Strafford Energy and Climate Committee (SECC)
Meeting Minutes APP

6/10/25
7:05 PM
Online meeting: Zoom

Meeting called by: Dorian Yates | Type of meeting: SECC monthly meeting

Facilitator: Dorian Yates | Note taker: Jim Schley

Attendees: Dorian Yates, Jim Schley, David Lutz, Vanessa Rule (after 7:35), Kazmira Nedeau (after 7:35), and guest Harry Falconer, Intermunicipal Energy Coordinator.

Next Meeting: **July 18, 2025, on Zoom**

Minutes

ACTION ITEMS FROM THIS MEETING

ACTION ITEM: Regarding the Ecogy Energy solar array at the Maclay property in Strafford, **Jim** will contact Ecogy Energy directly inquiring if the array may be for sale.

ACTION ITEMs: As follow-up for the Flood forum, **Jim** will update and distribute to participants the Resources document and also the link to the event summary on our Google drive, and will ask for the Resources document to be put on the town website; and **Vanessa** and **Kaz** will draft a follow-up message with proposed next steps.

ACTION ITEM: In regard to the need for updating the Enhanced Energy Plan component of the now revised overall Town Plan, **Dorian** will redistribute the template report, and we can make a plan for updating the data more accurately, since it's been created by aggregating from other places.

ACTION ITEM (carried over): **David** will ask the Sharon representative on the IREC steering committee what kind of thermal imaging equipment they have that can be checked out from their library. Carried over. Matt would really like to move forward on this purchase — either with committee money or crowd-funded (Matt offered to make a matching contribution we could fundraise against. To be discussed and resolved at July meeting.

ACTION ITEM (carried over): Send to **Dorian** your various phone numbers, so that if we can't reach each other by e-mail or if the Zoom weren't working, she would have a way to call. Dorian still needs numbers from some committee members.

Next meeting: Discuss Revised Procedure for Approval of New Members for Town Boards, Commissions, and Committees, which we received from selectboard chair Toni Pippy on May 12.

Next meeting: Committee's role in updating the Enhanced Energy Plan with energy data and targets TRORC devised for Strafford in their updated Regional Plan, adopted on 2/26/2025.

Minutes

AGENDA for this meeting:

1. Approve minutes from previous meeting (May). Approved.

2. Harry Falconer's report on public EV charger for park-and-ride: The selectboard members were generally interested, but chose not to make a decision. not as enthusiastic about the cost-sharing aspect, were the town would pay for half of the wiring and installation expenses.

(Quoting from his emailed report and in-meeting comments:) Harry said his "main argument for that approach was that partly funding the project with town funds would make it much easier to claim the $1,500 GMP rebate and would make it possible to apply for the 30C tax credit. If we crowdfunded the entire project, it would be logistically difficult or impossible to remit these rebates to potentially hundreds of small funders."

Harry noted that another way to avoid losing out on the GMP rebate and tax credit would be if a single large donor provided the matching funds and could claim those incentives for themselves. Or a donor could make a fully tax-deductible donation to the town to pass through the matching funds, and the town could still claim the GMP rebate. Or, Harry said, "we could just try to crowdfund the whole expense and forgo the rebates, but that may be disingenuous to the funders if we collect more than is needed," since the rebates exist.

Skeptics are concerned that chargers would be used heavily by a small number of people who don't have home charging (renters, off-gridders) or possibly school staff, but the chargers were therefore be occupied for many hours at a time. Could we devise a reservation system (whiteboard or Google calendar) so that people could sign up for blocks of time?

The electrical work would cost about $3,000.

Cost-reduction strategies:

* Orange chargers are more than $2,000 each, but they allow you to collect revenue; upfront cost would be about $8,000 including the wiring work, minus the GMP rebate. We could crowd-fund for the equipment, and the town could make a contribution for the electric upgrade then get the rebate.

* Orange also makes a version that is essentially a 220-watt drier outlet, which costs much less: about $750 for the outlet plus $400 or so for a converter cord, which if we provided we'd need to secure; or and people could bring their own converter cord.

