



**SOUTH HADLEY ELECTRIC LIGHT DEPARTMENT  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' VIRTUAL MEETING  
APRIL 30, 2026, AT 6:00 P.M.**

Present for the Board: Chair John Hine, Vice Chair Paul Dobosh, Ron Coutu, Darren Hamilton  
Absent: Tom Terry

Present for SHELD: General Manager Sean Fitzgerald, Director of Operations Adam St. Martin,  
Administrative Services Specialist Kim Mendoza, Financial Manager Michael Conchieri

Guest: Nate Therien, MPIC

The virtual meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair John Hine.

**Reorganization of the Board:** Topic was tabled until next month as the full Board was not present.

**Audit Committee:** Mr. Hine previously spoke to Mr. Terry about being on the committee again this year. Mr. Terry agreed. After a brief discussion, Mr. Coutu agreed to return to the committee again this year.

On a motion by Mr. Dobosh, seconded by Mr. Hamilton it was  
VOTED: To appoint Mr. Terry and Mr. Coutu to the audit committee, by roll call vote: Mr. Hamilton-aye, Mr. Coutu-aye, Mr. Dobosh-aye, Mr. Hine-aye.

**Minutes Approval:**

3/26/2026 Open Session:

On a motion by Mr. Hamilton, seconded by Mr. Dobosh it was  
VOTED: To approve the open session minutes of March 26, 2026, by roll call vote: Mr. Dobosh-aye, Mr. Hamilton-aye, Mr. Coutu-aye, Mr. Hine-aye.

**Master Plan Implementation Committee:** Mr. Nate Therien gave the Board background on the prior year's progress and updated them on the reporting process for this year. Although SHELD does well with the task matrix format, others do not, so it was decided to let groups write a narrative version this year. He suggested that SHELD complete the task matrix again and write a narrative that goes beyond the tasks.

Mr. Therien asked SHELD to use the narrative report to reflect on how the Board can help address current town financial issues, divisions, budget pressures, and improving communication. He would like to see SHELD address decisions that are being made that don't take into consideration the needs of the town. What is SHELD's new building plan going forward after the negative non-binding vote?

Mr. Hine said Mr. Fitzgerald would complete the task matrix and the Board would write the narrative addressing the concerns mentioned. Mr. Therien said the MPIC would like to receive the information by July or August.

**Public Comment:**

Mr. Hine asked if anyone wanted to speak on a particular agenda item, to wait until they got to that item. At this time, no one spoke.

**Manager's Report:**

Outages: Two minor outages this past month, under an hour and were due to squirrel contact, on Grandview Street and Carol Ann Drive.

For the third year in a row, SHELD received the Certificate of Excellence award from APPA for exceeding national reliability standards. Mr. Fitzgerald thanked the entire staff for their hard work.

Fiberspring Update: Fiberspring has finally hit a 54% take rate with 2981 connected customers in South Hadley.

Mr. Fitzgerald displayed the stats for Fiberspring for March. The spike in Leverett calls was due to planned router upgrades for the town. Rivercrest Condos are scheduled for mainline fiber installation this week, with splicing and testing next week. Installations of the 23 interested units should begin by the end of May. Fiber installation discussions have resumed at The Meadows, with construction due to begin in June. We also met with the Hadley Village electrician to discuss their project.

Longmeadow has a planned Town funding vote on May 12<sup>th</sup> to be able to proceed with their fiber project.

**Annual Town Disbursement:**

Mr. Hine explained that SHELD transfers funds to the Town each year to reimburse the Town for services they provide to SHELD (Accounting, HR, Payroll, DPW snow removal, etc). The amount has increased over the last 3 years, from \$180k to \$200k to \$220k, and we feel \$220k is still fair for this year. This payment comes from SHELD ratepayer funds.

Mr. Coutu wanted to see an increase this year. Mr. Conchieri noted that town department budgets have decreased, meaning SHELD's \$220,000 contribution now covers a higher percentage (roughly 8.56% projected for 2026) of those budgets. He felt the amount was sufficient.

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

VOTED: To keep the annual disbursement to the Town at \$220,000, by a 3 to 1 roll call vote: Mr. Coutu-no, Mr. Dobosh-aye, Mr. Hamilton-aye, Mr. Hine-aye.

**Fiberspring Financials:**

Mr. Hine started a discussion on how much information SHELD should make public regarding fiber financials. Mr. Coutu thought they had already decided to show more information on the South Hadley fiber financials after the last audit. He agreed that this should not include Leverett and Shutesbury as they are competitive territories, but South Hadley is not. Competition is based on price and not on profitability. We need to be more transparent about fiber profitability in South Hadley.

Mr. Hine said the Board had previously voted to protect fiber financials and this was backed by the Secretary of State, so we remain competitive. He wondered if it is possible to release some high-level information without all the details or will that leave us vulnerable to requests for more detail.

Mr. Fitzgerald referred to a brochure, from competitive "dark money" groups that are against municipal fiber, which is circulating in the area. We are trying to protect sensitive information that these groups could use against us. The Board gets to see the financial information in executive session, but we are trying to protect ourselves since telecommunications is highly competitive against very large providers.

