

2009 MAY -4 PM 2: 06

April 30, 2009

Hon. Jaclyn A. Brillig
Secretary to the Commission
New York State Public Service Commission
Agency Building 3
Albany, New York 12223-1350

Dear Hon. Brillig:

On January 25, 2009, a Petition to grant a rate increase to the Plattsburgh Municipal Lighting Department was sent to you. I am sending you and the Commissioners many of the articles that were written in the *Press Republican* for review. Last week the Mayor stated again there is a deficit of over \$1.3 million. On Monday, April 27, he stated on *WIRY* radio that he was looking into dissolving the City of Plattsburgh. I am requesting a quick solution to the problems of the Plattsburgh Municipal Lighting Department in granting a rate increase to ensure safe, reliable service, and reasonable just rates.

If the New York State Department of Public Service Commission would like more information or to meet with me, please call me at (518) 563-8998. I would be glad to attend any meetings.

Thank you,



Vickie Kirby
3693 Route 9
Peru, New York 12972

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Published April 22, 2009 12:26 am - Plattsburgh Green Committee details environmental goals in 2009 Action Plan.

Green Committee sets ambitious goals

Photos



PLATTSBURGH — The Plattsburgh Green Committee has released its 2009 Action Plan.

The Green Committee is a community-action organization focused on environmental sustainability.

The Action Plan, created through the input of the community and meeting attendees, includes the creation of task forces focused on: Local Political Action, Green Space, Residential Energy Efficiency, Public Awareness and Education, Recycling/Waste and Transportation.

Do you know someone who is "Going Green" — changing lifestyle or business to lessen their environmental impact? Let us know at news@pressrepublican.com.

The Plattsburgh Green Committee was started through the efforts of a handful of local residents and City Councilor Michael Kelly in August 2008.

The group's actions have already created the Plattsburgh Community Garden Group, a stand-alone organization focused on developing allotment-style community gardens in the City of Plattsburgh and the Local Earth Week Task Force, which has coordinated the efforts of numerous individuals and organizations to create the Local Earth Week Celebration, being held now through Sunday.

Here's a look at some of the goals outlined in the plan:

TRANSITION TOWN
 Goals of the Plattsburgh Green Committee's Political Action Task Force include making both the City and Town of Plattsburgh a "Transition Town," a process that works to address the question: "How can our community respond to the challenges and opportunities of peak oil and climate change?"

Additionally, the Transportation Task Force, working with the Political Action Task Force, plans to coordinate with the county, city, town, Plattsburgh State and Clinton Community College to improve bus routes.

COMMUNITY GARDENS
 The Plattsburgh Community Garden Group, working with the help of the Green Space Task Force, has made headway with the City of Plattsburgh to create space and gain access to water for a community garden in the Melissa L. Penfield Park.

Based on this season's success, the group will begin work toward creating a community garden in the South Acres Park for the 2010 growing season.

The Green Space Task Force also plans to work toward "Tree City USA" status and develop a solid tree-planting plan for the city.

EXPANDED RECYCLING
 The Recycling and Waste Task Force has already arranged a presentation by Casella Waste Management before the full Green Committee.

The Task Force will then present plans and requests to increase recycling options for city residents using Department of Public Works collection services.

The Waste and Recycling Task Force will pressure the city and county to adopt better solutions for recycling management and wider access to recycling services.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
 The Green Committee's Political Action and Residential Energy Efficiency Task Force plans to promote the idea for the City of Plattsburgh Municipal Lighting Department to become the Department of Energy and Efficiency.

The idea is to provide research support showing how MLD can work to decrease the amount of energy used by the ratepayers of the city.

Efficiency alone may provide the needed energy-use saving necessary to provide a net-zero increase to residential and commercial electricity bills even if rates are raised by the projected 8.25 percent, according to the Green Committee.

The federal stimulus plan allocates resources to organizations providing energy-efficiency audits that assess and recommend energy-use savings.

The Green Committee's Residential Energy Efficiency Task Force will work with the department to provide access to or possibly perform energy audits for residents and business owners.

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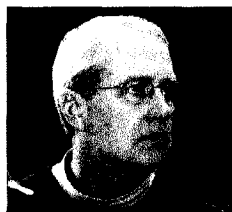
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Photos



City Councilor Michael Kelly
 P-R File Photo /

Published April 09, 2009 11:01 pm - A recent city councilor's opinion piece in the Press-Republican has caused the Public Service Commission to look into the Plattsburgh Municipal Lighting Department's finances.

Opinion piece sparks PSC inquiry
Councilor's figures in P-R on MLD arouses state

By **JOE LoTEMLIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — A recent opinion piece in the newspaper has raised the eyebrows of the Public Service Commission.

The commission has launched a formal inquiry into the finances of the Plattsburgh Municipal Lighting Department following an In My Opinion piece in the Press-Republican last Friday by City Councilor Michael Kelly.

In his lengthy article, which touched on several issues, Kelly (D-Ward 2) asserted that MLD finances are not as bad as some have made them out to be.

He said that recent figures showed MLD was about \$700,000 "to the good" at the end of February.

The city is seeking to raise MLD rates about 8.25 percent in order to deal with a projected deficit of about \$1 million.

Earlier this year, Mayor Donald Kasprzak proposed cutting six line workers to address the projected deficit, but the City Common Council, led by Kelly, did not support the cuts.

Instead, they opted to cut two positions and go forward with the rate increase.

'UNCOVERED ISSUES'

In the aftermath of Kelly's opinion piece, the Public Service Commission sent a letter to MLD asking, in part, for "a complete description and quantification for each of the uncovered accounting issues discussed in the article."

MLD Manager William Treacy responded by explaining that while the city may have accumulated about \$700,000 in revenue so far this year, it does not account for bills that have to be paid from that total.

From that money, about \$261,000 has to go toward depreciation and retirement costs.

Treacy also explained that as of April 1, MLD has switched to lower summer rates, and with warmer weather, electricity usage will be down, which will lower revenue for the remainder of the year.

'CHIPPING AWAY'

Kelly said he stands by his opinion piece.

"Things are as bad as we thought they were, but we are slowly chipping away at the debt," he said Thursday.

"But that does not rid us of the need to have a rate increase and watch our spending."

Kelly said MLD has already curtailed the purchase of new equipment and materials in order to cut costs, along with the two positions that were cut.

But he still maintains that cutting the six line workers would have been too much and unwise.

"Do you want an MLD that functions or do you want a bare-bones MLD that can't provide the services?"

"This is the people's MLD, and they need services. The mayor is the only person who believes that we don't need them (six line workers)."

Kelly said he welcomes the Public Service Commission inquiry.

"I think they should know the facts, and if things are explained to them correctly, I think our rate case will stand."

'IRRESPONSIBLE'

The mayor, on the other hand, said Kelly's opinion piece was inaccurate, irresponsible and designed to promote his agenda of hiring back the two workers who were laid off.

"We will respond to the inquiry and give them all of the correct information in hopes that we can move forward with them in dealing with our MLD financial situation," Kasprzak said.

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Published March 09, 2009 09:15 pm - Borrowing to fix problem deep financial problems with the utility is not the right answer

EDITORIAL: Council keeps going down wrong path regarding MLD

It's not surprising to see the Plattsburgh Common Council opt to borrow money to solve a problem with the Municipal Lighting Department's finances, given its penchant for not wanting to make difficult choices in this stressful economy.

Throughout history, the simple solution in too many cases, unfortunately, has been to just throw money at a problem.

It's easy, it's bloodless, and usually somebody else has to pay for it.

In this case, the council, acting as the MLD Board of Directors, decided to borrow an additional \$1.3 million to rebuild the department's depreciation fund.

The depreciation fund serves as sort of a rainy-day fund and is pretty much mandatory, according to the Public Service Commission.

The city decided to use about \$1.7 million from that fund two years ago to pay for a new substation, leaving it almost depleted.

Normally, that would not be a problem, because the reliable revenue stream of MLD would allow the city to replenish the depreciation fund to a healthy level again in 2008.

But in 2008, with fuel prices soaring and the economy tanking, electricity users took heed and cut back on usage substantially.

As a result, MLD's revenue was significantly down in 2008, not only leaving the depreciation fund unattended but creating a deficit of about \$1 million in the operating budget.

These alarming developments have left the once-reliable and affluent MLD staggering, waiting for the medics to stop the bleeding.

The council could have taken an effective but controversial measure to restore the utility's health by laying off six line workers at a substantial saving, as Mayor Donald Kasprzak and MLD Manager William Treacy suggested.

But, four of the six councilors declined to make the hard choice. They laid off two workers instead at a saving of only \$104,000. They are also considering raising electric rates by as much as 11 percent.

On top of that, they made the decision to borrow the \$1.3 million for the depreciation fund instead of considering more cuts.

In these tough times, when businesses are failing, banks are closing and workers are being laid off in droves, the message is clear and simple: It's time to cut costs in a big way.


Yet the only solutions the Common Council can come up with are borrowing and raising rates, which solves nothing and leaves the problem yet to be dealt with. Conventional wisdom says you don't raise taxes and fees during a recession. More people get hurt, and governments can't afford to further imperil their constituents and revenue sources.

That's the problem with sweeping dirt under the rug; when you lift up the rug, the dirt is still there.



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Published March 04, 2009 10:49 pm - Plattsburgh Common Council debates advisory board for troubled utility.

New advice for MLD

Council debates advisory board for troubled utility

By **JOE LoTEMPLIO**
Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — The Plattsburgh Common Council is considering forming an advisory board to help with utility issues.

Councilor Michael Kelly (D-Ward 2) thinks an advisory board made up of representatives from the public and businesses could help solve some of the city's problems.

"I think it is a wonderful idea to get some input from our customers who pay the bills about what is good and what might not be so good."

The council, which serves as the Municipal Lighting Department Board of Directors, is dealing with several issues regarding the department.

The MLD operational budget is about \$1 million in arrears, due in large part to a decrease in revenue from less usage.

The council also recently agreed to borrow an additional \$1.3 million to rebuild its depreciation fund, which serves as a "rainy day" fund of sorts.

The depreciation fund was depleted when the city earmarked \$1.7 million to pay for a new substation.

The fund was unable to be restored because the city received less revenue in 2008 due to the drop in usage.

The council considered laying off six line workers earlier this year to deal with the operational budget deficit but in the end opted not to make the cuts.

