

LIGHT LINES

Newsletter of the Sterling Municipal Light Department

December 2017 Edition

General Manager: Sean Hamilton Light Board: Chairman: Matthew Stelmach; Clerk: Brian Pierce; Third member Joseph Curtin

General Manager's Report December 2017

Raising Awareness of Public Power - While reading an article recently by The American Public Power Association, I was surprised to learn from their research only 1 in 5 of our customers recognize the meaning of **Public Power**. Wikipedia defines a **Public Utility** as “an organization that maintains the [infrastructure](#) for a [public service](#) (often also providing a service using that infrastructure). Public utilities are subject to forms of public control and regulation ranging from local community-based groups to statewide government monopolies.” Here at SMLD we like to simplify the definition simply by saying we are “**owned by the people we serve**”. What this means is that we are governed by a board of 3 commissioners that are elected by our ratepayers, who make decisions based on what is in the best interest of our community, so that we can continue to provide reliable service at competitive prices. **Public Power** also means that we are one of the 2,000 other public power communities that retain your money in the community and not by outside investors. It means that we are continuously working to improve the reliability of our distribution system and to bring in new award-winning projects such as the solar arrays or the battery storage system to help keep your rates protected. While we may not pay a tax bill each year we contribute funds in many other ways to the community. Some of the services that the SMLD provides to the community and Town include funds for annual maintenance for all town owned generators, maintenance of town street lights and fixtures, purchase and installation of the Christmas lights on the Town Common, installation of the flags on Main Street for Memorial Day, the Fourth of July and the Veterans Day Parade and even help with hanging the field nets for the Little League. Other programs include lighting and HVAC improvements that resulted in lowering the operating costs in 7 of the municipal buildings in town. We also hire professional instructors to present safety programs in our elementary schools as well as offer advice to our senior citizens on various subjects including electrical safety and scams in the area. The SMLD works alongside the DPW every year getting the power and lights on for the Annual Sterling Fair and works with the Police Department, who performs our dispatch services and assist us during outages and pole accidents. The Fire Department recently provided us with training and led us through a table top exercise on disaster recovery to better prepare us to help you in an emergency. Yes, we are us giving back, but I think the most important thing we offer is our customer service. When you call our office during normal business hours you do not have to press buttons or get a recording, you speak directly to an SMLD employee. I could go on and on but instead I will leave you with this; the utility world has changed more in the last 5 years than in the last 20 and here at SMLD we are adapting to these changes by providing modern services to fulfill our customer's needs. For instance, 7 years ago we offered only 2 methods to pay your bill and today we offer 7 different choices. The SMLD has been serving Sterling for over 100 years and will continue to do so for many years. We welcome you to stop by our office or visit our website at www.energysterling.com to learn more about us.

Leading by Example Award - On November 30th, 2017, the Town of Sterling and the SMLD were awarded the **Leading by Example** (LBE) award from the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources. The LBE Award recognizes outstanding efforts among Commonwealth agencies, public colleges and universities, and municipalities that have implemented policies and programs that have led to significant and measurable environmental and energy benefits.

Community Clean Energy Resiliency Initiative Battery Storage Project - In June we introduced our battery storage project and as of October 30, 2017 it has provided savings of \$375,805.00.

Christmas Lights on the Town Common - Thank you to all the Staff at the SMLD, the Fire Department and Malcolm Smiley a resident who volunteered his time to prepare the setup of new lights for the Christmas display.

Sterling Municipal Light Department, 50 Main Street, Sterling, MA 01564-2135

Telephone: 978-422-8267 Web: www.energysterling.com

Normal Business Hours: Mon– Thurs 7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Friday 7:30-11:30a.m. Full 24-hour coverage for power emergencies

Please call 978-422-8267. After normal business hours Sterling Police Dispatch at 978-422-7331.

Community Solar - With the support from the Sterling residents at the special town meeting in November, the SMLD signed a Purchase Power Agreement (PPA) with Origis Energy for a 1 MW solar array that includes 1MW/2MWhr of battery storage. This project will provide many benefits to our residents and businesses and is designed to allow those who cannot put in solar an opportunity to get their power from solar. After the first of the year further details will be forthcoming. Visit our website or contact our office for more information.

