

Strafford Energy Committee (SEC) Meeting Minutes

11/5/19

7:00 PM

Strafford Town Hall

Meeting called by: Kevin Grady

Type of meeting: SEC meeting

Facilitator: Kevin Grady

Note taker: Matt (recording), Jim (transcription)

Attendees: David Lutz, Kevin Grady, Barbara Smith, Matt Christie, Gus Speth

Next Meeting: December 17, 2019

Minutes

Agenda items:

1. **Minutes:** Review minutes from October. Approved.

2. **Pocket Park update, Barbara:** A good crowd came out for the putting-to-bed work this past weekend. And Barbara and Wally sent the new calendar to the Byrne Foundation as a thank you gift, and they sent a \$3,000 grant in response.

The question of where the funds received and raised by the Pocket Park should reside had been raised by the Selectboard, which has been saying that because the land is owned by the town, the funds should be administered by the town. Barbara reported that the Pocket Park group will give the funds to the town but also that they will be spending most of what has come in on current projects. Barbara will meet with Clerk-Treasurer Lisa Bragg and a Selectboard member tomorrow to go over details of the arrangement. She will request a monthly statement for the Pocket Park account to allow for budgeting and planning. Barbara would still like to consider eventually setting up a board and a separate nonprofit organization to manage the Pocket Park, which could involve a lease from the town for use of the land. Barbara had noticed that the former site of a little park in West Hartford to memorialize local people who died in Afghanistan had disappeared, and said that the founders would like to provide for some kind of continuity when they leave the venture, since "it's amazing how quickly things deteriorate if not kept up." Someone asked if the Energy and Climate Committee is the responsible party for ongoing oversight. In one of the original grants for the project, the Energy Committee (and Recreation Committee, too?) were listed as sponsors. In the beginning the town was wary of the Pocket Park, out of concern that they'd be responsible for upkeep. Now town officials are pleased with the outcome and would prefer to manage the finances. They don't want to have this account administered by the Trustees for Public Funds, but instead by the Treasurer. Presently Barbara submits bills and the town reimburses. David asked if the town can provide accounting for amounts available on a regular basis, and that hasn't yet been very clearly presented, but Barbara will request this in their meeting this week when she transfers the money in the bank account to the town. Kevin asked if there is a need for the Energy and Climate Committee to take any action in support of the Project Park, and Barbara said that she'll let us know after the meeting.

3. **WindowDressers update, Kevin:**

- WindowDressers recently increased our quota for this year, since other towns put in smaller orders.
- Thetford is going to do 115 windows for homes plus possibly several more for public buildings; Strafford will be able to offer 115 windows for buildings in town (another 15 of ours will go to Two Rivers Ottauquechee). We have 16 homes that are scheduled to get windows; some of these will get fewer than they requested, and three residents who were planning to participate have deferred to next year, to prioritize lower-income residents.
- For some of the homes our measuring team felt like there are other options: in some cases there could be sheets of plastic with wood strips instead of an insert.
- The WindowDressers jig was redesigned this past summer to be more portable and self-contained, and they made six of these to be sent out for town workshops. They'll be used in Glover then come to the Upper Valley for our use, with Thetford.
- our workshop will take place in the North Thetford Church, January 4–12, 2020 (from Saturday to the second Sunday). We need 12 volunteers at a time, with two 4-hour sessions per day, with a lunch break.
- We need to recruit people to fill the the workshop shifts, and it would be good to have someone with carpentry skills available for each block of time, although the assembly process is pretty simple: using an old-fashioned hand-held miter box, screws, tape.
- The materials are supposed to be delivered by December 20; so another volunteer opportunity is that during the week between Christmas and New Year's the building will be available, and Kevin and some others are going to

go over and assemble the frames, so that putting the “skins” on can then be done quickly, about 50 per day. With Thetford, we’ll do 250.

- Report from Kevin on raising funds for this project: We had individual donations of \$1,000, \$500, \$250, and \$100. We have the \$250 the town allocated to the SECC for this year. We received a grant (submitted by Heather and Doc) from New England Grassroots Environment Fund for \$750, and from Mascoma Bank’s foundation for \$2,500 (to be shared by Strafford and Thetford, \$1,250 each). So we have over \$4,000 for materials and for running the workshop, including heat, plowing, etc. In addition from participants we’ve received some contributions: \$560 so far.

ACTION ITEM: Heather and Doc get back in early December, and Heather will coordinate the schedule: There’s a sign-up website to share. Kevin will put this on the listserv, with an invitation for participants. We’d like everyone who’s receiving windows to give some time, but others can participate as well, ideally people who are “handy.” People can also contribute snacks and refreshments.