Instead, they agreed to lay off two workers and are considering a rate increase, possibly as high as 11 percent.

Kelly, Timothy Carpenter (D-Ward 1), George Rabideau (R-Ward 3) and Chris Jackson (D-Ward 6) voted not to lay off the six workers.

James Calnon (I-Ward 4) and Amy Valentine (D-Ward 5) supported the cuts, along with Mayor Donald Kasprzak.

Kelly said he would like to see representatives from the major business users in the city, the elderly and a financial expert on an advisory board.

"I think a mixture of people would give us some good input, and at the same time they can see that there is an awful lot involved in running a utility," Kelly said.

The council, as the MLD Board, will meet once a month to discuss the status of the utility.

In past years, the council often would hold only one or two meetings a year as the MLD Board.

Calnon said he has no problem with an advisory board, but in the end, it will be the council that has to make the decisions.

"In all aspects of our role as councilors, we get input on everything we can, and that is great. If we can put together a good advisory board that can help us see things in a different perspective, then that could help us," Calnon said.

"But, ultimately, the decisions rest with the six councilors and the mayor."

E-mail Joe LoTempio at: jltempio@pressrepublican.com



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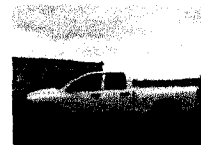
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Published March 04, 2009 05:57 am - Just when we thought the controversy over layoffs in Plattsburgh's Municipal Lighting Department and the prospect of significant raises in electric rates had calmed down, remnants of the ire over the issue have been rekindled.

EDITORIAL: Bad strategy over MLD incident

Just when we thought the controversy over layoffs in Plattsburgh's Municipal Lighting Department and the prospect of significant raises in electric rates had calmed down, remnants of the ire over the issue have been rekindled.

A video of MLD crews handling a recent power outage, posted on the Internet by the citizen who taped them, has Mayor Donald Kasprzak stewing. And the mayor's reputation of being a grudge-holder, deserved or not, has been raised again.

A local resident filmed an MLD crew working on a power outage caused by a squirrel on Hamilton Street last month. In the video, he filmed the crew up in buckets working on power lines and showed a shot of the burned squirrel in a container in back of a work truck. The videographer also got an explanation of what caused the outage from the MLD crew members.

Kasprzak, rightly concerned about work-site safety, was so incensed by the incident that he sent the video clip to the city's insurance company for an opinion.

The incident comes on the heels of a very public debate to tackle escalating MLD costs. The Common Council was considering laying off six MLD line workers to offset the increase of electric rates by 11 percent or more. Kasprzak favored that course of action. The council eventually agreed to lay off only two line workers and is still considering a rate increase.

The mayor is concerned about lax work-site procedures by the MLD workers, saying it could cause liability issues for the city. He's right. But he should have contacted MLD and left it at that.

But he didn't. He is threatening possible disciplinary action against the workers captured on the video clip. And he was quoted in this newspaper as saying: "I find the actions of these workers in this video unacceptable and will seek an opinion on discipline action. Safety on the job site and accountability and efficiency should be top priorities of all city workers, but it appears that is foreign to the MLD workers in this video."

He took a mean-spirited shot at the MLD workers that might give casual observers the idea he's got it in for the unionized utility workers after being rebuked on the layoff plan he supported. The city's MLD crews are known and respected for their professionalism and ability.

It seems to us the mayor is making too much of a public stink about this incident. It's not as if there have been widespread problems at MLD work sites.

Kasprzak should have made sure that the standard operating procedures that the utility has in place will be strictly adhered to in the future and left it at that. Instead, he comes across looking petty and, yes, vindictive.



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Published February 28, 2009 10:25 pm - The Common Council is split on a decision to increase a city bond.

City to borrow to pay off MLD debt

By **JOE LoTEMPLIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — City of Plattsburgh councilors have agreed to borrow money to help stabilize a shaky financial situation at the Municipal Lighting Department.

Councilors agreed to increase one of the city's outstanding bond-anticipation notes from \$8.3 million to \$9.6 million.

The additional \$1.3 million will go toward rebuilding the department's depreciation fund, which serves as a "rainy day" fund of sorts.

The fund has around \$2 million in it, but about \$1.75 million of that is pledged to pay for a new substation that was built.

With the substation payment, the fund will be dangerously low. MLD was not able to add to the fund in 2008 because revenues were down.

LOAN RECOMMENDED

MLD's financial consultant, Richard LaCapra, recommended that the depreciation fund be replenished with a loan.

At a recent meeting of the MLD Board of Directors — the Common Council serves as the board — the vote was 4-3 in favor of borrowing the money.

Councilors Michael Kelly (D-Ward 2), Timothy Carpenter (D-Ward 1), George Rabideau (R-Ward 3) and Chris Jackson (D-Ward 6) voted in favor.

Councilors James Calnon (I-Ward 4) and Amy Valentine (D-Ward 5) voted no, along with Mayor Donald Kasprzak, who has a vote as a member of MLD Board of Directors. In normal council business, the mayor votes only to break a tie.

Kasprzak called the council's move to borrow more money a Band-aid.

"I did not support this borrowing of additional funding because, as I have stated for many months now, the costs that are rising at MLD have not been adequately addressed by a majority of this council," Kasprzak said.

"I will not support borrowing any more money or any large rate increases until all of the costs and expenses have been addressed first."

The mayor said that without cost cuts, MLD will still not be able to adequately supply the depreciation fund in 2009.

"Electric usage is down, and revenues continue to decline because of that, and that is no one's fault, but we have to adjust and cut costs, and we haven't."

FORMAL VOTE LATER

The council will formally vote in June on borrowing the additional money.

Aside from the depreciation-fund problems, the council must still deal with a deficit of more than \$1 million in the MLD operational budget.

Earlier this year, the council, at the behest of the mayor and MLD Manager William Treacy, considered laying off six line workers to help solve the debt, but that controversial idea did not gain enough support.

The council voted 4-2 to lay off only two workers, at a savings of about \$104,000, and to raise rates an undetermined amount.

Kelly, Carpenter, Rabideau and Jackson voted in favor of laying off only two workers instead of six and raising rates.

Calnon and Valentine supported the mayor's idea to lay off six workers.

E-mail Joe LoTemplio at: jlotempio@pressrepublican.com



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Published February 26, 2009 12:15 am - Mayor Donald Kasprzak says lax practices could be city insurance issue.

Mayor mad over video of MLD crew
Worried about work-site safety

By JOE LoTEMPLIO
Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — A video of Municipal Lighting Department crews handling a power outage has the mayor burning.

Plattsburgh resident Andrew Golt filmed an MLD crew working on a power outage caused by a squirrel on Hamilton Street last month.

Golt then posted the video on YouTube on the Internet.

In the video, he filmed the crew up in buckets working on the power lines and captured the fried squirrel that was placed in a container in the back of a work truck.

It appeared that Golt had free access to the work site and at times was right under the buckets and power lines.

He also spoke with MLD workers, receiving an explanation of what caused the outage.

MAYOR CRITICAL
Mayor Donald Kasprzak cited lax work-site procedures by the MLD crew and said it could cause liability issues for the city.

He is considering discipline against the workers.

"Safety on a job site and accountability and efficiency should be top priorities of all city workers, but it appears that is foreign to the MLD workers in this video," Kasprzak said.

"I find the actions of these workers in this video unacceptable and will seek an opinion (with the city's lawyer) on discipline action."

INSURANCE COMPANY
Kasprzak sent the video to the city's insurance company for an opinion.

The company said the crew should not be talking to citizens while they are working.

"Only trained personnel should respond to questions at a site," the insurance company said in an e-mail.

"Just like at any emergency, crews should not talk to anyone with a question but refer them to designated contact people. If the citizen persists, law enforcement should be called in, as the individual is endangering themselves and the workers."

TRAINING
MLD Manager William Treacy said crews are trained not to let citizens into work areas when they are performing repairs and should not have let Golt and his camera so close.

He said decals on the MLD bucket trucks warn people not to touch them.

"Something could happen with the power lines and the bucket, and the truck could become energized, and that could be dangerous," Treacy said.

Treacy was at the Hamilton Street burnout site that day but left before Golt arrived with his camera.

"Once they found out what the problem was, I left because I had a meeting to go to," he said.

Treacy said he will discuss the situation with the mayor to see if discipline is warranted.

MAKES MANY VIDEOS
Golt said he had no particular motive in filming MLD and often posts videos on the Web.

"It's a stress-reliever for me. Some people watch football; I make videos."

Golt did appear at a recent meeting where the Common Council was considering laying off six MLD line workers or raising electricity rates by as much as 11 percent.

"I'm on the fence on this issue," Golt said.

"I know that we have to cut costs, but we also need good services."

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Published February 25, 2009 10:29 am - Local man videotaped Municipal Lighting Department crews working on a power outage. Mayor says citizen shouldn't have been allowed in work area.

Mayor upset about MLD video on YouTube

By **JOE LOTEMPLIO**
Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — A video of Municipal Lighting Department crews handling a power outage has the mayor burning.

Plattsburgh resident Andrew Golt filmed an MLD crew working on a power outage caused by a squirrel on Hamilton Street last month.

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INSURANCE COMPANY

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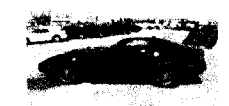
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Published February 14, 2009 11:00 pm - Better ideas for more productivity are necessary to assure job preservation is on solid footing in the long run.

Looking beyond just saving jobs

Colin Read: Everybody's Business

Does anybody know where civility goes when the economy threatens our homes and our jobs?

The "not me" debate is raging. The recession is painful, and we all feel the brunt. It is entirely human to try to preserve jobs in times like these.

Yet, we continue to ask the wrong question. Instead of asking how we can protect our individual interests and preserve our jobs, we should be asking how we can work together to forge a more perfect economy. It won't be easy, but it will be worthwhile.

This is no time for divisive opportunism. Ideology distracts us from the real need to find a solution that sows the seeds for greater productivity. Meanwhile, special interests are paralyzing creativity and Congress both. I am sure that provisions for family planning, tax breaks for movie investors, and honey-bee production in the original American Recovery and Reinvestment Act are all very good initiatives. However, job creation must be the priority. In the words of Winston Churchill, this is the time for blood, toil, tears and sweat. This is not the time to slip a pet project or tax cut through Congress.

