

Town of Essex
Energy Committee

Minutes

Wednesday, April 27, 2022

7:00 PM – 81 Main Street, Essex Jct, and Via Zoom

Physically Present: Irene Wrenner, Phil March, Dottie Bergandahl, Tom Yadow

Virtually Present: Will Dodge (chair), Michael Fink, Natalee Braun, David Skopin

ADMINISTRATIVE

1. Approval of meeting minutes from March 23, 2022, with changes courtesy of Irene and Phil: passed unanimously. (@06:29)
2. Separation: The Committee briefly discussed the July 1, 2022 date for establishing the City of Essex Junction. The consensus was that because fiscally the communities will still be joined until July 1, 2023, it makes sense to continue covering Essex Junction until that time. (@08:53)
3. Committee Description. Irene volunteered to work on the description, for use at the upcoming municipal roundtable event on May 15, 2022. (@13:06)
4. Terms. A brief discussion was had regarding expiring terms for Will and Phil this year. Natalee, David and Mike have terms lasting until 2023; Irene and Dottie have terms running into 2024. Will stated an intention to lay out some points of concern during his upcoming reappointment interview. (@15:25)

SUBSTANTIVE

1. Working Groups Report – General First Impressions: (@17:49)

The Committee Members described the experience with the Working Groups from

the first “experimental” month. It was agreed that the general format should be to allow one Working Group report per monthly meeting, so as not to be waylaid for time by too many reports.

2. Weatherization and Thermal Energy Efficiency WG Report: (@23:05) The group reported on Phil’s work with the updated weatherization opportunities for Essex homeowners. The WG recommended another event at Lowe’s in June or July, but cited issues involving lack of availability of contractors. The group agreed to take a look at the VECAN Toolkit in publicizing another Lowe’s event.

3. Transportation WG Report (@28:15). The WG reported on efforts to get information from Drive Electric Vermont on adoption, as well as status of the Route 15 multi-use path. Phil also recounted a discussion with Darren Schibler regarding the status of bike and pedestrian pathways in Essex, including the potential use of ARP funds (and specifically the likelihood that any ARPA opportunities have likely been swallowed up by tax stabilization plans for property owners.) The discussion included an assessment as to municipal staffs’ relative willingness to look into bike paths, as well as an inquiry into the status of Circ Highway Alternative funds.

4. Renewable Energy WG Report (@46:01). Mike and Tom from the WG discussed the fact that Essex produces about 3% of its own energy, mainly because Global Foundries is such a large consumer. South Burlington produces 20% of its electricity, by contrast. The WG discussed wanting to learn more about what capacity the Town has to produce more of its own energy. Will pledged to follow-up on the energy data to look into net metering credits. Tom discussed his efforts with

iSun (fka Peck Electric) to expand solar, and the discouraging calls with Efficiency Vermont to find that they were not into solar generation incentives. Tom noted that the Police Department is now the efficiency priority because of threatened demand charges (though we were close with 81 Main Street).

5. Planning Commission Multi-Committee Working Groups Status Report (@1:04:24).

Will provided a status on the various Planning Commission WGs and potential Essex Energy Committee assignments. Concerns were expressed regarding the time commitment and the WGs' efficacy, but overall each member of the EEC volunteered for a separate committee. Will pledged to provide the selections back to the Planning Commission. The Committee members were positive overall on the potential of this effort to lead to meaningful change.

Among the benefits, per Tom Yandow: "We, the town, have such potential for land development that we need to craft and put it in such a way that if going to be able to help us benefit our back pocket and some of these new laws and regulations and curtailing it in the right way that we can develop the way that we would like to see the town developed."

6. Energy Coordinator Position. Irene, Phil and Natalee led a discussion with the conclusion that given the Town's current fiscal constraints, there is little appetite for creating an Energy Coordinator position at this time.

7. State Legislation (@1:34:57). Natalee provided an update on SB 148 (Environmental Justice), the Clean Heat Standard Bill. While the former appears slated to pass, the latter is definitely in trouble.

8. Other Business (@1:41:08). The Committee discussed the upcoming municipal / EWSD event at the Double E for May 15. Will and Natalee agreed to

work the table and produce a small amount of materials using QR Codes to reach the new Weatherization Guide and other items. The Committee also agreed not to participate in the Memorial Day Parade. Irene noted her run for Senate seat, and the accompanying 2.5 month "leave" for her campaign.

The Committee also discussed the fact that ARPA funds in Essex were being directed towards tax stabilization as a result of the merger, so there will be correspondingly few funds left for new infrastructure. This is in contrast to other communities in Chittenden County where the process for selecting funding items is more open to public input.

Motion to adjourn accepted (@1:57:38).

Next Meeting: Wed., May 25, 2022 at 7:00 PM

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