* Or we could investigate an honor system: the Peacham (Vermont) Library has a "Clipper Creek" (see the "Enphase" app) setup like this, with a donation box and possibly a QR code for digital payments. The cost estimate is $622 plus the electric work, so around $1,300 for two chargers, which seems advisable.

Dorian praised the concept of an honor system, but expressed concern that we'd need to incorporate extra elements for security, since people do steal (for instance) from farmstand money boxes.

In terms of timing, Jim proposed that we take another month to think about this. There could be some time-sensitivity because all the clean-energy credits may be eliminated in this round of budget negotiations, but we need to hear from other committee members about the idea.

If we used a crowd-funding approach — asking people specifically to make a donation to the town for this project—Harry asked if it would be appropriate for the town to receive the money and then a utility rebate too. Dorian felt that it would be appropriate, comparable to people making a contribution for the Town House, which goes through the town.

ACTION ITEMs: Harry will contact the library in Peacham to see how their honor system for charging is working. Harry will also find out from Green Mountain Power is a non-charge (honor system) approach would qualify for the GMP hookup rebate.

3. Discussion of Strafford Community Solar:

When system was permitted they got "adder rates" for ten years at sweetheart rates, which expired in 2024. They are now getting 40% of the prior rate, and they're paying taxes on the array. We've discussed the possibility that the array might be offered for sale, and our committee has resolved to learn more about this and potentially engage local buyers, possibly the current community partners (school, town, United Church, Morrill Library, and Barrett Hall) or maybe the new trust that has purchased Coburns' Store.

Back on December 13, 2024 (but missed at that time), Harry Falconer sent the committee a message with projections on production by the array, which is quoted here:

Average Annual Income: $20,898.59

- System production: Per data provided by Dori Wolfe, over the past 33 months, the array has generated an average of 10,208 kWh/month or 122,496 kWh/year.
- Net-Metering (NM) rate: According to DSIRE (see "Grandfathering"), NM systems permitted before 2017 are grandfathered for 10 years. After 10 years, generation from these systems is compensated at the statewide blended residential rate with no adjusters applied. The current statewide blended residential rate is $0.18398/kWh. Your system was permitted in 2014, so this rate should now be in effect.
- Average annual credit value: This means the array, on average, will produce $22,536.55 worth of NM credits per year.
- Credit allocation: The Town of Strafford's current credit allocation is for 27.32% of production. The remaining 72.68% is spoken for by other off-takers paying Ecogy for 90% of the credit value, netting them a 10% discount on electricity. (Note: I've only seen the Town's PPA, so I can't confirm that other off-takers getting the same 10% discount).
- Cut out the middleman: If Strafford took over the array, the Town could claim 100% of the credit value instead of cutting Ecogy checks for 90% of the credit value.
- Electric bill offset: This means Strafford would claim $6,156.98 in NM credits to offset its own electric bills each year.
- PPA income: Other off-takers would pay the new system owner, the Town of Strafford, for 90% of the value of the credits they receive. This would beequivalent to $14,741.61 per year on average. Importantly, this income is in the form of USD and not NM credits.

Annual Expenses: $12,709.36

- Debt service: If purchase of the system were financed through VT Bond Bank, the Town would make annual payments equivalent to $11,109.36 per year for 10 years, for a lifetime payment of $111,089.28. (This is at VBB's 2.125% interest rate, assuming a purchase price and loan principal of $100,000 to make the math easy).
- Deferred property tax revenue: Since the system is currently privately-owned (unless the Town has provided an abatement that I'm not aware of), the Town would lose out on some municipal tax revenue by taking ownership and giving the array tax-exempt status. The entire property where the system is located, including a house and almost 40 acres, earns the Town $3,328.61 in municipal taxes per year. The array only represents part of the value of this property, so the Town would not lose this entire amount. Let's assume $1,600 for the purpose of our projection, to be conservative.
- Depreciation: I'm not including this as I'm missing the numbers I would need to know.
- One-time fees: VBB charges a one-time fee of $3,000 for environmental review on their loans. There would also be a $9,500 IRA filing fee if Strafford wanted VBB to apply for IRA Direct Pay for the project. I have not confirmed that buying an existing array would be an eligible use of the generation tax credit. I'm guessing Ecogy will have already claimed tax credits for the project so Strafford would not be able to, as this would be double-dipping.