We can't expect much help from the creative people on Wall Street. Those who profited are long gone, and yet Wall Street is still the biggest recipient of recovery funds — by far.

Other nations can't bail us out either. We want them to buy our products, but we proposed new legislation that prevents us buying theirs. Such "beggar thy neighbor" Smoot-Hawley policies in the Great Depression, while appealing on the surface, bred retaliation at another time when global economic cooperation was equally important.

We must shift the debate from the promotion of our individual interests or ideologies to the promotion of the interests shared by all. This is a time for common ground, not the common pursuit of self interest.

Unfortunately, we remain stuck in conventional, predictable and self-serving thinking. Workers argue against job cuts, educators argue for more education spending, governors want bailouts for states, and automakers tell us about the value of the auto industry. Wouldn't it be refreshing if each group offered up productivity and service improvements first, before demanding more spending or reduced cuts? Resources follow productivity, but productivity does not necessary result by throwing money at a problem. Indeed, productivity often falls with indiscriminate spending.

If we can produce more, we can expand the economic pie and afford everybody a bigger piece. If instead we artificially preserve unneeded jobs, we may prevent some from joining the unfortunate ranks of the unemployed. But if our solution does not create more production, we are just dividing a fixed pie more thinly. We are only spreading the burden and setting ourselves up for greater competitive disadvantage.


Too often, though, our fearful tendencies cause us to tinker around the edges. Minor cost reductions here or there, perhaps the purchase of fewer pencils and laptops, maybe attendance at fewer conferences, will only get us so far. In this global world where we compete with those who have neither laptops nor conferences, we need change that is more profound.

Consider, for example, the raging Municipal Lighting Department debate. Layoffs were proposed to reduce costs at a time when city residents and businesses contemplating shutdowns can ill-afford rate increases. We all can agree this is not a good time for rate increases, and we all would like to avoid layoffs. Unless we think outside the box, we can't have both, and we have not found much common ground.

We need a bold response in the face of fear. Let's be more imaginative. MLD and others string cable and provide utilities. Why do we constrain their work to arbitrary boundaries drawn on maps, arbitrary job classifications, or arbitrary silos of competitors. Let us use this as an opportunity to contain costs while expanding services through a reinvention of government and industry alike.

Ultimately, if the careful deployment of human resources means we must sometimes trim our human resources to remain viable, competitive, or innovative, so be it. Indeed, if our focus had always been on competitiveness, we would not be in this mess in the first place. It took a

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Michael Betts / P-R Photo

Published February 05, 2009 11:00 pm - Four line positions were saved from the cutting block Thursday night, but city residents could still see a double-digit rate increase.

Council opts to cut two MLD positions, up rates

Compromise may still bring rate hike of more than 10%

By **ANDREA VanVALKENBURG**
Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — The City Common Council has opted to cut two Municipal Lighting Department positions instead of six, but officials say residents could still see a double-digit rate increase.

Mayor Donald Kasprzak originally proposed eliminating the six line positions to help save more than \$600,000 and keep the electric-rate increase at about 5.44 percent.

After weeks of controversy, the proposal went to a vote Thursday night in front of a crowd of about 70 and was shot down by councilors Tim Carpenter (Ward 1), Michael Kelly (Ward 2), George Rabideau (Ward 3) and Chris Jackson (Ward 6).

Instead, those councilors later voiced the need for compromise and voted in support of Jackson's motion to cut one line position and one line-worker helper.

But for Kasprzak and councilors Jim Calnon (Ward 4) and Amy Valentine (Ward 5), those cuts won't make enough of an impact on the deficit of more than \$1 million to bring a reasonable rate increase.

'I'm still very concerned'
"I don't think it will affect the deficit enough to help our future rates for the residents and businesses in our community. I'm still very concerned about the rate," Kasprzak said, adding that the layoffs likely won't bring the impending rate increase below a double-digit hike.

In the nearly three-hour meeting, Calnon and Valentine both voted in support of the six layoffs to help ease the financial burden of already-strained taxpayers.

Valentine said she couldn't support the two cuts because of the larger rate increase and since it's still unclear how much the New York Power Authority increase to the city will be.

Those increases could bring an extra 3-percent raise on top of what the MLD hike will be.

The two positions will officially be cut from the payroll in early March.

Earlier in the meeting, residents spoke out evenly in favor and against the original proposal.

A handful of residents, landlords, small-business owners and corporate managers said a double-digit hike could cripple the tax base and that the low electric rates are what attract businesses and residents to the area despite higher property taxes.

Others, like Jen Colver, supported the larger rate increase and said it should've happened years ago.

Colver said it wasn't just about saving the six jobs but doing "what is best for the City of Plattsburgh ... and keeping a healthy Municipal Lighting Department."

Supporters said the rates would still be lower than outside the city.

The council will now bring the two cuts to MLD financial consultant Richard LaCapra, who will determine what the new rate increase will be.

Councilors who supported the proposal of fewer layoffs said MLD has already lost several positions through attrition and that eliminating half its line force would be too extreme.

Despite the cuts and rate increase, the council agreed more work is needed to address the deficit and current MLD situation.

But, Jackson said, "It's the first step toward cost reduction ... and it's a step in the right direction."

E-mail **Andrea VanValkenburg** at: avanvalkenburg@pressrepublican.com

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Published February 04, 2009 10:37 pm - Tells Rotarians that without layoffs the issue will re-emerge.

Mayor resigned to rate increase for MLD
Tells Rotarians without layoffs issue will re-emerge

By **JOE LoTEMPLIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — For weeks, Mayor Donald Kasprzak has been doing his best to persuade the Common Council that drastic measures are needed to help the Municipal Lighting Department.

The mayor has been seeking the layoffs of six line workers, which he says would save more than \$600,000. That, coupled with a proposed 5.44-percent electric-rate increase, would address a deficit of more than \$1 million.

But it appears that four Common Council members are not in favor of the layoffs and are leaning more toward raising rates, maybe by as much as 11 percent.

The city likely will also be facing increases in charges from the New York Power Authority, which could further raise rates up to 3 percent.

COUNCIL VOTE

The mayor said Wednesday that he is resigned to the fact that his argument will not prevail when the council votes on the issue at tonight's meeting.

"It looks like they will have the four votes to keep the six linemen and then raise rates by 11 percent if they want to," Kasprzak said.

"But I will predict this: We will be revisiting this issue again in three or four months because the deficit is not going away on its own."

The mayor told the Noon Rotary Club Wednesday that he fears that an 11-percent rate increase could harm the city's large industrial users, which, in turn, would impact the entire city.

"Once you start affecting the large industrial users, those decisions better be the right decisions, because if they find a better opportunity they will leave," Kasprzak said.

COMPROMISE?

While the mayor may be frustrated with the way the issue has unfolded, Councilor Chris Jackson (D-Ward 6) says there will be more to the story and that tonight's vote will not be the end of the issue.

He noted that the councilors approved a 60-day stay on the process of seeking the 5.44-percent rate increase while they sort out MLD's finances.

"The stay ends on March 6, and we have to tell Mr. LaCapra (MLD financial consultant Richard LaCapra) what the rate increase should be," Jackson said.

"That doesn't mean that some kind of compromise of cost cutting and rate increases can't be reached."

Jackson said MLD rates need to be increased, regardless, in order to pay for improvements to the system that previous city councils approved.

"There is going to be a rate increase; it is just a matter of how much.

"But it is both a function of cost-cutting and a rate increase, and I hope we can find some middle ground."

MEETING TONIGHT

Expecting a large crowd, the city has moved tonight's meeting to the third-floor auditorium in City Hall, instead of the Council Chambers on the second floor.

The meeting begins with a work session at 5 p.m., followed by the regular meeting at 5:30 p.m.

E-mail Joe LoTemplio at: jlotemplo@pressrepublican.com



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Published February 03, 2009 11:40 pm - Power Authority seeks cost hike in electricity sold to city.

New MLD increase hinted

Power Authority seeks cost hike in electricity sold to city

By **JOE LoTEMPLIO**
Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — Already facing a difficult financial situation with the Municipal Lighting Department, city officials may have to deal with even more bad news.

The city has learned that the New York Power Authority is planning to increase the rates it charges the city for obtaining hydropower by 15.2 percent this year and 6.7 percent next year.

The impact of such increases would amount to rate increases for customers of about 2.3 percent in 2009 and 1.1 percent in 2010.

The increases would come on top of a pending rate increase the city is now considering.

Councilors have been looking at a proposed rate increase of 5.44 percent, as well as laying off six line workers at MLD.

The moves are aimed at reducing a deficit of more than \$1 million in the MLD coffers.

But the council is divided on the layoffs and is considering a rate hike of 11 percent instead.

The issue has sparked heated debate for several weeks. Councilors are expected to make their decision on the issue at Thursday's meeting.

Councilor Michael Kelly (D-Ward 2), who is liaison to MLD, said the Power Authority's rate increases are just proposals.

"We don't even know for sure if this is going to happen. We need more information on this, so as far as I'm concerned, this has no impact on the current situation."

Kelly said it would be wrong to lay off six valuable line workers at this time.

"It is not wise to fire six of your most valuable workers without a plan in place as to how you would operate without them, and I have not seen a plan yet."

Councilor James Calnon (I-Ward 4), who as mayor pro tem serves as the council's budget officer, said the Power Authority's proposed rate increases, along with another 1-percent increase if the council has to borrow money to deal with the deficit, could mean MLD customers will face rate hikes of 8.5 percent to 14.5 percent.

"That's scary to me," Calnon said.

"I don't see how you can consider any type of rate increase without cost containments."

Mayor Donald Kasprzak said the Power Authority is usually successful in seeking increases for hydropower rates.

"I feel very badly for all the ratepayers of this city because it appears that these charges will be added to the 11-percent increase the council looks like it will be supporting," he said.

"I still have not heard any meaningful way to deal with the deficit of MLD."

Kelly said the council will continue to search for ways to deal with the deficit, relying on information from MLD Manager William Treacy, City Chamberlain Richard Marks and MLD financial consultant Richard LaCapra.

Thursday's meeting starts with a work session at 5 p.m., followed by the regular meeting at 5:30; both are open to the public. The council will meet in third-floor auditorium of City Hall to make room for the big crowd that's expected.

