in favor at 8:11 PM.

Anderson asked at the next meeting would the percentage still be on the table. Snow said everything is cleared off and would start over with that part.

Manager Benefits Negotiation

Manager Folding felt maybe we should just table this for the next meeting. Nobody had a problem with this.

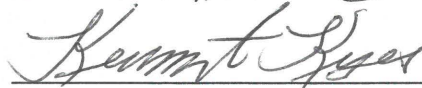
Snow made a motion to table negotiations with the manager till the next meeting. Keyes seconded the motion. All voted in favor at 8:13 PM.

Adjournment

Robert Snow made the motion to adjourn. Kenneth Keyes seconded. All voted in favor in favor at 8:15 PM.

Minutes submitted by Eric R. Grover


G. Robert Merry, Chair


Kenneth Keyes, Clerk



Robert Snow, Member