

Essex Energy Committee – Minutes of September 11, 2024

ADMINISTRATIVE

A. Draft Minutes from 08/14/2024 and 08/21/2024

These were not yet completed. Natalee offered to assist if Will could use Fathom or another transcription device to help obtain a summary.

B. Vacancies

Will provided an update that there have been no candidates coming forward.

SUBSTANTIVE

1. CVF Lessons Learned

In the Essex Energy Committee meeting, members discussed lessons learned from their participation in the Champlain Valley Fair (CVF). They emphasized the value of engaging with a large audience and shared positive feedback from attendees who had implemented suggestions from previous fairs.

Overall, the participants had 347 conversations with individuals interested in weatherization, heat pumps, efficiency and EVs over the course of five days. Participants included those from other Chittenden County energy committees.

A key lesson was the need for a prepared script to guide volunteers in initiating conversations, especially for those new to the task. Some members mentioned the importance of familiarizing themselves with the handouts to better explain the information. The committee found that handouts, while traditional, were effective in sparking conversations and served as useful reminders for people to take home.

They also discussed improvements for next time, such as better organizing QR codes for easier scanning, increasing the visibility of keywords behind their booth to attract attention, and utilizing vertical displays to make their materials stand out. Lastly, they noted the importance of clearly identifying themselves as volunteers, not affiliated with the power company, and raising the overall visual presence of their booth.

Concerning some suggestions from Henry Bonges at the Milton Energy Committee (who participated during CVF), the Essex Energy Committee responded positively to his suggestions regarding the Champlain Valley Fair, specifically his idea to create three posters focused on key topics: home energy/weatherization, electric vehicles (EVs), and lawn tools. The committee agreed that these topics would simplify messaging at the fair and prevent attendees from being confused about the booth's purpose. Henry also offered to work with Efficiency Vermont and CCRPC to develop the posters, which the committee was open to using for next year's fair. However, the committee was hesitant about prominently displaying Efficiency Vermont branding due to confusion in the past, where attendees mistook the energy committee for representatives of Efficiency Vermont, leading to complaints.

Other takeaways from the discussion included:

- A need to clarify the committee's identity at future events, to avoid being confused with vendors or companies trying to sell products.
- The success of engaging attendees with energy-saving tips and information, including real-time consultations on energy efficiency.
- Suggestions for improving booth engagement, such as incorporating a raffle, games, or swag related to energy topics.
- The importance of having printed income cutoff guidelines for energy assistance programs available at the booth.
- Reflection on logistics for future fairs, such as better preparation, potential collaboration with other energy committees, and possibly securing a larger booth. The committee also discussed planning training sessions for volunteers to better interact with attendees.

The committee expresses thanks to all the volunteers who joined the team, including: Henry Bonges, Brad Cook, Brian Forrest, Carolyn McLaughlin, Diane Teetsel, Steve Crowley, Lou Bresee, and Rob Meader: it meant a great deal to us to have you in the booth with us.

A special thanks to Ann Janda at CCRPC for all her guidance and support to make the event a success.

2. Essex Explore!

The group is planning an info table for an event on September 21st, "Essex Explore! " Committee members discussed concerns about the event feeling less impactful than the CVF, but also recognized the need for physical handouts or "swag." Natalee and David confirmed that they already have plenty of materials from Green Mountain Power and Vermont Gas, noting a hesitancy about using Vermont Gas material, given their association with fossil fuels. Geetha and Mukesh highlighted the need to encourage people to move towards greener alternatives like heat pumps.

David recommended a TED Talk by Johan Rockström on climate change tipping points, suggesting that sharing it might motivate people to take action. The Committee also discussed logistics such as using existing laminated signs about weatherization and heat, and debated on whether to use a slideshow or large screen display, but ultimately decided to keep things simple. Additionally, the Committee members confirmed that they have plenty of candy for the event and no more is needed. Finally, Will offered to bring over extra kits and materials for the event if necessary.

3. Charter Changes and New Zoning Regulations

The committee members discussed an upcoming meeting on September 16th regarding proposed changes to the Essex Energy Committee's charter. Will plans to present a pitch for the changes and asks if others can attend or join via Zoom to show support. While attendance isn't mandatory, having additional voices backing the concept is seen as beneficial.

With respect to proposed comprehensive changes to zoning regulations, which are typically updated annually, there is consensus that the rules should be simplified and made clearer for the average person, as the current regulations are seen as vague and open to interpretation. A suggestion is made to involve experts like Darren Schibler and Melanie Needle at CCRPC to provide guidance on the town's zoning regulations and energy-related provisions. Will pledged to invite them to an upcoming meeting in October or November to discuss an approach.

Members offered to comment during the Selectboard meeting, with Will to take the lead and others to offer supportive remarks. The Committee expressed optimism about the changes, and plans to present a united front.

4. New Municipal Complex – Next Steps

The item was postponed based on the fact that the group is concentrating on the CVF event.

5. Solar RFP Proposal for Unsworth Parcel (Will & Geetha)

The item was postponed based on the fact that the group is concentrating on the CVF event, the Charter, and Essex Explore.

6. Other Business

In this final portion of the Essex Energy Committee meeting, several key topics were discussed:

Button Up Campaign: The Button Up weatherization initiative by Efficiency Vermont was reviewed. It was noted that this year's campaign is similar to previous years, focusing on weatherization and heat pump webinars. The committee discussed the possibility of hosting events to promote the campaign, including offering raffle prizes like \$100 hardware gift cards. They also considered holding a Button Up event at the election booth, as was done in previous years.

The committee debated how best to publicize these efforts and whether to request promotional materials from Button Up, such as hats and information kits. There was some frustration about the timing of the campaign and challenges working with the Button Up team in the past, though the group agreed on the campaign's importance.

Green Mountain Transit: There was concern about a proposal to cut Essex's bus service, which would negatively impact public transportation. A meeting at the Brownell Library was mentioned to discuss the matter, and committee members were encouraged to attend.

Energy Efficiency and Geothermal: A new licensing fee for electric vehicle chargers in Essex was mentioned. Additionally, one committee member shared information about a geothermal system being used at a community center in Burlington and expressed interest in exploring its potential. Another member suggested bringing in a speaker to discuss thermal energy networks and legislative changes supporting these systems in Vermont.

Miscellaneous Discussions: The committee briefly touched on energy-saving devices and explored geothermal heating systems, discussing the technology's application and potential in Vermont. No specific actions were taken in this section.

The last section of the meeting focused on energy efficiency initiatives and the logistics of supporting both public transportation and renewable energy systems in the community.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 11, 2024.