E-mail Joe LoTempio at: jlotempio@pressrepublican.com



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Published January 28, 2009 04:24 am - Councilors will go over figures as they head toward decisions on layoffs, rate hike.

City to meet with MLD consultant

By **JOE LoTEMPLIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — City councilors will hear from the Municipal Lighting Department financial consultant tonight in what many hope will be an enlightening meeting.

LaCapra Associates, the city's longtime consultant to MLD, is scheduled to meet with the council at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall.

The city is considering laying off six line workers at MLD in order to close a deficit in that department's budget of more than \$1 million.

But the council is split on the issue and is also considering raising electric rates by as much as 11 percent instead of laying the workers off.

The city had been seeking an electric-rate increase of 5.44 percent but put that on hold until the budget situation can be sorted out.

"Mr. LaCapra will answer questions about the proposed rate increase and give details about the situation, and hopefully many points will be clarified," Mayor Donald Kasprzak said Tuesday.

The meeting is open to the public, but public comments are not expected to be heard.

"This is a work session for the council to get information and ask questions of Mr. LaCapra," the mayor said.

E-mail Joe LoTemplio at: jotemplo@pressrepublican.com

COUNCILOR CONTACTS

Due to the snowstorm expected today, the Press-Republican is providing councilor contact information for city residents who cannot attend the meeting but want to make their opinions known:

- Ward 1: Tim Carpenter
572-6978
tcarp@verizon.net
- Ward 2: Mike Kelly
578-0159
mikekelly@progressforplattsburgh.com
- Ward 3: George Rabideau
563-2357
gergram@verizon.net
- Ward 4: Jim Calnon
593-3278
jcalnon@westelcom.com
- Ward 5: Amy Valentine
570-8074
imaginethat@westelcom.com
- Ward 6: Chris Jackson
563-7653
chris_jackson2008@yahoo.com



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Published January 28, 2009 10:18 pm - William LaCapra, of LaCapra Associates of New York City verifies figures city is faced with.

MLD options reviewed; Council faces tough decision on rates, layoffs
Council faces tough decision on rates, layoffs

By **JOE LoTEMPPIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — A lengthy meeting with the City of Plattsburgh's Municipal Lighting Department financial consultant Wednesday night confirmed what councilors already knew: the city has a difficult decision to make next week.

William LaCapra, of LaCapra Associates of New York City, fielded questions from councilors for two hours about MLD's deficit of more than \$1 million and what to do about it.

The city is considering either raising electric rates by 5.44 percent and cutting six line-worker positions or boosting rates as much as 11 percent and keeping the workers on board.

Now, other options may be considered before the council makes its final decision next Thursday, Feb. 5.

"Isn't there something in between these options that we can do?" Councilor George Rabideau (R-Ward 3) asked LaCapra.

LaCapra said there are different options, but he could not recommend any of them specifically, as he is a financial consultant and not a policy maker.

Councilor Michael Kelly (D-Ward 2), liaison to MLD, said he would prefer smaller increases on a yearly basis or every other year rather than large jumps every four or five years in the long term.

"I think that is more palatable to the public than big increases," Kelly said.

LaCapra said that could be done in the future, but a 5.44-percent hike alone right now would not get MLD out of debt.

"You are too far in the trench."

As for the immediate deficit, Kelly said he is not prepared to make a decision yet.

"We've got a lot to go over in the next week," he said.

Councilor Amy Valentine (D-Ward 5) said she did not favor raising electric rates by a wide margin.

"You don't raise rates in a recession."

Councilor Chris Jackson (D-Ward 6) said MLD would not be in such a financial mess if the council had approved a rate increase of 8.14 percent as LaCapra had recommended in 2006.

"If we took care of this in 2006, we wouldn't be here," Jackson said.

"Well it wasn't taken care of," responded Mayor Donald Kasprzak.

The mayor reiterated his position that he does not favor raising rates 11 percent.

"Mr. LaCapra verified that a 5.44-percent increase will not cover the deficit if we do not also reduce costs," Kasprzak said.

"If we don't reduce costs, then we will have to pass on an 11-percent rate increase to residents, businesses and industrial users, and I simply do not find that acceptable."

E-mail Joe LoTempio at: jlotempio@pressrepublican.com



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Published January 27, 2009 10:24 pm - There should be some compromise, and maybe the rate can be reduced or we could actually plan for the future and finish the work that was started long before some of us were elected.

6 layoffs at MLD imprudent

6 layoffs at MLD imprudent

By **CHRIS JACKSON**

A lot has been said and written about MLD, but here are some facts and opposing opinions that need to see the light of day.

MLD his 10 linemen and two lineman apprentices. They are responsible for maintaining 566 pole mounted transformers, 355 pad mounted transformers, 3945 power poles, 1,008 additional street lights and poles and over 350 miles of distribution power line. If the five linemen and one lineman apprentice are cut, this will reduce the line staff by 50 percent.

In a public work session at City Hall on Jan. 21, 2009, the director of MLD stated that "There is enough work to keep everyone busy. Maintenance on the system has slipped over the past years, due to the conversion work that has gone on, and we need to do a better job of maintaining our system."

Though it is not been discussed publicly, the consultant we pay to analyze our rate needs and guide us through the rate increases process has been requesting that the city proceed with a 5.44 percent rate increase since 2006. That was the year the council approved a 31-percent tax-rate increase, so of course, there was no political will to proceed with an MLD rate increase. I don't know why the process wasn't started in 2007. In the three years that this has been put off by other councils and mayors, MLD has lost that corresponding revenue. Whose fault is that — not the people that work at MLD.

The rate increase will not impact the entire bill. The rate for the "customer charge" will go from \$2.50 to \$2.70, and the remainder of the increase will go against the two "Energy Charge" lines on electric bills. PPAC and IEEP lines are not affected by this increase.

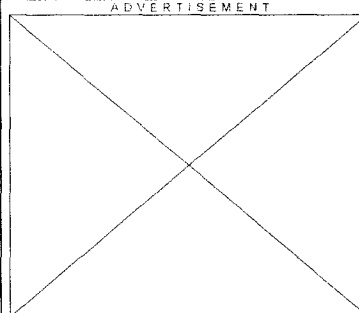
In the article published in the Press-Republican last Friday, Richard Marks stated that the rate increase would be between \$11 and \$25 per month. What Mr. Marks failed to say, was that those numbers were calculated on actual December bills only and were calculated on George Rabideau and another individual's personal bills. Mr. Marks also failed to mention that the other individual has a hot tub that is the equivalent of two additional hot water tanks. When an 11-percent increase is calculated against all of George Rabideau's bills for 2008, it equates to an increase cost of \$99.04 for all of 2008.

What this all boils down to is that, under previous administration, a commitment was made to improve the safety and security of our electric system. The bills for that commitment are coming due. There is still work to do, but major construction of three new substations is complete. We now have to upgrade the transformers, especially in the West End, south of Cornelia Street. This can be done on an ongoing process, as long as we have the staff to do the work. This work can proceed on a section by section basis and will not require bonding.

There are other commitments that the city has made to outside agencies and developers on behalf of MLD that need to be honored, such as rerouting the power over the Northway when NYS DOT installs a new bridge. The DOT will be reimbursing the MLD for all labor and materials costs. We have in our possession the transformers for various parts of the city. These need to be installed. We have six major development projects that will need electricity supplied to them. If we only have a line crew of six people, how will this work get done and who will be taking care of regular maintenance?

The last major increase in electric rates was in 2003. There was a small 1.8-percent increase in 2006. So from 2003 to 2010 (when the rate increase will go into effect) the average rate increase would equate to a 2-percent increase per year. Look at inflation and cost of living over that same period.

When the topic of cutting six positions was originally discussed in late November, I was opposed to it and felt that a 50-percent reduction in line staff was too much. I felt it endangered the safety and security of the system and safety and security of the workers. I argued that one or two may be more appropriate, and I lost the vote 4 to 2. Since then, two people have changed their minds on the appropriateness of six positions, and this has gotten very political. It's too bad. Politics is not governing. If backed into a corner to vote for six cuts or zero, I will vote for zero. There should be some compromise, and maybe the rate can be reduced or we could actually plan for the future and finish the work that was started long before some of us were elected.



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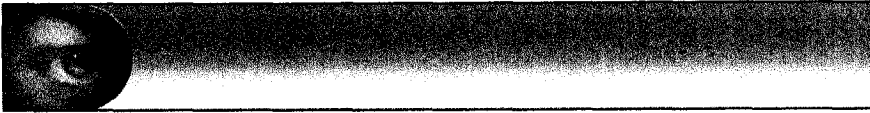
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Published January 23, 2009 11:33 pm - Concerned about department's final budget numbers.

Council votes not to seek new MLD finance manager yet

By **JOE LoTEMLIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — Plattsburgh city councilors voted to hold off on seeking a new finance director for the Municipal Lighting Department until the budget situation in that department becomes clearer.

The council is in the midst of deciding whether to lay off six MLD line workers or raise rates possibly 11 percent to deal with a department deficit of more than \$1 million.

The council is also considering other cost-saving measures and is expected to make a decision Feb. 5.

The finance director position at MLD has been vacant since Robert Shimko retired in December 2007.

Councilor James Calnon (I-Ward 4), who as mayor pro tem acts as the council's budget officer, recommended recently that the post be filled as a step toward fixing MLD's financial problems.

When a vote to seek a new financial director came up at Thursday night's meeting, Councilor Timothy Carpenter (D-Ward 1) offered to postpone the move until Feb. 5 because of the uncertainty.

Carpenter noted that MLD's longtime financial consultant, LaCapra Associates, was due to meet with the council next week.

"I think we should wait on this until we hear from LaCapra," Carpenter said.

Councilor Chris Jackson (D-Ward 6) argued that the city needs the position sooner rather than later, and he noted that funding for the position is in the 2009 budget.

A vote on postponing the matter ended in a three-to-three tie with Carpenter, Michael Kelly (D-Ward 2) and George Rabideau (R-Ward 3) voting in favor of postponing the job search and Calnon, Amy Valentine (D-Ward 5) and Jackson voting against it.

The measure failed for a lack of four votes, and Mayor Donald Kasprzak was out sick, unable to break the tie.

The council then voted on the original resolution to seek a new finance director, and that vote failed by a four-to-two count.

Carpenter, Kelly, Rabideau and Valentine voted against it, while Calnon and Jackson supported initiating a search.

