

Vice Chairman Anthony Agnitti called the meeting to order at 5:10 p.m. in the BELD Board Room as Chairman Reynolds was delayed in arriving. Those present at the meeting included Chairman Thomas Reynolds, Vice Chairman Anthony Agnitti, Secretary James Regan, General Manager William G. Bottiggi, Ken Stone and Joe Bracken, all of BELD. Chairman Reynolds arrived at 5:16 p.m.

**I. Minutes of Prior Meetings**

**i. January 12, 2021 Open Meeting**

Voted: on motion of Mr. Regan, to accept the minutes of January 12, 2021 Open Meeting as written. Mr. Agnitti stepped down and seconded. So voted.

**II. Items for Action**

None.

**III. Items for Discussion**

**i. Coronavirus Update**

Mr. Bottiggi explained that we had taken a step back in the schedule due to coronavirus holiday spread and we got through that period. We are back to full schedule work – there are some people who can work from home and are – but the crews are all back. We are spending a good amount of money to sanitize and on PPP. Mr. Stone keeps track of how much. Mr. Stone reported that the Town of Braintree just received their payment from the CARES Act and FEMA and he is waiting to hear from them on how much BELD would receive. He continued he was told that we would be receiving 25% from the CARES Act and 75% from FEMA.

Mr. Bottiggi said Town Hall had called BELD as they had some vaccinations available that they did not want to waste. We had to send the employees over within a thirty minute window. Nine employees were given the first dose of the vaccine. That was because there was extra. Hopefully, we will start getting vaccinated soon. Employees do not have to go through the town as there are other ways to get vaccinated.

**ii. Potter II**

Mr. Bottiggi reported that we have received over \$2.4 million of the \$2.5 million and there is only one more insurance that owes us a payment. We have a meeting scheduled tomorrow to talk to the company who is going to help us to open up the gas turbine, disassemble it and sell it for us. There is at least one company who wants it. Then we will continue to try and sell what we can before we attempt to do any demolition. Mr. Li has been talking with a company about the step-up transformer and they have offered \$200,000. There was discussion.

**iii. Negotiations**

Mr. Bottiggi explained that Management and the Union traded proposals. The Union gave a seven page document. He continued: both teams then met and went through the proposals and discussed. The managers met separately today and we pared it down to what Mr. Bottiggi thinks is something

reasonable. Management and the Union are going to meet again on Thursday. There was discussion.

Chairman Reynolds had come in during this discussion. Mr. Agnitti stepped down and made a motion for Mr. Reynolds to take over the meeting. Seconded by Mr. Regan. So voted.

**IV. Personnel Update**

Mr. Bottiggi reported that there may be some more retirements coming up – in addition to the two that he had reported on last month. These positions will be replaced – internally and possibly one from outside BELD.

**V. Old Business (As Determined/Needed)**

None.

**VI. New Business (As Determined/Needed)**

None.

**VII. Public Participation (As Determined/Needed)**

None.

**VIII. Tabled Items**

**IX. Next Regular Meeting – Upcoming Meetings**

- i. Tuesday, March 16, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.**

**X. Executive Session (As Determined/Needed)**

- i. To discuss trade secrets or confidential, competitively-sensitive or other proprietary information.**

Chairman Reynolds announced that the Board would be going into Executive Session to discuss trade secrets or confidential, competitively-sensitive or other proprietary information. He continued any decisions that we vote on will be announced when we come back into Open Session; if no votes are taken we will be adjourning.

Voted: on motion of Mr. Regan, seconded by Mr. Agnitti, to recess Open Session to go into Executive Session.

Chairman Reynolds announced a Roll Call Vote at 5:25 p.m.:

Mr. Agnitti – yes. Mr. Regan – yes. Mr. Reynolds – yes.

Executive Session commenced at 5:26 pm.

Chairman Reynolds re-opened the Open Session 6:09 p.m.

**XI. Adjournment**

Voted: on motion of Mr. Regan, seconded by Mr. Agnitti, to adjourn the meeting at 6:10 p.m. So voted.

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James P. Regan  
Secretary

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**February 9, 2021**

Attendees: Chairman Thomas Reynolds, Vice-Chairman Anthony Agnitti, Secretary James Regan, General Manager William Bottiggi, all of BELD.

A Roll Call Vote was taken to enter Executive Session to discuss trade secrets or confidential, competitively-sensitive or other proprietary information. at 5:25 pm.