Mr. Hine and Mr. Dobosh agreed that making more information available on what Fiberspring has accomplished would be positive and help promote Fiberspring. The Board agreed on the value of highlighting Fiberspring's profitability and self-sustaining nature to reassure South Hadley residents.

Mr. Hine suggested that we get a legal opinion on being able to release more South Hadley fiber financials at a high level without having to release every detail. It would be positive for residents and could help Longmeadow to know more details about South Hadley fiber financials.

Mr. Conchieri stated that Leverett and Shutesbury financials are not broken out of the fiber totals. It's similar to commercial and residential electricity being combined. It would be an estimate. Mr. Hine would like to be more transparent and asked Mr. Fitzgerald to get a legal opinion on controlling the information released, and the topic will be discussed again next month.

**New Building:**

Mr. Hine said he would like the Board members to talk about the non-binding vote, then attendees will be allowed to speak.

Mr. Coutu stated that giving people the information but not listening when they say no to the new building is not the way to handle the project. 4092 people voted against the building. The plan should be stopped. He views the referendum as a clear mandate from the town and will not support the building project as currently proposed. It's a clear message that we should not build it as planned. I will not vote for this building as currently proposed.

Mr. Dobosh stated that we need the new building. 100 years ago, it was decided that it's the Electric Light Board's responsibility to make these decisions as we were elected to do. Mr. Dobosh referenced a past example of a board decision which was contentious, the nuclear plants, yet they are now our most valuable asset. He wonders what SHELD's rates would be had they not made such a difficult choice. Delaying the project will only result in higher costs due to inflation.

Mr. Hine said the commercial/industrial entities in Town (which account for 40% of the revenue) had no voice in the town referendum. Mr. Hine ran on the ballot for re-election and received 4350 votes even after being clear that he supports the new building. They could have chosen not to elect him. The legislation, 100 years ago, allowed MLP and MLBs to be created and decided the Board should make decisions for the electric light plant, now and in the future. It's the responsibility of each Board member to decide how SHELD will meet its reliability requirements into the future and do what is best for SHELD as a reliable provider of electricity and service. The current 100-year-old building is in the flood zone and would need millions of dollars of renovations and doesn't meet those requirements. It's a Board members' decision.

Mr. Hamilton feels the current building isn't fit for the business. The Board took suggestions to look at existing buildings that ended up being more expensive. Reducing the size of the building doesn't reduce cost substantially. We are well provided with service. I don't see an alternative and the need is pressing.

Mr. Dobosh asked how we would fund \$8 million to renovate the current building. Is it possible to use some existing reserve funds to soften the initial rate impact of the new building?

Mr. Conchieri said it's unrealistic to think we could fund \$8 million in repairs to the existing building without borrowing money and he strongly advised against draining the Depreciation Fund or the \$8M in

the MDLM reserve trust fund, to renovate the existing building. 85 Main Street would still be in the flood plain and would still be too small. For the \$37.5 million new building - it is possible to use some funds over the first 4 years to reduce the cost to ratepayers. If we use \$1 million of the fund and have Fiberspring be responsible for \$4 million dollars, that could lower the cost to the ratepayer from \$17/month to \$14.58/month for 700 kWh usage.

Some of the rate stabilization fund could be used over four years to soften the increase further. By using \$800,000 in the first year, the monthly cost would drop to under \$10.00. Then by reducing the funds taken from the rate stabilization fund over the next 3 years, the cost would gradually increase to \$13.00 and then no longer be subsidized.

It's critical to maintain the rate stabilization funds, and the MDLM funds, to keep rates from having to be drastically increased in the event of emergency operations or recovery from a catastrophe event. It also helps maintain SHELD's favorable credit rating. Mr. Conchieri does not suggest using any of those funds for the new building.

Resident John Howard stated his concern over climate change and older buildings, like the present building, surviving severe weather events. He is not against the new facility, but he is angry with the past Board who did not build it years ago when it was much less expensive. Mt. Holyoke College is changing from using natural gas to electricity so that should help SHELD's business.

Mr. Hine told the Board that if anyone wanted to propose a change in direction, to make a motion. The next major decision for the Board will be the purchase of the Big Y property, pending approval from the Planning Board and Conservation Commission. If the property purchase goes forward, the final decision will be financing the project.

**Old Business:** There was none.

**New Business:**

Mr. Coutu inquired about the impact of Mount Holyoke College transitioning to geothermal heating and cooling on SHELD's peak load and purchasing of power. Mr. Fitzgerald noted that while this will require hedging more power, SHELD's strong asset position (covering nearly 80% of current load) makes the transition manageable. Mr. Hine noted the college's project is likely to be phased in over a long period rather than activated all at once.

**Adjourn:**

On a motion by Mr. Dobosh seconded by Mr. Coutu, it was unanimously VOTED: To adjourn the meeting, by roll call vote: Mr. Hamilton-aye, Mr. Dobosh-aye, Mr. Coutu-aye, Mr. Hine-aye.

The open session ended at 7:39 P.M.

Signed by:



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Darren Hamilton, Light Board Clerk

Approved: May 28, 2026

EXHIBIT A

List of Documents reviewed on April 30, 2026, at the Municipal Light Board Meeting

1. Draft Open Session Minutes of March 26, 2026
2. Estimated Cost Impact of New Facility