Once the fiscal situation is dealt with, the move to hire a new finance director is expected to come before the council again.

E-mail Joe LoTempio at: jltempio@pressrepublican.com



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Published January 22, 2009 10:45 pm - Cost to ratepayers at issue; figures due next week.

MLD hike disputed
Cost to ratepayers at issue; figures due next week

By **JOE LoTEMLIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — City councilors are considering an 11-percent increase in electric rates in order to save six jobs.

The city agreed last year to seek a rate increase of 5.44 percent to offset a projected deficit in the Municipal Lighting Department budget of more than \$1 million.

The 5.44-percent increase alone would not be enough to solve the deficit, though, so Mayor Donald Kasprzak, after consulting with MLD Manager William Treacy, recommended that six line workers be laid off, as well.

But some Common Council members do not believe the layoffs are necessary and are considering a higher rate increase to deal with the deficit instead.

\$4 PER MONTH AVERAGE

Last week, councilors agreed to ask the Public Service Commission for a 60-day stay on their request for a 5.44-percent increase, in case it needs to be higher.

Securing a rate increase can take up to a year and cost about \$225,000 in fees.

Councilor Michael Kelly (D-Ward 2), who is liaison to MLD, said the council still needs to look at more numbers before making any final decisions.

The city's longtime MLD financial consultant, LaCapra Associates, is scheduled to make a presentation to the council next Wednesday.

"We need to talk to LaCapra before anybody feels comfortable making a decision," Kelly said. "But you can count on a rate increase. What it will be we don't know yet."

Kelly said an 11-percent rate increase would amount to about \$4 per month for an average homeowner in the city.

"It's really nothing to be scared of," he said.

"People are afraid, but in reality, it's really a small increase on your bill."

SYSTEM STRENGTH

Kelly said he is more concerned about the reliability of the MLD system, noting that many old parts will need replacing soon.

Without the six line workers, improvements to the system will be difficult, if not impossible, Kelly said.

"We are in the process of improving the system, and that has to be done.

"We have substations that need to be replaced now or we will have real problems."

Kelly said that if the city had agreed to a rate increase as recommended in 2007, it would not be looking at a double-digit increase now.

"But we are way past the point of how this happened, and we've moved on to how we are going to fix this.

"Nobody wants any hardships, but I'd like people to remember that it is only a few dollars per month."

bigger number

City Chamberlain Richard Marks said Kelly's figures do not appear to compute.

Marks said an 11-percent rate increase actually translates into an electric-bill increase of anywhere between \$11 and \$25 per month in the winter, depending on the size of the house and the amount of usage.

A 5.44-percent increase would equal a hike of about \$4.91 per month for an average home, Marks said.

"It (11-percent rate increase) is something to be afraid of, especially if you are on a fixed income," Marks said.

OPPOSITION

Councilor James Calnon (I-Ward 4) said he does not favor an 11-percent

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Published January 15, 2009 10:38 pm - 5.4-percent may not be enough if six line workers are kept on the job.

MLD rate hike on hold; bigger increase possible

By **JOE LoTEMPPIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — City councilors have agreed to put a request to raise electric rates on hold until they figure out what the Municipal Lighting Department will look like in 2009.

"Because of what we did last week, there may be a different rate," Councilor Chris Jackson (D-Ward 6) said Thursday night.

The council agreed to request a 60-day stay on their request to increase rates by 5.4 percent for 2010.

The council chose to increase electric rates last summer in a move to reduce a deficit of more than \$1 million.

The rate-increase procedure can take up to a year and can cost up to \$225,000 in fees.

But a 5.4-percent rate increase alone will not alleviate the deficit, and with that in mind, Mayor Donald Kasprzak put forward a recommendation from MLD Manager William Treacy that six line workers be laid off.

Councilors have differed on the layoffs and put off a decision until Feb. 5 after they receive more information from the MLD finance consultant, LaCapra Associates, and the Public Service Commission.

The mayor said the fact that the council asked for a stay on the 5.4-percent rate increase indicates to him that they may be heading toward asking for a higher increase.

If the six line workers are kept on the job, a 5.4-percent rate increase will not be sufficient to deal with the deficit, the mayor said.

"If my feeling on this is correct, then they are going to be asking for a double-digit increase in electric rates, which I find completely unaffordable and unacceptable for the people of this city," Kasprzak said.

"The deficit has still not been adequately addressed in all of this, and I know the PSC and our consultants are very concerned about that."

Treacy said that if the council wants to amend their request for an increase higher than 5.4 percent, it will not have to start the process over and pay another \$225,000 in fees.

"They (PSC) just don't want to waste time on something that might change," Treacy said.

Jackson also suggested that the city seek to hire a finance director for MLD as Councilor James Calnon (I-Ward 4) suggested last week.

The finance position has been vacant for about a year since Robert Shimko retired.

E-mail Joe LoTempio at: jlotempio@pressrepublican.com



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Published January 08, 2009 11:18 pm - Final decision on whether to keep the jobs delayed until Feb. 5 meeting.

MLD layoff decision delayed
But councilors approve funding for jobs they may still eliminate

By **JOE LoTEMLIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — City of Plattsburgh councilors voted to keep funding for six Municipal Lighting Department positions in the 2009 budget but delayed a final vote on whether to keep the jobs.

In a three-hour meeting attended by more than 100 people, who crammed into the council chambers and spilled into the adjoining rotunda, councilors vigorously debated the choice of laying off six MLD line-worker positions.

Councilor James Calnon (I-Ward 4) gave a 47-minute slideshow presentation where he refuted information presented last week by Councilor Michael Kelly (D-Ward 2).

Calnon said Kelly's claims that MLD management has wrongly overpurchased equipment in recent years were incorrect.

He said transformers and other equipment that Kelly pointed to all have a destination and will be used as soon as possible.

He also said that comparing ratios of line workers to customers and other municipal systems in the state are not always valid.

"Staffing ratios don't really mean anything, and you should not make a decision based on ratios if you don't know if they are relevant or not," Calnon said.

He also said that Kelly got his information from the workers who are faced with losing their jobs.

"People who are threatened do not make the best witnesses."

Without cutting costs, a proposed rate hike of 5.4 percent for 2010 would have to be more like 14 percent to make up for the deficit of more than \$1 million that MLD is facing, Calnon said.

Kelly countered with a 24-minute slide-show presentation of his own that showed piles of equipment sitting in the MLD yard.

Kelly said he was absolutely convinced that management should not have purchased all of that equipment.

But since it is on hand, that means there is plenty of work for MLD crews to perform.

"You don't buy stuff if you don't have the cash coming in," Kelly said.

"I don't know how you can live with that, Jim (Calnon)."

Amy Valentine (D-Ward 5) told Kelly that it is necessary to pre-order much of MLD's equipment because it is specially made and takes months to receive.

"You don't just go out and buy this stuff at Lowe's," she said.

Kelly reiterated that he felt there was too much "stuff."

"I believe in keeping inventory, but this goes beyond the beyond."

Before Calnon and Kelly made their presentations, several residents, many of whom are related to MLD workers slated to be laid off, spoke up.

Jennifer Colver said she would not mind paying higher taxes to keep the workers employed.

"Is keeping the lowest possible tax rate really worth this trade-off?" she said.

Edmund Sanderson, grievance officer of the Fire Department union, said a depleted MLD staff could jeopardize rescue-personnel safety.

"We want you to realize how interwoven city services are," he said.

Former councilor from Ward 3 Stuart Voss said MLD needs an independent board of directors instead of having the council serve as the board.

"We need a board to manage MLD with expertise and concern and with a long-term look."

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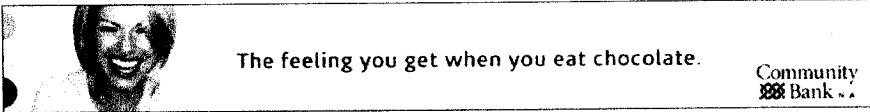
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Published January 08, 2009 10:23 pm - Final decision on whether to keep the jobs delayed until Feb. 5 meeting.

Council opts to keep funding for MLD positions

By **JOE LOTEMPLIO**
 Staff Writer

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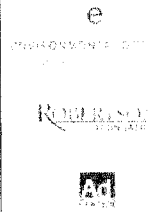
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Published January 07, 2009 11:01 pm - Contract confusion addressed; both city and union satisfied.

City, MLD reach deal on salaries
 MLD union, city agree: No additional 1% raise

By **JOE LoTEMPLIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — While city councilors still have to make a decision on whether to lay off six Municipal Lighting Department employees, it appears they have reached a deal on a new contract with the union.

The city and union came to an agreement last September, but when it came time to formally sign off on the pact last month, some confusion arose.

The deal called for 3-percent raises for five years and for MLD workers who previously got health insurance for free to pay 15 percent of their premiums.

But city leaders charged that the union tried to sneak in an additional 1-percent raise, as well as raises for employees who do not take city health insurance.

Mayor Donald Kasprzak angrily denounced the union's actions, and the city planned to file a grievance with the Public Employment Relations Board.

Union President David Bezio said the disagreement was a misunderstanding over some language in the contract.

At a meeting this week with union representatives from Syracuse and city leaders, the wrinkles were ironed out.

"We wanted to work to put this behind us and move forward because we want to keep MLD solvent," Bezio said.

The additional 1-percent raise the city was angry about has been removed from the pact, Bezio said.

"There was some confusion about that during the negotiations, but we agreed to remove it."

Negotiated changes in the plan include putting all workers who do the same job on the same pay scale and reducing the payments for employees who don't take city health insurance from \$3,000 to \$1,500.

"That's a good deal for the city because a family health insurance plan can cost \$16,000 to \$18,000," Bezio said.

WORKED TOGETHER

The mayor said he was pleased with the outcome.

"I appreciate how we all worked together to settle this and solve this contract."

The MLD offers are facing a \$1.5 million deficit, and the city is considering laying off six line workers.

Bezio offered concessions last month to help address the deficit. He said workers would be willing to go to a 35-hour work week instead of 40 hours.

The suggestion is still being considered.

"We've talked to our members about it, and there are some concerns, but it is still on the table," Bezio said.

City councilors are expected to decide on the proposed layoffs at tonight's meeting, when they vote on the 2009 budget, which includes a tax-levy increase of about 5 percent.

