

Draft for discussion purposes

Belmont Light Governance Reform Goals

1. The Governing Board Should Consist of Members Knowledgeable in Utility/Energy Matters
The entity making decisions regarding Belmont Light (BL) should consist of members with experience in and knowledgeable about the various aspects of electric utility operations and programs. Studies and reports beginning in 2005 looking at the BL governance issue have come to the same conclusion. Belmont has been fortunate in the past few years to have several members of the Light Board (LB) that have become familiar with BL issues. But in the past that hasn't been the case and it may not be the case in the future. The need for an independent board with members knowledgeable in utility/energy matters is demonstrated by the decision of other towns with Municipal Light Plants (MLPs) in Massachusetts. Past research shows that of the MLPs in Massachusetts approximately 90% have elected light boards (27) or appointed Light Boards (7). Belmont is one of four MLPs in which there is no independent Light Board. Of the MLPs in our area, such as Concord, Wellesley, Braintree, Reading, and Wakefield, all have elected or appointed boards.
2. The Governing Board Should Have the Ability to Examine Policy in Detail
The current governing body, the LB, also serve as the Select Board (SB) and has considerable duties overseeing the Town and its various functions. No one can fail to be impressed by how much work the SB members, essentially volunteers, devote to Belmont Town business. The other side of this, however, is that the SB, when serving as the LB, is stretched thin when it comes to BL matters. Given the state of the utility and energy world, it is not possible to adequately manage the needs of BL and the community interests it serves in one-hour meetings once a month – meetings that are really only preliminaries to the longer SB meeting that follow. At the least, a regular multi-hour monthly meeting is needed. At times, multiple meetings a month may be necessary. This should not be read as, in any way, criticizing the efforts of the SB. As indicated above, given the extensive nature of the SB's members duties, and the time available, the SB members undoubtedly do the very best they can. It is also the case that the Light Board Advisory Committee (LBAC) has been trying to use its meetings to help prepare BL for the issues discussed at subsequent Light Board meetings. In addition, the Light Board has scheduled joint meetings with LBAC at times to hear from LBAC directly on BL matters. That has helped, but it does not take away from the need for more regular, detailed discussions of BL-related matters.
3. The Governing Board Should Be a Separate Voice for BL.
There needs to be a separate voice collaborating with and assisting the BL. At present, SB members always wears two hats, one as Light Board member and one as Select Board member. At times BL issues are inevitably viewed from the larger Town perspective. A new governing board would consist of town residents and would certainly consider town interests, but its

primary responsibility would be to BL. Currently, the Light Board Advisory Committee (LBAC) attempts to do what it can to be the voice for BL. However, that is not its charge and it is a purely advisory body and its members recognize that any final decision must come from the Light Board/SB. A new governing board would have as its sole obligation its collaboration with and giving voice to BL.

4. The Governing Board Should Eliminate Duplication of Function

Currently, LBAC discusses issues at its meetings that are often essentially repeated in abbreviated fashion at later LB meetings. While there is sometimes a benefit in an LBAC discussion that focuses issues for a later LB meeting, there are other times where the process is duplicative and inefficient. The current process also means that BL's General Manager and staff often have to attend duplicative meetings, which is not the best use of BL's resources. An independent governing body would eliminate the need for LBAC and eliminate any duplication of function.