

Strafford Energy and Climate Committee (SECC)

Meeting Minutes **APPROVED**

2/9/21
7:15 PM
Online meeting: Zoom

Meeting called by: Doc Bagley

Type of meeting: SEC meeting

Facilitator: Doc Bagley

Note taker: Jim

Attendees: David Lutz, Matt Christie, Susan Hodges, Gus Speth, Doc Bagley, and Jim Schley, plus guests Dorian Yates & Jenevra Wetmore

Next Meeting: March 9, 2021, 7 pm via ZOOM

Minutes

Action Items from this meeting:

ACTION ITEM: **Doc** will ask Lisa to add Geneva and Dorian to the SEC@Straffordvt.org mailing list.

ACTION ITEM: **Jim** agreed to contact the School Board after Town Meeting to see if they would be receptive to having an energy audit for the main building and the gym.

ACTION ITEM: **Doc** suggested that we revise our Mission Statement to incorporate the Climate Emergency Resolution. **Dorian** offered to work on this with **Doc** and **Jim**. (See below for current version.)

ACTION ITEM: **Everyone** is invited to bring ideas about filling the position of Committee Chair to the next meeting.

1. Introductions to SECC – Dorian Yates & Jenevra Wetmore

Jenevra has been living part-time in Strafford and will be moving to Strafford full-time this spring. Program coordinator for Sustainable Woodstock, also very involved in the Forest Carbon Group there. They've formed a group first to learn more, and are now moving into projects:

- Creating a Forest Carbon Guide for landowners
- Planning educational events
- Hoping to bring large landowners (200 acres-plus) together to explore sequestration strategies
- Not yet involved in the payment aspects of sequestration, which are very complicated

Dorian has worked on environmental issues for forty years, including energy realms but more in holistic impacts, and especially interested in solutions. Very interested in carbon sequestration in forests and soil: using nature for our remedies and helping more people understand the evolving science around these issues.

2. Review action items and approve January meeting minutes

Action Items from previous meeting:

— **Doc** will ask Rock Bottom Farm and Strafford Village if they're interested in potentially being a community solar site. Doc has talked with Rock Bottom Farm and they are interested in solar; however they use a great deal of electricity, so they're on a commercial plan with Green Mountain Power. The daughter of the CEO of Norwich Technologies works there, and the conversation is ongoing. Doc hasn't yet heard back from Strafford Village Farm.

— **Doc** and **Susan** joined the Selectboard for a meeting to explain our committee's support for continued support of the Intermunicipal Regional Energy Coordinator. Strafford's contribution was RENEWED in the NEW BUDGET that will be presented at Town Meeting.

— **Doc** requested contributions for this year's Town Meeting report. Reports were then submitted for both the Energy and Climate Committee and the Intermunicipal Regional Energy Coordinator.

— Doc offered to provide a link for the online presentations from the 2020 VECAN conference:
<https://vecan.net/conferences/13th-annual-vecan-conference-2020/>

Minutes for the January meeting were approved.

3. Report on Intermunicipal Regional Energy Coordinator activity: Doc confirmed that the Selectboard voted to continue Strafford's support for 2021/22, subject to the budget's approval at Town Meeting.

Steering committee update: Doc is representing our committee; most recent meetings were January 8 and 28. Current projects include bringing in EEI, an audit company that has offered to do audits for all the towns in the compact; in Strafford they'll be focusing on the Town Garage. Geoff Martin will meet with Rhett Emerson and John Mackinnon to make plans for this. The last meeting was almost entirely about Energy provisions in new Building Codes; one of the steering committee members (Erica Ko, from Thetford's Energy Committee, who works and works as an architect for Smith and Vansant Architects) has done a review of the new Residential Building Energy Standards (RBES) and compliance issues (see accompanying document).

Matt commented that there's resistance in this region, in our small local communities, to have third party compliance checks; the key here is to get the local building inspector informed, resourced, and connected with training resources. We wouldn't let homes and other buildings get built if they had electrical and plumbing hazards, but we don't have the same vigilance about energy provisions. Also electricians and plumbers know codes, but contractors oversee the energy aspects of a building and there's no consistency. And non-compliant builders can outbid those who incorporate efficiency and conservation. Doc observed that we touch on this every other meeting but we don't arrive at a next-step plan. Could we involve the builders in town to ask them how these new codes could be more broadly adopted? Does Efficiency Vermont run this kind of contractor information session? Also important is engaging Brian Johnston actively in this process.

4. Sub-committees – MONTHLY UPDATES

— **Transportation:** Doc asked David if he'd heard of Capstone's "Mileage Smart" program, where those who meet an income threshold can get a subsidy to purchase a high-mileage car from a Vermont dealer (offering 25% of cost up to \$5,000); there are also subsidies for purchases of electric vehicles. Genevra will be testifying for the House committee on refunding the "Mileage Smart" program. Robin Jacobs posted a link to the Go Vermont survey on how people get around: <https://www.connectingcommuters.org/>

— **Weatherization / home heating / construction:** Doc got an e-mail from WindowDressers asking about plans for this year. It still seems too early to make plans for this coming fall, but Doc is going to reach out to the "measuring" volunteers, since they'd be the ones going into people's homes. Matt has been developing a "training deck" for contractors and utility officials to cover the benefits and viability of cold-climate heat pumps; this could potentially be adapted for homeowners.