E-mail Joe LoTempio at: jltempio@pressrepublican.com



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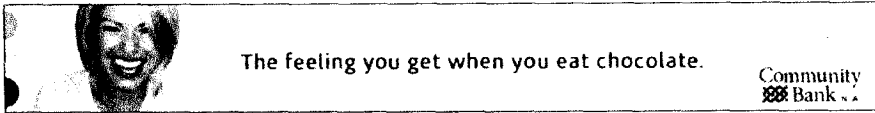
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Published January 06, 2009 11:05 pm - Opinions over deficit, solution vary widely; Kelly and Kasprzak are at odds.

City council to vote on MLD workers' jobs
 ► Opinions over deficit, solution vary widely; Kelly and Kasprzak are at odds

By **JOE LOTEMPLIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — A move to lay off six Plattsburgh Municipal Lighting Department workers has created some serious sparks among the council.

In a cost-saving move, the council is considering laying off six line workers at MLD along with the traffic-enforcement officer position in the Police Department and one Finance Department employee.

The cuts are part of the 2009 budget, which will be voted on at Thursday night's meeting.

The MLD workers are being cut to help eliminate a \$1.5 million deficit in the department.

But Councilor Michael Kelly (D-Ward 2) is convinced that making those cuts is the wrong move.

Kelly said removing those six line-worker positions will put other crews in jeopardy and will hurt ratepayers.

"I am 100-percent convinced that removing these six positions would not only be unwise, but it would also be dangerous," he said.

Kelly said he initially agreed with the layoffs when Mayor Donald Kasprzak and MLD Manager William Treacy suggested the idea in November during budget sessions.

One reason given for the layoffs, Kelly said, was that there was not enough work to keep the six linemen on board.

The city is also concerned about a loss of MLD revenue as some of the major users have cut way back in usage.

But after talking with some of the workers and with MLD Union President David Bezio, Kelly said he sees a different picture.

"I feel we've been lied to. There is plenty of work to be done," he said.

Equipment waiting

Kelly said there are millions of dollars worth of equipment on the ground at the MLD yard on Green Street that needs to be installed.

"This is why we have a deficit, not because of the employees."

Kelly noted that nearby municipal lighting departments have more line workers per customer than Plattsburgh does.

"Rouses Point has one line worker for every 400 customers, Lake Placid has one for every 500 customers and we have one for every 900 customers," he said.

"With the mayor's proposal we would have one for every 1,700 customers."

He also said that if the six linemen are cut, it would leave the staff dangerously low if there was a major power outage.

"If the power goes out at midnight on a Thursday, the crew that goes out is not allowed to work the next day because of safety rules.

"That would leave us with no one to work on Friday if something were to happen then. People remember during the Ice Storm (1998) we had our power back on very quickly while some parts of the county went three weeks without power. Our ratepayers appreciate that and want that to continue."

Kelly said that the shortage in revenue because of the cutback in power by some of the major users will turn around.

"We've got some big projects going on here, and I think that will help. It is not all doom and gloom like the mayor says."

Kelly also said that the mayor and Treacy have not offered any solid plans as to how MLD would operate without the six linemen.

"I think the mayor has been way more biased than the workers," he said.

"He has been attacking union members ever since he took this job."

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City Councilor Michael Kelly
P-R File Photo /

Published December 31, 2008 04:31 am - At the council's meeting Tuesday evening, discussion revolved heavily around the city's plan to lay off eight workers in a cost-savings measure.

Council hears case against planned layoffs

By **KATELYN MOCKRY**
Contributing Writer

PLATTSBURGH – The City of Plattsburgh Common Council continues to face challenges with its 2009 budget.

At the council's meeting Tuesday evening, discussion revolved heavily around the city's plan to lay off eight workers as part of a cost-savings measure.

Effective March 4, 2009, pending council approval, the city will lose six workers from the Municipal Lighting Department, one from the Finance Office and one from the Police Department.

Denise Nephew, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, addressed the council regarding the elimination of the billing clerk and parking-enforcement officer positions.

Nephew requested that the billing clerk position's end date be moved from March 4, 2009, to June 20, 2009, so the person currently doing that job can qualify for benefits associated with 30 years of work.

With this appeal, however, Nephew asked the council to reconsider eliminating the position at all.

"The office is already overloaded," she said.

Nephew also expressed concern about eliminating the parking-enforcement officer position, which she said brought in more than \$97,000 in tickets paid in 2008. She also noted that in 2008 there was a budget for \$65,000 in parking-ticket revenue, and there's a budget for \$90,000 in revenue in 2009.

"There must be other ways to trim the budget without removing bodies, especially those bringing in revenue," she said.

Councilor Michael Kelly (D-Ward 2) said he's re-evaluated the decision to eliminate six MLD positions.

"I'm proud of the budget. We've worked hard to make it right, but I'm not pleased with the MLD budget."

Kelly said the councilors have some challenges to deal with, but he didn't believe staffing was the problem.

"I don't want the taxpayers paying for unnecessary jobs," but I don't believe the MLD positions are redundant."

Kelly believes the issues at MLD are rooted in financial management problems rather than from a lack of work.

Mayor Donald Kasprzak said it will be difficult to keep these jobs on board.

"My concern still remains with how the council is going to address the \$1.5 million deficit in the MLD in 2009."

If the city positions are not cut, Kasprzak said, electric rates will increase on top of an already proposed rate hike in the budget.

"I do not support regular electric-rate increases because people in our community cannot afford that type of decision making."

Kelly requested to adopt the Common Council budget as compiled Dec. 22, with exception to the MLD budget, when they vote next week. He suggested that the MLD budget that was compiled in October, which didn't include the staffing reductions, be voted upon as a temporary MLD budget instead.

Regardless of how the budget is divided up, an agreement will be made at the Jan. 8 meeting, said Jim Calnon (D-Ward 4).

"You never know what's going to happen around the council table until a vote is taken, and we'll have to see what happens next week."



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Published December 19, 2008 04:30 am - Union willing to take original deal.

Contract dispute called misunderstanding

By **JOE LOTEPLIO**
Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH -- A contract dispute between the City of Plattsburgh and the Municipal Lighting Department union was called a misunderstanding by the union leader.

Union Chairman David Bezio told councilors Thursday night that the disagreement stemmed from language in the memorandum of understanding that said unless an item was specifically discussed, it would remain the same as in the old contract.

The previous MLD contract expired in 2007, and in August, the union and city appeared to have agreed to a new five-year deal.

The new deal included raises of 3 percent for five years and called for all employees to pay some of their health-insurance premiums.

But the union came back with a plan that called for additional 1-percent raises and raises for those who do not use the city's health insurance.

Mayor Donald Kasprzak accused the union of trying to sneak in extra raises after the fact. He called their actions greedy and selfish.

Bezio said the mayor's comments were unnecessary.

"I won't participate in that because it is not good for the city or MLD," he told the Press-Republican.

The additional 1-percent raise was never brought up by the city or the union during negotiations, he said, and it was added to the agreement by union headquarters in Syracuse.

Both the union and the city have filed unfair labor practices against each other with the Public Employment Board of Relations.

Bezio said Thursday night that the union is willing to sign the original deal agreed upon in August.

"I want to settle this," he said.

"This is a historic agreement, and we want to ink the deal."

The mayor said the council will consider Bezio's offer.

jloteplio@pressrepublican.com



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Published December 19, 2008 04:30 am - It appears that the anger among the City of Plattsburgh Common Council members regarding the proposed contract for the Municipal Lighting Department is justified.

EDITORIAL: City's MLD union not playing fair

It appears that the anger among the City of Plattsburgh Common Council members regarding the proposed contract for the Municipal Lighting Department is justified.

The council and Mayor Donald Kasprzak are outraged over what they call a sneak attack by the union.

The problem stems from a contract agreement that was reached between the city and the union in August.

The deal called for 3-percent raises for five years and for employees who got health insurance for free to begin paying 15 percent of their premiums.

Both the council and the union approved the contract; the council unanimously, and the union by a vote of 22-6.

As the paperwork portion of the deal began to unfold over the months following the agreement, the city suddenly found itself facing a different deal.

The union submitted an agreement that features an additional 1-percent raise, as well as raises for employees who do not take city health insurance.

If not for the good work of City Chamberlain Richard Marks, MLD Manager William Treacy and the city's labor attorney, Jacqueline Kelleher, the additional raises might not have been noticed until the deal was signed and the first pay period rolled around. By then, it would have been too late, and the city would have suffered the consequences.

The additions to the agreed-upon contract have the mayor and councilors incensed. The mayor called the actions greedy and selfish.

Councilor James Calnon (1-Ward 4) was moved to barnyard profanity at a recent council meeting in addressing the union's move.

Union President David Bezio said the contract dispute is simply a misunderstanding. Information got lost between a mediator and the two sides, he explained to the council Thursday night.

Bezio vowed to correct the situation and was even talking about offering substantial givebacks to the city.

We will watch closely to see how it all unfolds.

The city says it will be taking the matter to the Public Employment Relations Board to make sure the original agreement is enforced.

We hope the union goes back to the original, agreed-upon deal not only because it is the right thing to do but also because it is in the best interest of the taxpayers who are being asked to foot the bill for this contract.

It is interesting to note that this union maneuver comes at a time when, for the first time perhaps ever, the MLD budget is running a deficit of more than \$1 million.

The city is already proposing a rate hike to compensate for the deficit. To sneak in an additional 1-percent raise, if that is indeed what happened, is insulting to the ratepayers who are already being asked to clean up MLD's finances.

The mayor often talks about changing the culture of the city in that it has to become more about the taxpayers than the employees.


With episodes like this, we can see that achieving that culture change will be an uphill battle.

We wish him luck.





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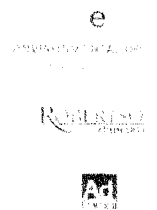
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Published December 19, 2008 04:30 am - Plattsburgh Municipal Lighting Department union willing to provide major concessions.

MLD union offers plan to avoid layoffs

By **JOE LoTEMPLIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH -- The leader of the Plattsburgh Municipal Lighting Department union is offering major concessions to the city in order to avoid layoffs.

Union Chairman David Bezio told councilors Thursday night that the union would be willing to accept major pay cuts, get rid of overtime and reduce the amount of equipment and supplies purchased to save jobs.

"I am negotiating this contract right here on the floor of City Hall," Bezio said as he passed out his proposal to councilors.

"We will do what we have to in order to save MLD."

