

WEST BOYLSTON MUNICIPAL LIGHTING PLANT

4 Crescent Street, West Boylston, Massachusetts 01583

Telephone (508) 835-3681 Fax (508) 835-2952

HISTORY OF WEST BOYLSTON'S LIGHT PLANT

In a town meeting on November 12, 1908, the town appointed a committee to investigate the installation of electric street lighting along town roads. Electric lights would replace the old oil and gas lamps that were being used in town at the time. The chairman of the Board of Selectman appointed Edward A. Waters, Walter E. Chapman, and Charles T. Lamb to this committee. The committee talked to three local electric companies to see what kind of deals for street lighting could be arranged. On December 10, 1908, the committee brought their findings to a special town meeting and decided it would be unwise for the town to manufacture its own electricity, but it should hire a private company to install and operate the electric street lights. The meeting adjourned with the committee empowered to execute the most favorable contract possible. A month and a half later the committee and Board of Selectmen signed a contract with the Marlborough Electric Company to install 120 tungsten lights along town roads. The work however, was never completed and on July 1, 1909, the agreement was canceled. The town was now more interested in providing electricity to all of its residents and business in West Boylston.

In two separate town meetings on October 19 and December 20, 1909, it was voted and overwhelmingly approved, that the Selectmen should establish a town-owned light plant. On September 5, 1910, Arthur T. Hunting was appointed as the first manager of this plant. After its first year of operation, the plant had installed 177 lights with approximately twelve miles of poles and wires to begin providing electric service. The electricity for the street lighting was purchased from the Connecticut River Transmission Company. From Hunting's first report as manager, it is interesting to note that the cost of electricity at this time was \$0.12 per KWh, slightly lower than it is now, over 100 years later. Arthur Hunting would serve as manager until 1917 when he joined the military. The selectmen then appointed J.E. Burpee as his successor. Burpee would serve as the light plants second manager until 1935.

In 1934, a separate Light Board was established by a vote of the residents. The Board of Light Commissioners became an independently elected board that provided fiduciary oversight of the town's light plant and acted as representatives of the ratepayers. This vote elected three board members for terms of three years with the terms staggered so a new board member would be elected every year. For the first three years, members of the board served without pay, but in 1938, the town set salaries for the elected commissioners. Today, the Board of Light Commission selects the general manager and approves the annual budget, electricity rates, and light plant policy.

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The building that currently houses the Light Department on 4 Crescent Street, was built in 1936 on the old Town Hall site at a cost of \$14,039.01. The land was granted to the light department by the town at town meeting on February 3, 1936. This location had previously been used as the Town Hall, but it was destroyed in a fire almost 18 years earlier. Since 1936 there have been two additions constructed onto the original building. One was a garage located in the back of the original building in 1954 and the other was the northern section of the building in 1963 which includes the main lobby and the offices on the second floor which were used as the civil defense headquarters. Today, the Town's local access cable channel uses the second floor office space.

The town has been visited by several hurricanes in the past 100 years with the worst on September 21, 1938. In 2008, most of central MA including West Boylston was hit by a severe ice storm which caused significant damage and some of the longest power outages in recent memory. The light department has come a long way with the adoption of new technologies and upgraded electrical distribution equipment. These new tools and equipment help increase reliability, improve efficiency, and ensure accurate billing.

In 1972, the light department and Boylston began construction of the Denton-Lovell 115/13.8 kV substation. This is our single point of connection to New England's electrical grid and it is designed to serve both towns in a cost effective and reliable manner. Because the equipment is critical to our operations, both towns share in the cost to provide backup service to one another if any one piece of equipment fails. This is a great example of sharing critical infrastructure when it is appropriate and cost effective. This represents the largest construction project undertaken by this light plant. The total cost of this substation in 1972 was \$661,561.44 with West Boylston's light plant paying \$367,969.17 for its share of the project. In 2012, the light plant determined it was time to upgrade the substation equipment and we expect to have all of the critical equipment replaced by the end of 2013. Again we are sharing the cost of the project with Boylston, but today our cost is approximately \$2.5M.