ACTION ITEMS: **Jim** will contact Ecogy Energy directly and inquire if they are considering a sale.

4. Discussion of last week's community forum on Preparing for and Preventing Flooding. Very successful event, and it was really helpful to have offered childcare, which allowed some people to come who wouldn't have.

- Over 43 people attended the flooding forum
- 42 people signed up to take next steps
- 21 households are interested in participating in a flood preparedness neighborhood meeting

- 19 households are interested in learning about practices to build soil to increase water infiltration and reduce water runoff
- 12 households committed to regularly clearing their culvert
- 19 households are interested in stream walks in their neighborhoods to see how the water moves and where flood prevention opportunities exist
- 18 households are interested in helping with stream restoration

Concerns and Interests People Brought Up

- Giving up hayfields for trees
- Feeling of passivity and reactivity around floods
- Increasing community self-reliance
- Wanted to find out what we can do at home
- Understanding the connections through bridges and potential impacts of losing them
- How can we work with water instead of fighting it?
- Can we rightsize culverts?
- Mapping alternate routes in case of floods
- What can be done to maintain roads?
- Building community to check in on each other
- Getting to know our neighbors

Other skills and interests people brought up

- For town: hydro-seeding river banks as needed; elected officials to strengthen relationship wiht FEMA; replace culverts; repair bridges.
- Detailed mapping of Alger Brook/Miller Pond watershed to understand local scale risk and vulnerabilities
- Our neighborhood knows one another and we support each other (Cross Road)
- I would like to know more about gully stuffing and landslide prevention
- Information about mapping watershed on properties/neighborhoods

ACTION ITEMs: As follow-up for the Flood forum, **Jim** will update and distribute to participants the Resources document and also the link to the event summary on our Google drive, and will ask for the Resources document to be put on the town website; and **Vanessa** and **Kaz** will draft a follow-up message with proposed next steps for household, neighborhood, and town level actions that could be taken to prepare for an emergency and to lessen flooding.

5. Municipal Summary Worksheet for Strafford: Dorian acknowledged receipt of this from Bryan Kovalick, Planner at Two Rivers Ottauquechee Planning Commission; this pertains to revision of the Advanced Energy Plan component of the Town Plan. Bryan's letter says:

"The energy data and targets in this document are required by Act 174 of 2016 for inclusion in a Town Plan written to contain an 'Enhanced Energy Plan.' An Enhanced Energy Plan is required for Town Plans seeking an affirmative determination of energy compliance. This is *optional* for municipalities. However, any Town Plan granted an affirmative determination of Energy Compliance will receive substantial deference in § 248 proceedings. During these proceedings, the Public Utility Commission (PUC) reviews proposed

energy-generation facilities for approval or disapproval. Any policies concerning the siting or operation of energy generation facilities within a Town Plan that has received substantial deference will inform the criteria applied by the PUC in their review of a proposed facility.

The energy data and targets within your Municipal Summary Worksheet are the energy data and targets TRORC devised for your Town for our updated Regional Plan, adopted on 2/26/2025. You may choose to rely on these analyses and targets to meet the municipal standards set by the Department of Public Service (PSD). Alternatively, your municipality may develop your own custom analyses and targets or supplement the analyses and targets provided by TRORC. If these options are chosen, your municipality must include all of the same analyses and targets and meet the same standards outlined in PSD's *Guidance for Regional & Municipal Enhanced Energy Planning Standards*. **ACTION ITEM**: **Dorian** will redistribute the template report, and we can make the data more accurate, since it's been created by aggregating from other places.

7. Revised Procedure for Approval of New Members for Town Boards, Commissions, and Committees: Dorian acknowledged receipt of this from Selectboard chair Toni Pippi. More formalized process.

Discussion for our newer members for what our role is in relation to the Selectboard: we are officially an advisory committee, not a commission (which has different statutory requirements), but not ad hoc (like the Strafford Climate Action group is). We are charged with looking at all of these issues through the lens of our Town Meeting resolution, passed in 2___, to achieve net zero by 2030.

ACTION ITEM: Discuss new procedures at our next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm. **Next meeting is July 8, 2025**