The city is planning on laying off eight workers effective March 4, 2009, as a cost-saving measure. Six of those employees are from MLD.

The MLD coffers are facing a \$1.4 million deficit, and the layoffs will save about \$700,000. The city is also considering a rate hike to make up the rest of the deficit.

Bezio countered with an offer of reducing work hours for the 30 MLD employees by five hours a week, from 40 to 35. That would amount to pay cuts of up to \$10,000 per year for some employees, or about \$225,000 total.

He also offered to remove lineworkers on standby, for a savings of about \$18,000, and any other overtime where possible, a savings of about \$25,000.

Also offered was a cut in materials of about \$194,000.

Bezio said the concessions would be considered temporary until the new contract expires or MLD is able to get back in the black.

He said the union membership has not voted on his plan yet, but he assured the council that he has full support.

"I won't tell you that everyone is happy, but we are a family, and we are willing to do this to save MLD."

In return for their offer, Bezio said, the union would like two seats on the MLD Board of Directors and two residents to be put on the board, which is currently made up of the six councilors and the mayor.

The union would also like to see a 10- to 12-percent reduction in MLD Manager William Treacy's \$92,000 salary.

"If we are going to feel pain then so should management," Bezio said.

Mayor Donald Kasprzak said the city's decision to lay off workers was not personal but based on economics.

He said the council would review the union's offer before voting on its final budget plan Jan. 8, 2009.

Councilor Chris Jackson (D-Ward 6) said the decision to lay off people was not made solely by the mayor.

"This was agreed to by the council, and this is not new or retaliatory," Jackson said.

"This was discussed back in August."

Councilor and Mayor Pro Tem James Calnon (I-Ward 4), who serves as the council budget officer, said the union's offer deserves some study.

"The best way to work things out is to discuss them," Calnon said.

"This is a significant proposal, and we will certainly look at it."

E-mail Joe LoTemplio at:

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Published December 17, 2008 04:32 am - Positions will be cut in MLD, finance, police due to budget problems.

City to cut eight positions

By JOE LOTEMPPIO
Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH -- The City of Plattsburgh will reduce its workforce by eight people in an effort to solve budget problems.

"This decision was very difficult and not a reflection of the hard work performed by these city employees," Mayor Donald Kasprzak said Tuesday.

Effective March 4, 2009, pending council approval, the city will lose six workers from the Municipal Lighting Department, one from the Finance Office and one from the Police Department.

The MLD workers include five line workers and one line helper.

The finance position is a billing clerk, and the police position is the parking-enforcement officer.

The cuts in MLD and finance will be done based on seniority.

The mayor said Alan Gibson, Personnel Department director for Clinton County, is involved to ensure that proper Civil Service procedures are followed with the layoffs.

MLD Union President David Bezio did not return calls from the Press-Republican to discuss the layoffs and neither did Denise Nephew, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

The total savings from the cuts will be close to \$700,000.

Kasprzak said the money will allow the city to restore the fund balance and go toward eliminating a more than \$1 million deficit in the MLD budget.

The city is also seeking a rate hike for MLD customers to deal with the deficit.

"We also have a concern that some of our larger users will diminish their use of electricity in the next few years, which will affect our revenues," Kasprzak said.

"Unfortunately, we could be looking at even further cuts in the 2010 budget, as well."

The mayor said the parking-enforcement officer position was cut because it was not cost effective.

"The revenues coming in from that position were not what we predicted.

"We will rely on patrol officers to enforce parking regulations."

Police Chief Desmond Racicot said a large percentage of parking tickets, including those issued during snow-emergency parking bans, are already written by patrol officers.


"We understand that in tough economic times we have to work to pick up the slack," Racicot said.

"We don't have a choice."



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Published December 12, 2008 10:09 pm - Calls Municipal Lighting Department union selfish and greedy.

Mayor outraged at city union
Says union tried to slip in higher amount for raises

By **JOE LoTEMPLIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — Plattsburgh Mayor Donald Kasprzak is outraged at what he calls a sneak attack by one city union.

"What kind of people are we dealing with here?" Kasprzak said at Thursday night's Common Council meeting.

"This is disrespectful, unprofessional and, I believe, illegal."

The mayor was fuming over an apparent attempt by the Municipal Lighting Department to change a contract agreed upon by the union and city in August.

The deal called for 3-percent raises for five years and for MLD workers who got health insurance for free to begin paying 15 percent of their premiums.

The council unanimously approved the contract, and the union voted to OK it by a 22-6 count.

But the deal has yet to be formally signed, and the city claims that MLD has since submitted a contract that features different numbers.

Kasprzak said the new MLD figures show an additional 1-percent raise, as well as raises for employees who do not take city health insurance.

"The union is refusing to accept a contract that they signed off on, and they tried to sneak something in there, but we caught it," Kasprzak said.

"We will go to the Public Employees Relations Board and sue to make sure they enforce this agreement."

The mayor said MLD's behavior in a time when millions of Americans are losing their jobs, homes and savings is upsetting.

"The MLD union changed this out of greed and selfishness," he said, noting the department is facing a \$1.4 million deficit, which has spurred the need for a proposed rate increase.

"Yet their employees want more money than what was negotiated for."

Councilor James Calnon (I-Ward 4) said the city should look at previous agreements over the years to see if contracts were changed before being formally signed.

"I could understand if there was some dispute with some language or something like this, but you can't mistake a 3 for a 4," Calnon said.

"This looks like it was definitely done on purpose."

Union President David Bezio said he did not want to comment on the issue until he spoke with union representatives from the Syracuse office.

"We are trying to work through some issues here," Bezio said.

The mayor said MLD's actions are costing the city.

"This is going to cost us to pursue this legally, and the health insurance copays were supposed to start Dec. 1, so that is costing us, too.

"This is a perfect example of how people are trying to take advantage of us, and they will not be allowed to do that."

E-mail Joe LoTempio at: jlotempio@pressrepublican.com



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Published October 16, 2008 11:30 pm - Officials will use great deal of fund balance to lower taxes.

City budget to feature 5-percent tax levy increase

Officials use fund balance to cover some expenses

By **JOE LoTEMPLIO**
Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH -- The proposed tentative 2009 budget for the City of Plattsburgh features a 5-percent increase in the tax levy.

It could have been worse.

"I think the taxpayers deserve as much tax relief as we can give them so we did some things to provide that," Mayor Donald Kasprzak said.

The city is facing an overall loss in revenue of about \$841,000. The main loss comes in the form of \$850,000 from Saranac Energy Partners (formerly Falcon Seaboard) from an agreement that expires in early 2009.

State aid is also not expected to increase.

On the plus side, the city will get about \$200,000 more in sales-tax revenue than anticipated, and revenue from other sources is also up about \$91,000.

But health-care costs have gone up about \$401,000 despite a change in the city's health maintenance organization plan that shaved about \$600,000 off health-care costs.

All told, the city was initially looking at a tax-levy increase of \$1,498,935, or about an 18-percent increase. The tax levy is the amount raised by taxes.

To pare down the levy, Kasprzak said \$1,102,112 of the fund balance was used to lower the amount.

That leaves the fund balance with \$1,251,000, or 6 percent of the general fund.

"The state comptroller recommends that your fund balance be between 5 and 10 percent, and we are within that range," Kasprzak said.

Councilor James Calnon (1-Ward 4), who as mayor pro tem serves as budget officer, said he would like to have seen less of the fund balance used to lower the tax levy.

"I'm not comfortable using that much, but I am willing to do it," Calnon said.

"I would feel better with using only \$750,000 or \$800,000 because you just don't know what unforeseen costs you might have."

The council will continue to look over the budget for ways to cut more costs, with a goal of further reducing the spending plan by another \$300,000 to \$400,000, which would be put back into the fund balance.

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Published September 26, 2008 10:15 pm - All workers will now pay portion of health-care costs.

City, electrical union agree to new deal
Workers will all pay part of insurance for first time

By **JOE LoTEMPPIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH – The City of Plattsburgh has approved a new contract for the Municipal Lighting Department union.

The deal is of historic proportions as all union members will begin to pay a portion of their health insurance.

"For the first time in the city's history, an entire bargaining unit will be paying for a portion of their health care," Mayor Donald Kasprzak said.

"Compromises were made by both sides, and we had good negotiations."

The five-year deal calls for 15 percent in raises spread out over five years for the 30 MLD workers.

The deal is retroactive to July 1, 2007.

In return, the union agreed to have every member pay 15 percent of their co-payment for health insurance.

Any MLD worker hired after 1993 began paying 25 percent of their health insurance. That figure was dropped to 15 percent in 2004.

Those hired before 1993, representing about half of the staff, did not pay anything for health insurance until now.

"We felt we needed to do our part to help the city in this time of financial trouble because we realize what the situation is," MLD Union President David Bezio said.

"I know the mayor probably would have liked the figure (co-payment) to be higher, but you have to work in small steps."

The union also agreed to go to bi-weekly paychecks instead of weekly.

The mayor said that change, although it may seem small, will help the city.

"Now, with three of the five bargaining units going to bi-weekly paychecks, we will be able to save on payroll in the future in the Finance Department," Kasprzak said.

The union ratified the contract by a 22-6 vote.

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Photos



Ed Agnew from Morrisonville Construction cleans up debris from a tree that fell around 5:15 a.m. in the City of Plattsburgh, blocking Sanborn Avenue and knocking down power and phone lines. 'It could have been a lot worse,' homeowner Sherman Luck said.
 Staff Photo/Kelli Catana /



Sherman Luck (right) stands in his front yard, with neighbor Herbert Myers, looking at the trunk of a maple tree that fell across Sanborn Avenue in the City of Plattsburgh during a windstorm early Monday. 'It made an awful noise,' Sherman said. Verizon, the Municipal Lighting Department and contractors from Morrisonville Construction worked to clean up the mess.
 Staff Photo/Kelli Catana /

Published September 15, 2008 10:30 pm - Remnants of hurricane blows through, taking down trees and power lines.

Windstorm blasts North Country
Storm takes down trees, power lines

By **DENISE RAYMO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH -- The remnants of Hurricane Ike blasted the North Country early Monday, toppling trees and causing power outages.

As of 11:30 a.m. Monday, about 2,300 New York State Electric & Gas customers remained without power, down from a peak of about 5,000 customers.

