

**SOUTH HADLEY ELECTRIC LIGHT DEPARTMENT  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS EXECUTIVE SESSION  
SPECIAL VIRTUAL MEETING  
DECEMBER 28, 2023, AT 7:00 P.M.**

Present for Board: Chair John Hine, Vice Chair Denise Presley, Paul Dobosh, Ron Coutu  
Absent: Kurt Schenker

Additional Attendees: SHELD Administrative Specialist Kim Mendoza

The virtual meeting open session was called to order by Chair John Hine at 7:00 P.M. following an open session motion, by Mr. Dobosh and seconded by Ms. Presley, to move into Executive Session pursuant to M.G.L. c. 164, § 47D, for the purpose of contract negotiations with nonunion personnel, the General Manager, and for the purpose of discussing trade secrets, confidential, competitively sensitive, or other propriety information pertaining to fiber projects and then return to Open Session, by a roll call vote (see open minutes).

Mr. Hine stated the meeting was to discuss Mr. Fitzgerald being offered a position at Hudson Light & Power with a significant salary increase. Mr. Hine wanted to discuss whether the Board would want to make a counteroffer to Mr. Fitzgerald to encourage him stay at SHELD.

Mr. Coutu was not in favor of a counteroffer. He further stated he is against the strategy of trying to match salary offers from larger utilities and that the Board has a fiduciary responsibility to rate payers to lower electric rates from telecom profits.

Mr. Dobosh agreed that the Board cannot continually try to match salaries of GMs in the eastern part of the state where there is a higher cost of living. Ms. Presley said she is a strong advocate of Mr. Fitzgerald and is worried about the disruption to SHELD if he leaves. She would like to see him stay but is concerned about what the ratepayers will say about a substantial increase because we have a duty to the ratepayers.

Mr. Hine said the success of Fiberspring has been remarkable and there were no guarantees it would be as successful as it has been. It is providing revenue that will impact the electric side of the business as shown in the 2024 budget. He stated that he is willing to offer Sean more money to stay. Mr. Hine further said if SHELD searches for another GM, there will be substantial costs to hire a search firm, which could cost 25-30% of the salary for the position, plus it would be disruptive to the company. He also doesn't believe the Board could hire a new GM for a salary equal to Sean's current salary, and candidates may not have fiber experience.

Mr. Coutu said that when Mr. Fitzgerald came to SHELD, it was a huge transition and there were a lot of significant issues that he handled very well. He has done an excellent job. SHELD is in a much better place now, with good managers, and is in a better position now to handle a change. Sean has done an excellent job, but the price will be too high for a small utility. Mr. Coutu stated he is concerned about how the Board will negotiate Mr. Fitzgerald's salary next year when

he will already be at the top of the salary range for GMs. Mr. Hine said they will have to address next year's salary, next year.

Mr. Hine reviewed 2023 salaries of the local municipal GMs, with telecom experience. Mr. Dobosh stated the Board could justify a raise for Sean on current competitive rates for an experienced GM with telecom experience. Ms. Presley agreed with Mr. Dobosh and Mr. Hine. She did not think that the disruption of having to hire a new GM was the better choice.

After discussing the GM contact, it was decided to add an 8th amendment to the contract. Mr. Hine stated that the Board would need to go back into open session to take a vote on increasing Mr. Fitzgerald's salary by \$25k effective 1/1/2024 and to authorize the Chair to make the contract changes.

On a motion by Mr. Coutu, seconded by Mr. Dobosh, it was

VOTED: To adjourn the executive session and return to the open session, by a roll call vote: Ms. Presley-aye, Mr. Coutu-aye, Mr. Dobosh-aye, Mr. Hine-aye.

Executive Session ended at 7:49 PM.



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Paul Dobosh, Clerk

Approved: January 25, 2024