4. Climate actions:

- Update by Kevin, from information provided by Tii McLane: The Two Rivers Action Coalition (TRAC) will have a meeting on November 14 at the church in Sharon. The focus will find ways to support actions around the state to press for gubernatorial and legislative response. Barbara reported that new data shows Vermont to be the only state in New England where emissions have increased. Others have decreased significantly more. A list is being developed to show which legislators are most crucial to be contacted and lobbied for action.
- Kevin reported on a recent “On the Media” podcast about climate responses, which described how often the most positive actions aren’t the ones adopted, and there’s a underestimation of longer-term technical costs, for instance with our Town Garage (where short-term savings were prioritized) and the upcoming renovation of the town office building, which risks using lower-cost materials and expensive labor and not accurately accounting for energy costs and potential savings over time. Gus quoted an old Chinese proverb: “Straw shoes are the most expensive.”
- What will our committee’s role be in reviewing, evaluating, and critiquing the plans being developed by the architect for the town office project? Including materials, heating and cooling, solar and geothermal options, net-zero potential, historic preservation considerations (it would be more economical to replace the building than to renovate, or strip it to the structure). They seem to have had only one architect involved. Previously the Energy Committee helped with insulation of town office; Janet and Dori would know more about this. It would be appropriate and important for the SECC to be involved in this project, which appears to be on hold “indefinitely.” There’s the potential to create a plan for a net-zero, carbon-neutral building with no fossil-fuel load. And there will be a new regional Energy Coordinator coming on, who could be an ally and a resource for this effort.

ACTION ITEM: Kevin will review the Selectboard minutes to see where they are in the process and report back at the December meeting.

- Updates from Gus and Barb:

- * Resolution for the warning for Town Meeting: here to be signed, with printed name, signature, legal address. If passed, this would direct town officials to consult periodically with the Energy Committee, reporting on the town’s emissions and to present information and ideas for achieving zero greenhouse gas emissions in Strafford by 2030.

- * On November 15 at the Morrill Homestead education center, there will be a workshop and talk on calculating your personal and household carbon footprint, and information on carbon offsets. Pat Parenteau and Tim Denny will be there to talk about individual reductions in carbon impacts.

- * After the petition was drafted and began circulating, Gus got a call from Shannon Varley of Strafford Village Farm, who asked, “What is being done to look at agricultural and forest sectors and greenhouse gas emissions and sinks?” We agreed that we’d focus our committee’s meeting on these questions. Shannon and B. J. Miller are lined up to attend, and Doc offered to contact Amy Hueffer and Earl Ransom from Rock Bottom Farm, David Paganelli, the Orange County Forester, and consulting forester Tii McLane. Other resources for the future could be Didi Pershouse and Cat Buxton, who are knowledgeable about keeping carbon in the ground.

As background, Strafford Village Farm was given a loan by the Iroquois Valley Trust, which has a program for inspiring climate initiatives on farms to which they’re loaning money. The Trust asked Shannon and B. J. to do calculations of their carbon emissions and also absorption in the soil and plants. They tried to use USDA data as the basis for their analysis, which is a deeply complicated process. Iroquois Valley Trust has now hired a consulting firm from Chicago to work in this area, and our committee and the Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Planning Commission could possibly work with them on developing tools for analyzing what the farms and forests here are doing in this area, positively and negatively.

ACTION ITEM: Doc is still away; who will follow up with invitations of guests for our December 17 meeting.

- Discussion of comparative benefits of keeping carbon in a forest versus burning wood. David Paganelli has talked about changes in forestry practices that would both provide wood for building and fuel but also allow longer and

larger tree growth by more selective harvesting (current standard is 18-inch diameter for “mature” trees, but this could be increased by policy and practice).

- Reminder from Kevin: The legislative session will soon begin, and there are ways we can be involved in promoting greater awareness and advocating for faster government initiatives, on the town, state, and regional levels.
- Also a reminder from Barbara: Come out for the weekly Climate Action rally on Friday mornings in front of Barrett Hall.
- Noted: Our committee’s name is not yet “officially” the Strafford Energy and Climate Committee.
 - ACTION ITEM:** Doc was looking into what’s required for that change approved by the Selectboard to be confirmed officially, so that we can use this in every case.
 - Letter from Strafford Climate Strike Planning Group to the Selectboard, 9/11/19. The board voted “to support the spirit and intent of the letter,” and the committee is now drafting a resolution that would be presented at town meeting, including a provision that the Energy and Climate Committee will report to the Selectboard periodically with progress reports on the town’s goal to be carbon neutral by 2030.
 - Report on initiatives to involve farms and forestry community; Shannon Varley and B. J. Miller would like to come to our December meeting. We’d like to invite county forester David Paganelli and forester Tii McLane.

Adjourned: 7:57 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Schley (with thanks to Matt Christie for recording)