The heaviest concentration of NYSEG outages were in the towns of Bellmont, Chesterfield, Dannemora, Ellenburg, Long Lake, Peru and Plattsburgh.

At 1 p.m., National Grid had 1,062 customers out in Franklin County, 870 in Essex County and 81 in Clinton County.

In Franklin, most of the National Grid outages were in the Town of Brighton; in Essex County, the problem spots were Crown Point and Schroon; in Clinton County, Black Brook.

National Grid predicted most customers would have power by late Monday.

NYSEG crews expected to have all the customers back online by midnight.

"The high winds resulted in numerous downed wires," Mark Leta, NYSEG's regional operations manager, said in a news release.

But he cited "a quick response from our crews" in getting power back on.

To ensure safety as the restoration effort continues, any downed or low-hanging wires should be assumed to be "energized."

People must stay away from any problem wires and keep others away as well to ensure their safety, Leta said.

MLD BUSY

Several big trees were knocked down, which damaged power-service boxes at some residences and tore down power lines.

The biggest problem happened shortly after that, when a large tree fell on power lines between Kennedy and Erin avenues in the West End. Power had to be shut off on those two streets for about two hours as MLD crews made repairs.

A large tree also came down at the corner of Broad Street and Sanborn Avenue. MLD crews cut up and removed that tree.

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Published August 15, 2008 10:45 pm - Interim leader given top Municipal Lighting Department job permanently.

City hires new MLD manager

By **JOE LoTEMPLIO**
Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH – William Treacy has been named as the new manager of Plattsburgh Municipal Lighting Department.

Treacy, 49, has been running the utility as interim manager since former Manager John Brown retired last October.

The city did a nationwide search for a new manager, but it did not yield a candidate suited for the job or one who would accept the city's terms. Mayor Donald Kasprzak said Treacy has filled in admirably since he became interim manager, which prompted the council to forego another search and give him the job on a permanent basis.

"We have hired a man who is dedicated and experienced who will benefit the city," Kasprzak said. "I am pleased we appointed him."

Treacy, whose salary will be \$92,233, joined MLD in June 2004 after working as a structural superintendent for Plattsburgh Area Redevelopment Corp. for nine years.

A native of New York City, Treacy served in the Air Force as an engineering officer for 14 years and worked for the Department of Defense as a civilian for one year before joining PARC. He went through Reserve Officers Training Corp. at Plattsburgh Air Force Base in 1979.

As head of MLD, Treacy will be overseeing a utility that has built a reputation over the years as being one of the most affordable in the nation.

"I just want to keep the organization going forward and want to continue providing good service to our customers," Treacy said.

jlotemplo@pressrepublican.com



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Published June 18, 2008 11:00 pm - Grievances, overtime, time off to collect award provoke reply from Mayor Kasprzak.

'Selfish' employee gripes irk mayor

Grievances, overtime, time off to collect award provoke reply

By **JOE LoTEMPPIO**
Staff Writer



Mayor Donald Kasprzak
P-R File Photo /

PLATTSBURGH – City of Plattsburgh Mayor Donald Kasprzak is unhappy with complaints from a few city employees.

He says their actions are selfish and frivolous and costing taxpayers.

"These people don't get it," Kasprzak said. "They don't care about the taxpayers, but I do."

PAY DURING TRAINING

The mayor is angry over a grievance from the Fire Department union regarding pay for three newly hired firefighters who recently completed basic training.

While in training in Utica, the three probationary firefighters were paid for 48 hours of work per week, which represents a regular workweek for city firefighters, who work 24-hour shifts every fourth day.

The union is arguing that the rookies should get paid for 61 hours per week while in training.

"The probationary scheduled workers have been compensated by the fire chief with a fixed 48-hour work week, regardless of their actual hours worked," the grievance read.

"The probationary scheduled workers are working an average of 61 active work hours per week. This includes all active work, such as physical training, classroom time, practical skills in training, station maintenance and travel time and time in which they are engaged to wait. It does not include meal periods."

Kasprzak said Fire Chief Paul Williams told him that no other state fire departments that he knows of pay rookie firefighters more than regular pay while they are in basic training.

City Councilor James Calnon (1-Ward 4) agreed with the mayor.

"These firefighters have not been productive yet in terms of fighting fires for the city, and yet the union wants them to get paid more already," he said.

GRIEVANCES

Kasprzak said union grievance officer Edmund Sanderson is taking advantage of the taxpayers.

"He's filed six grievances since Chief Williams took over, and they are frivolous because he doesn't like the way things are," the mayor said.

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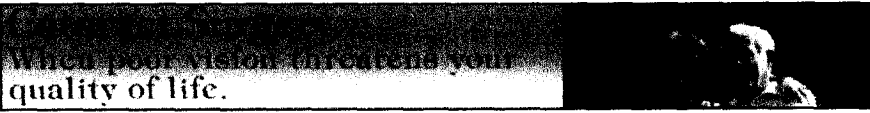


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- 2009 Toyota Matrix - Blue - \$24,141

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Mayor Donald Kasprzak
P-R File Photo /

"He (Sanderson) has earned \$33,000 in overtime the past three years, and you would think that he would be working in the best interest of the taxpayers who pay his salary and spend more time on training than on frivolous grievances."

The mayor said Sanderson is making the rest of the department look bad.

"He is hurting the reputation of the good firefighters by doing this. I think the excellent people of the department ought to handle this problem internally," he said.

Sanderson did not return repeated telephone calls from the Press-Republican.

CONTEST WINNER

Also irritating the mayor is a complaint from Municipal Lighting Department lineman Paul Kirby.

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USEFUL TO CITY?

Calnon wonders if Kirby's attendance in the program will actually help MLD ratepayers.

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'Selfish' employee gripes irk mayor

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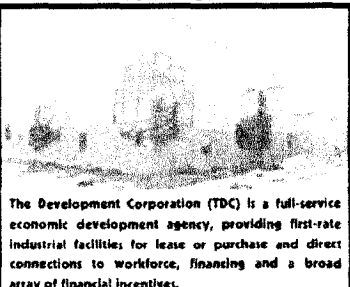
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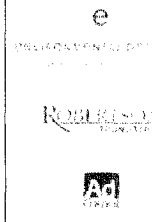
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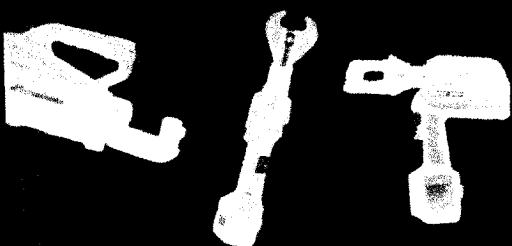
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Published June 11, 2008 10:05 am - City of Plattsburgh considering electric rate hike to pay for infrastructure improvements.

MLD rates may be raised

By **JOE LOTEPLIO**
Staff Photo

PLATTSBURGH — City of Plattsburgh electric users will probably see a rate hike in the near future.

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Councilors are considering a 5-percent increase for residential and commercial users to help pay for improvements to the Municipal Lighting Department's infrastructure.

But it could have been worse.

Late last year, outgoing MLD Manager John Brown recommended an 8-percent rate increase, but Mayor Donald Kasprzak and the Common Council rejected the idea.

"With all the financial problems this city is facing and all of the burdens there are on the taxpayers, we just could not accept an 8-percent increase," Kasprzak said.

The increase would help pay for about \$13 million in infrastructure improvements and the increasing cost of supplying power.

The mayor directed Richard LaCapra of LaCapra Associates, the firm that has been consulting MLD for 30 years, to look for ways to trim the proposed 8-percent increase.

LaCapra recently told councilors that it costs the city about \$18.7 million per year to provide electricity to all its customers. The current rate structure produces only around \$17.8 million in revenue, for a shortfall of about \$900,000, LaCapra said.

A 5-percent increase will cover the costs, he said.

The impact on users will be about \$2.50 per month for apartment dwellers and about \$7.50 a month for single-family homeowners.

The mayor said MLD has other costs to deal with, as well.

"We are facing costs for debt service on substation construction and increasing health-insurance costs for employees, and this is forcing us to consider this rate increase for the first time since 2005," Kasprzak said.

"But before I will support a 5-percent increase, I will scrutinize the entire MLD budget, including every position and all of the equipment the department is planning on purchasing."

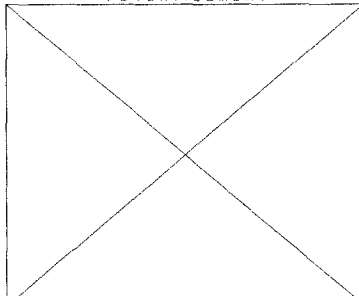
Before a rate hike can be approved, it must go through a process regulated by the Public Service Commission, which takes about 18 months and includes public-comment periods.

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Photos



Former MLD Superintendent Jack Brown
 P-R File Photo /

Published January 06, 2008 10:16 pm - Most of city was back in power within three or four days.

City electrical department turned in stellar performance

By **JOE LoTEMLIO**
 Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH -- In early January 1998, the City of Plattsburgh Municipal Lighting Department sent a crew to help workers of the Massena municipal system with their problems.

"As that ice started building up (here), I told Bob that we'd better get that crew back here because we were going to need them," said former MLD Superintendent Jack Brown, recalling a conversation with former MLD Manager Robert Metz.

"We wound up getting about 15 crews from other municipal departments around the state to help us out."

Brown, who retired in October after 40 years on the job, said that by the third day of the Ice Storm, trees started snapping from the weight of the thick ice.

As trees crashed down, they took with them power lines and utility poles, knocking out power to most city residents.

"We were able to hold our own for the first 72 hours or so, but then all hell broke loose," Brown said.

With power out all over the city, crews worked 12-hour shifts around the clock to "bubble-gum" the system back together so power could be restored.

The major repairs would come later.

"I'd say that within three or four days after losing power, about 98 percent of people had power back on," Brown said.

"We had some people in the West End who told me that they never lost power."

But some places, including a section of Park Avenue near Sandra Avenue, were out for more than a week as about a half-dozen poles crumbled there.

Brown said his crews worked their tails off getting power restored.

"That's one of the reasons we decided to go with 12-hour shifts and not 16, because of safety," he said.

"The guys worked very well together, and I bet the younger guys got about 10 years worth of experience in one week."

While the City of Plattsburgh was back on line within days, some areas outside the city went weeks without power.

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