Mr. Agnitti – yes

Mr. Regan – yes

Mr. Reynolds - yes

Executive Session commenced at 5:26 pm.

Mr. Bottiggi explained that he asked Mr. Orpen, the Broadband Division Manager to put together a history and what is needed to continue in the Internet business and stay competitive with Comcast and Verizon. The system is over 24 years old and was designed 30 years ago and things have changed a lot in 30 years. This was built for AMR (Automatic Meter Reading).

Mr. Bottiggi continued: we had a big outage last week – squirrels got in and chewed up a bunch of fibers. We had to get a contactor in to do the repair because it was beyond our ability to do it quickly. We have had great employees here over the past 22 years who have helped us greatly to upgrade the system and get us to where we are. However, we do have 2 big competitors and they have 70% of the customers in Braintree. We are stuck right now – we are adding some but it is hard to add because of Covid-19 – at 2500 customers. Another consequence of Covid-19 is the kids are remote learning and more people are having zoom meetings which requires uploading and downloading of information and we are hitting 95% in some of the nodes right now. That could impact our wi-fi. We have lost some customers because of this. Another part of this is that everything is wi-fi. Our techs will go into a home and they will have multiple devices that all require wi-fi: an iPad, laptop, cell phone, 6 Roku sticks. They all add up. The bandwidth keeps going up and up.

Mr. Bottiggi explained that what is required is an upgrade and a major investment to keep going: a 3 year capital expense plan of between \$600,000 and \$700,000 per year. Just under \$2 million in total. Our expenses last year were \$1.9 million and our revenue was around that – we probably lost \$200,000 in the business. As a business we would be spending \$2 million to maintain a breakeven business or a business at a slight loss. We are doing a good job marketing our product but we are dealing with 2 big gorillas. We charge \$39 per month for the 150 meg and \$89 for 800 meg. That is the download speed and the upload is at 30 meg – we are stuck at that because of the technology we have. There was discussion on how upgrading the equipment could increase the upload speed and would it make sense to increase our rates each year and how much would we have to increase it. Comcast has about 4,000 customers, we have 2,500 and Verizon has over 10,000. They have a 2 year deal of \$49 per month and then equipment charges on top – maybe another \$70-80 per month. 5G is also coming and will be another competitor for us. There was discussion.

Mr. Bottiggi reported that there is another piece to this: the broadband talent that we have, retirement of key personnel and the talent that we do not have at this time. There was a

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discussion on the pay scale of BELD's talent versus other cable companies and a brief discussion on contractors. Mr. Bottiggi said even if we had the talent at a lower rate we just don't have the customers in internet. Internet is a commodity – people do not realize all that goes into the background and working behind the scenes. The bottom line is it is a \$2 million investment for a business that isn't growing.

There was discussion. We don't want to waste the ratepayers money. But we want to be a good community resource – we keep the other companies in check. Business is stabilized but at a very low number. The way to keep going is to spend the money – we cannot keep going the way we are. There is time to discuss this more – but we may want to get out of the internet business by the end of 2021.

We would be spending \$800 per subscriber – the electric ratepayers would end up paying for this upgrade. We do not want customer satisfaction going down – we could have outages as we struggle to keep our system up. Mr. Regan said walking away from cable was easier and it has saved people money but walking away from internet is harder as it seems like the modern vehicle. This was discussed. There was some discussion on if the business or the equipment would be worth anything. It is not the money – it is more the quality of the service that we can provide – this is an old system and even if we pay the money it will be dicey. Calculations were done to see how high we would have to raise our rates.

A comment was made that the discussion should be more in line with is this a community service that we can and want to supply – because as a business decision it does not make sense to continue providing internet. However, as a community there are not many that have recognized that we are owned by them and they should use our services. Internet is a vital communication link - this is a very hard decision and must be taken seriously.

Covid has caused our customers to use our system a lot and that has highlighted why we need to upgrade it.

It was discussed to revisit this issue before the summer. There is a severance package clause in the union contract for the employees. And most of the employees will also get some type of a pension.

Motion and roll call vote to adjourn from the Executive Session at 6:09 p.m.

Mr. Agnitti – yes

Mr. Regan – yes

Mr. Reynolds - yes

Executive Session adjourned at 6:09 p.m.

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James P. Regan, Secretary