— **Education and communication:** Jim agreed to contact the School Board after Town Meeting to see if they would be receptive to having an energy audit for the main building and the gym.

— **Distributed electrical generation (renewable energy):** David & Doc (See above.) Three sites have been identified as potential **community solar** site: Geoff Martin and Doc and Kevin Jones from the Vermont Law School's Energy Clinic (which will help with the permit applications) will be meeting with Liz Clark, Sandy Preston, and Peter and Carol Orgain; Norwich Technologies did a prospective site plan using aerial mapping. Two different models: community-shares buy in, which is more complex to set up; or a power-purchase arrangement where the installer would buy the electricity generated at the sites.

Gus asked if the Public Utilities Commission's recent actions are putting a damper on new solar development. Doc said yes, the net-metering payment rates have been lowered repeatedly; essentially they keep reducing the incentives and increasing obstacles.

David proposed that we host a DIY workshop on home-school solar, emphasizing how much you can do if you mail-order the components and do the wiring yourself or hire an electrician. Jim is interested in helping with this, and there are several "micro-solar" systems at the homes in the co-op where he lives.

— **State Legislature:** Susan has been in touch with Tim Briglin about doing an online session with him on environmental, energy, and climate issues, and he said he could do so after Town Meetings.

H.94 is all about transportation issues. Senate is beginning to work on a big Weatherization bill which will be debated in the spring.

The Vermont Climate Council has been accepting nominations for citizen representatives. The subcommittees will be 1) **Cross Sector Mitigation** (which will focus primarily on transportation, buildings and the electric sector/efficiency sectors); 2) **Rural Resilience and Adaptation**, 3) **Agriculture and Ecosystems** and 4) **Just Transitions** (which will focus on how to serve all populations equitably during a transition to clean energy). A **Science and Data** subcommittee will also be established.

— Agriculture, Pocket Park and forestry: **Gus** has been attending the meetings of the Carbon Forestry Action Group (CFAG) hosted by Sustainable Woodstock, and he shared links to recent reports:

* The Vermont Forest Carbon Sequestration Working Group's Final Report: <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/VFCSWG-Report-Final-Report-1.4.20.pdf>

* The University of Massachusetts–Amherst's Forest Carbon Guide: https://masswoods.org/sites/masswoods.org/files/Forest-Carbon-web_1.pdf

Gus emphasized that this is a big area of potential activity for our forested region. Susan mentioned the documentary film *Burned*, which exposes how destructive (worse than coal) use of wood for electricity-generation can be; swathes of the U.S. south is getting cut and shipped to Europe for “green” power plants, and National Forests and Parks are heavily logged.

— Enhanced Energy Plan (EEP) and the Planning Commission: **Doc** has a call in to Steve Willbanks to find out the status of the Town Plan revision. The regional planning commission (Tory Littlefield, of TRORC) and the town's Planning Commission have been working closely together.

5. Mission Statement review (currently displayed on the committee's page on the town website): **Doc** is proposing that we revisit and update our mission statement. Thank you, Dorian, for pointing out the lack of acknowledgment of the importance of agriculture and forestry.

— **Current**: “Our mission is to promote energy conservation and alternatives to fossil fuels in the heating/cooling of buildings, vehicles, and electricity generation. As an advisory committee to the Select Board, we offer town officials and members of other committees information on energy-related policy matters, and we provide assistance to the residents and businesses of Strafford in adopting efficient, cost-effective ways to be comfortable while reducing the negative impacts of human activities on our planet's well being.”

And from the **Town Report**: “The mission of the Strafford Energy and Climate Committee (SECC) is to promote energy conservation and alternatives to fossil fuels in heating or cooling buildings, powering vehicles, and generating electricity. With the resolution to achieve zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030 passed at Strafford's Town Meeting of March 2020, the SECC works as an advisory committee to the Selectboard, providing our town officials, members of other committees, and the residents of Strafford and South Strafford along with local farms, businesses, and forest managers information on energy-related matters, including options for reducing our carbon emissions through best practices and sustainability planning.”

Doc suggested that we revise our Mission Statement to incorporate the Climate Emergency Resolution. **Dorian** offered to work on this with **Doc** and **Jim**, too. ACTION ITEM

6. Strafford Energy and Climate Committee Chair Position

Doc is continuing as chair for the time being but has explained that he'd like to focus on project work, after three years of serving as chair. We're looking for ideas for how to fill this position. The Selectboard is asking us to post the position on the list-serve. **Dorian** asked for a description of what the chair of this committee does, expressing possible interest in serving as chair if the role is mainly calling and facilitating meetings. Everyone is invited to bring ideas about filling the chair position to the next meeting.

7. Other Business:

Jim offered an announcement from Vital Communities: “The public is invited to find out the range of ways climate change impacts our region, who is doing what, and how individuals can get involved, at a **Climate Partners Summit** on Thursday, February 25, 3 to 4:30 pm. For more information: <https://vitalcommunities.org/blog/climate-partners-summit-february-25/>

March 9 is our next meeting.

Adjourned: 8:48 pm. / Respectfully submitted by Jim Schley