

Town of Essex
Energy Committee
Minutes

Wednesday, December 15, 2021

7:10 PM - Via Zoom and Live (81 Main Street)

Present: Will Dodge (chair), Phil March, Michael Fink; Tom Yandow, Dottie Bergendahl, David Skopin

Remote: Irene Wrenner, Natalee Braun, Ann Janda, Energy Project Manager, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

Absent:

I. ADMINISTRATIVE.

- Review of meeting minutes from November 10, 2021 - Irene and Phil provided corrections. Moved to approve - accepted.
- Phil suggested restructuring some aspects of the meeting planning. Will will take steps to implement the recommendations including opening up the agenda for input a week in advance of the meeting.

II. SUBSTANTIVE.

A. VECAN Conference report Phil provided an overview of the VECAN online presentation “Building Back Better in VT: The New Climate Action Plan and a 2022 Look Forward.” Phil’s impression was that components of the presentation varied in quality and some segments were difficult to follow. Ben Edgerly Walsh from VPIRG facilitated and the focus was on the components of the recently drafted Climate Action Plan (CAP). The CAP addresses means to reduce the state’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in various sectors. The plan outlines goals and strategies in five areas aimed at meeting the targeted GHG reductions specified in the Global Warming Solutions Act passed within the year.

The five areas included transportation, weatherization, achieving 100% renewable electricity in VT with a focus on in-state generation, smart growth and environmental

justice/equity. There was an emphasis on transportation in the presentation and its importance to fossil fuel use reduction. Joining the Transportation Climate Initiative will reportedly be a challenge because of the state administration’s resistance and the lack of full support from other New England states.

Notable topics discussed by Representative Sarah Copeland-Hanzas included an energy revolving fund for state buildings that could be directed to municipal buildings, more energy coaches for the thermal sector, improved management of refrigerant leaks and products, and adoption of an energy czar to direct state energy policies.

Representative Becca White discussed the Transportation Innovation Act that focuses on funding EV supply equipment (including charging stations) and promoting public transit, ride sharing, bikes and E-bikes, and pedestrian safety on walkways.

Other topics discussed in the “Creating Resilient Communities” presentation at the VECAN conference included: farm to plate initiatives, creating climate action teams and climate havens, and planning for mobility (AARP can do an audit of your community to determine how walkable it is).

Will and Phil reported on VECAN’s “Tools and Tips for Energy Committees” presentation. In the breakout session on cultivating partners, participants recommended working with other energy committees, connecting with local Rotary clubs, faith organizations and educational institutions. Dottie suggested that we go to rotary meetings and other committees with a specific ask rather than, or in addition to, an informational presentation.

With regard to schools, the most successful approach may be to engage students in applying pressure to school boards. Ann suggested contacting school environmental

clubs to engage the students in advocacy for more sustainable policy

Additionally, the value of having subcommittees within an energy committee was discussed along with strategies for recruiting volunteers. Open meetings issue: do you need to warn subcommittee meetings? If there are three or fewer committee members present for a subcommittee meeting you do not need to warn the meeting. Dottie suggested that we call it a working or advisory group to avoid the quorum/meeting warning requirement.

Ann Janda started her job in early September 2021 as the Energy Project Manager for the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission. She hopes to be a resource for our committee including writing press releases and letters to the editor.

Action Item s: A. Review the Town Energy Committee's Communication Toolkit. Consider designating subcommittees within the Essex Energy Committee.

B. Button Up follow up - key takeaways:

Efficiency VT (EVT) most often gets questions about windows. The problem is generally not the window itself, it's the area around the window. Discussion about window weatherization followed. The discussion touched on the Housing Committee and whether they have done an analysis of the weatherization needs of various age cohorts of homes, as in a housing inventory.

Will expressed that because there will be significantly more money for weatherization coming in we want to be ready to mobilize to use it wisely. Do we begin in the spring to encourage folks to start their weatherization projects? DIY projects run into difficulty obtaining rebates because the work is not being done by a contractor. Partnering with our community development office will be important to put on a big push. Ann is assisting CVOEO to get the word out about weatherization.

Action Items : In addition to items from November discussion, obtain charts for local housing. Irene will contact Darren Schibler for further information. A related chart will be on

the January agenda. Phil to provide information concerning Efficiency-VT-affiliated contractors, as well as working with Ann Janda to promote weatherization more broadly.

C. Residential Energy Standard: Ann reported that currently the standard allows builders to self-certify that they have met energy standards. Therefore, municipalities do not have legal standing to enforce the statewide energy codes. Proposal is for states to do the enforcement. CCRPC is working on that. Municipalities don't have the resources/skills to do the energy standards assessment. The state should manage this.

D. Weatherization Program Updates: Phil reported that Efficiency VT utilizes 58 BPI-certified contractors with only about half this number serving Chittenden County. VGS utilizes 4 of their own sub-contractors for weatherization projects. EVT requires the contractor to contact them when a client makes contact in order for the rebates to occur. VGS customers are advised to contact VGS directly to discuss their weatherization project. VGS calculates annual natural gas usage to determine if homeowners qualify for a VGS-led project. If a residence doesn't qualify, owners can move to the EVT process, although their weatherization project requirements are not as stringent. Despite this fact, VGS customers going through the EVT process still receive the same rebate as homeowners qualifying for a VGS-led project. VGS weatherization incentives are significantly better than those offered by EVT.

Action item: Phil will update the Weatherization Guide for the town website to reflect the program updates.

E. Annual Report: The annual report is being prepared for the town meeting. Will will produce a draft and disseminate to the committee members. He proposed including some "asks" that could also be presented at the town meeting. One definite request could be that we hire an Energy Coordinator.

Tom Yandow is currently handling energy management along with his other duties in the Town and the Village. Another potential request

centers on the Revolving Loan Fund to sustain funding for projects. Could it be funded from the budget? Ideally we would have a renewable energy project that brings money into the Revolving Loan Fund (e.g., credits from a solar array or savings from other energy efficiency projects). We will propose having a say in the use of the one time incoming federal funds. ARPA monies have very specific guidelines for usage; building resiliency is a strong focus. Additionally, funding a building inspector could be recommended, although that will likely be a state position because of the qualifications needed.

Action item: D. Will prepares the initial draft of the annual report and disseminates it for our input/revisions with an emphasis on our requests. Ann Janda will collaborate with Tom Yandow in the coming year.

E. Future of the Essex Energy Committee:
Recommendation is for us as a committee to serve both the town and the village. Tom remarked that the Village may want their own energy committee. We will need to explore that option and offer our services to both municipalities. Motion to agree to act for town and village or city as an Energy Committee passed unanimously.

Action item: E. Will sends a letter to the two municipalities expressing our wish to serve both.

F. Miscellaneous Reports: Will: overview of Local Motion presentation about e-bikes. The Multi Use path will not be completed in the near future. Do local zoning rules state that a certain amount of space needs to be allotted for improvements to bike and pedestrian pathways? More incentives are coming. Riding on sidewalks is problematic but legal.

Will: net metering developments are still in process.
Presentation from Dandelion: The committee is interested in information from Dandelion, a company that does geothermal installation employing local drillers. Perhaps we could promote a webinar and invite community members.

Comprehensive Energy Plan comments are due within the next five days. Could we invite the village administrators to meet with us?

Action item: F. Will will give Tom the name of an individual who can assist with the work he is doing in the area of net metering. Mike will offer further information on Dandelion in January. Invite the village administrators to meet with our committee.

Move to adjourn - accepted

Next Meeting : January 12, 2022 at 7:00 PM

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