

Sharon Energy Committee

Remote Access Meeting

Monday, December 28th, 2020 @ 05:15 PM

2020-12-28 17:15

Draft Minutes

This meeting was held through teleconference and in compliance with the Vermont Open Meeting Law for electronic participation.

Energy Committee members attending: Dee Gish, Ryan Haac, Jill Wilcox.

Ryan called the meeting together at 17:26 (5:26 PM).

1. **Public comment period**

No comments.

2. **Previous meeting minutes approved**

- Monday, August 24th, 2020 (2020-08-24 17:15)

- Monday, September 28th, 2020 (2020-09-28 17:15)

3. **Intermunicipal Regional Energy Coordinator updates**

Ryan described how recent work has revolved around a RFP process for selecting an ESCO (Energy Services Company) to evaluate Town buildings and their energy utilization. The ESCO model involves the company auditing all buildings and then proposing improvements to increase building efficiency, reduce associated greenhouse gas emissions, and save money. The idea is that the cost savings can pay for the cost of the doing the work. The ESCO will monitor and verify savings.

Ryan explained that EEI was selected as the ESCO for the towns of Fairlee, Sharon, Thetford, and Woodstock by committee using a rubric system. The paperwork to get the project is moving along and the project is being managed by the IREC. The project should get underway in the first months of 2021. The initial phase of the project carries no financial burden for the Town.

4. **Mobile Home Energy Savings Project updates**

Ryan spoke about his work with Vital Communities on the Mobile Home Energy Savings Project. He praised the work of Vital Communities in their effort of consolidating information for services and assistance available for mobile homeowners and disseminating the information through direct mailings, listserv content, etc. Engagement is implemented through names collected through survey responses, allowing volunteers to follow-up with participants based on their individual needs. Sharon has a few participants whom he has to follow up with, which Ryan will be reaching out to within the next week.

5. **Upper Valley e-Bike Loan Program participation**

Ryan presented a program being organized by Linda Gray of the Norwich Energy Committee and run through the support of Local Motion. Essentially, we would have e-bikes available for test rides and short-term loans (all at no cost) at the library over about a two-week period. All members were supportive and thought the program would be beneficial to residents. Ryan will follow-up with Linda to confirm participation.

6. **Energy Storage in Sharon discussion**

Ryan relayed that he received an unsolicited email regarding a potential battery storage project near the GMP substation. He began by mentioned that energy storage is often touted as an important part of the equation in a renewably powered electrical grid but postulated that most of us have not considered how that is realized. In regard to the specific proposal on Town property near the GMP substation, Dee and Ryan voiced consternation about the status of the site, related to flooding risk, Town ownership criteria, and possible conservation status. Ryan had already responded to the developer that he felt the site was not suitable due to the flood risk and potential conservation status but asked about alternatives. Dee suggested that Ryan forward the request onto the Planning Commission to bring the issue of energy storage developments to their attention and gain some insight into the parcel and also to ask Geoff Martin (IREC) about existing storage projects in the State; Ryan agreed to do so.

7. **Legislative update from Jill**

- The Global Warming Solutions Act passed toward the end of the last session and the State has since formed the Climate Council. Eight cabinet members were appointed by Governor, seven appointed by the Senate, and eight appointed by the House. Meetings have begun and are open to the public. Organizations such as Capstone, EAN. Nature Conservancy have representatives appointed to the council.
- Recently, the Governor declined to join the Transportation Climate Initiative. Although the possibility for joining later is still open, we all agreed that this was disappointing. States that did not sign on (including Vermont) have committed to continue in helping to development the program.
- We are still in the “in-between” time – the legislature starts up again in January. More updates next meeting

8. **Real carbon solutions**

- Ryan relayed his personal experience with passively collecting remnant woodstove charcoal from his woodstove and subsequently using it at the bottom of a Bokashi composting system to inoculate the charcoal into biochar, which can then be sequestered in soil and add beneficial microorganisms. He also mentioned a system he has yet to put into action in which charcoal can be made directly in a woodstove with a non-sealing covered pan filled with wood scraps. The pyrolysis reaction creates some gas that combusts (that turns into heat for the home) while the carbonaceous bit is left behind (charcoal).

- Jill mentioned that she has recently witnessed a great deal of brush burning for clearing lots; she was alarmed that it was all just burned away. We all agreed that there are substantial benefits to leaving brush piles throughout the area for wildlife habitat. Ryan also mentioned that a middle ground (or best of both worlds approach) would be to start the shrubbery fire but smother it to convert it to charcoal with a simple “pit-burning” method.
- Jill joined a newly formed group called “Standing Trees VT” that is protesting the State’s clearcutting stands in some State forest areas and will keep us updated.
- 350 VT has an initiative for planting trees this spring – 100,000 trees across VT by 2022. Jill to follow-up on this “Rewild Vermont” initiative and see how we can get involved and bring the program to Sharon. We all agreed planting more trees (ideally for food crops) is one of our best tools for food resilience and a future that sequesters excess carbon. Dee mentioned that the Conservation Commission and White River Partnership do annual (at least) riparian buffer and forest plantings.
- Dee mentioned that BALE had a carbon sequestration program earlier this year. Maybe they could expand to forest
- Jill praised the Pocket Park idea in Strafford and wondered how we could implement a similar resource in Sharon.

9. **Other business**

- Jill mentioned that she was hopeful that some climate leadership could be integrated into a restart of the Community Resilience Organization in Sharon, with more emphasis on overall community resilience instead of only emergency services. We all expressed interest in participating in the group but were unable to commit leadership responsibilities.
- We all should be thinking big about climate solutions for our Town and our world.

10. Next meeting – Monday, January 25th, 2021 (2021-01-25 17:15)

Ryan adjourned the meeting at 6:40 PM.