Neighbor-To-Neighbor - As the holidays approach we ask you to consider The Neighbor-to-Neighbor Fund. This fund was established to help Sterling residents during difficult economic times. The Sterling Municipal Light Department has a program in place so our customers can continue to help their neighbors. Since the creation of our bill Round-Up-Program in June 2014, and thanks to our generous ratepayers to the program, a total contribution of \$8,617.01 has been donated to the fund. The program aids with payments toward housing, utilities, food, clothing and other essential living costs. The way the program works is that your SMLD bill is rounded up to the nearest dollar each month and the difference is given to the Neighbor to Neighbor Fund. Your maximum donation per account would not exceed \$11.88 per year. To sign up for the Round-Up Program, please stop by our office, call us at 978-422-8267 or visit our website at www.energysterling.com and send your request to Customer Service. To find out more information or how you can make your tax free donations directly to the program, please log onto the **Town of Sterling** website at www.sterling-ma.gov under the Board of Selectmen or you may contact the Community Representative, Patrick Fox at 774-275-1174 or pafox57@comcast.net. Thank you again for your continued generosity.

ACH Program - The ACH Program gives our customers automated opportunity to receive the discount amount on their bills. By using this program there is no need to put your bill in the mail or drop it off at the office. You will receive your bill as normal (paper or email) and on the discount day the payment is automatically deducted from your checking, savings or credit card account. Once paid you have the option to receive an email or text message confirming payment. Sign up today and never miss your discount day again!

Utility Scam - Scammers continue to make calls to our customers at any time of the day or night, weekday or on weekends identifying themselves as an SMLD employee or from another "utility" and demanding that a payment be made over the phone or the service will be disconnected. **Do not respond or make a payment to this request.** Hang up and call our office at 978-422-8267 (Monday-Thursday 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Friday 7:30 to 11:30 am) or after hours call the Sterling Police Department at 978-422-7331. Be aware that if anyone stops by your home claiming to be an SMLD employee and you do not have a pre-arranged appointment, **DO NOT LET THEM IN.** All SMLD employees have photo I.D.'s and will only be at your home for a scheduled appointment. Again, call our office or the Sterling Police Department if these incidents occur.

Public Power Mutual Aid to Florida and St. Thomas - After Hurricane Irma hit Florida on September 11th, the SMLD crews provided storm restoration assistance in Homestead. Shortly following their return another call went out for assistance in the Virgin Islands, where in less than 2 weeks two category five hurricanes struck the island of St. Thomas. The SMLD was one of 15 light departments that answered the call. With the support of the Sterling Light Commissioners we provided men and equipment to the island. We will be reimbursed by FEMA for our labor and trucks at no cost to the Sterling ratepayers. Our linemen have been working on a rotating basis since early October when only 14% of the island had power. We will continue to set poles and assist in running wire until December 15th when all the New England crews may return home. St. Thomas is about 32 square miles, almost the same size as the Town of Sterling and with 2,800 broken or damaged poles it almost seemed overwhelming, but alongside the 41 other public power crews from New England the power was slowly restored in the most critical areas. In the second wave, the New England public power crews increased from 41 to 60. As the Safety Supervisor, I can attest that this was hard work for these crews, especially in this hot and humid area. They left for work in the dark and returned in the dark. A typical day started at 5:00 a.m. for breakfast and ended around 6:30 p.m. or later, making dinner around 7:30 p.m. The hurricanes may have destroyed countless homes, 2 schools and even the police station, but it did not break the spirit of the residents who were quick to offer us water and kind words of appreciation at each opportunity. This was truly an example of public power helping another public power utility in need. Ironically, I met a couple crews from other light departments that worked in Sterling during the 2008 Ice Storm. It's a small world.

Wishing you Happy Holidays,



Sean Hamilton
General Manager

Public Power
"Owned by the People We Serve"