



**ACTION ITEM:** Vanessa offered to talk with Peter Sterling at Renewable Energy Vermont about sales of community solar arrays, in terms of a local buyer’s potential opportunity, in general, not at this time sharing any of the proprietary information Ecogy provided. **Done:** See report in these minutes.

**ACTION ITEM:** Jim will ask Dori Wolfe how the community and municipal partnerships were set up for the Maclay array: Were they investors? Would those relationships be maintained or need to be renegotiated if the array were sold? **Done:** See report in these minutes.

#### 4. Maclay Solar Array discussion:

**Lengthy discussion of appropriate role for our committee in this venture.** We arrived at an agreement that only a goal of town ownership of the array (soon, or eventual) justifies our involvement, since our committee was established to advise the town select board. We will not, in other words, play the role of intermediary to some other entity purchasing the array.

For the town to consider buying the array, a persuasive case would need to be made to the Selectboard as part of the Capital Planning process that this would be an economical and revenue-producing investment to secure a local source of power for the coming [15–25?] years, and is almost certainly (barring some catastrophic equipment failure) going to repay the investment., potentially within ten years.

At our previous meeting Jim was asked to call Dori Wolfe, former Strafford Energy Committee member/chair and before moving from Strafford a key participant in developing both the Elizabeth Mine solar project and the Maclay / Strafford Community Solar array. Jim talked with Dori by phone on December 16. She confirmed that the current owners of Strafford Community Solar (Ecogy Inc.) would be receptive an offer from a buyer; she herself is a minor partner in the project, and would be careful not to create a conflict of interest in talking with us directly. She also confirmed that the “off-takers” or community partners for this array are the Town of Strafford, Barrett Memorial Hall, the United Church of Strafford, the Morrill Memorial and Harris Library, and the Newton School. In recent years Ecogy has contracted with Norwich Solar for regular maintenance on the array. Dori herself manages three solar arrays in Vermont on a fee-for-service basis, but not the Strafford site. **ACTION ITEM:** Jim will invite Dori Wolfe to join us for the first part of our February meeting to discuss specific information we don’t know about the existing structure of the investors and off-takers, and also to talk about a strategy for crafting a proposal for town ownership. Jim will share Vanessa’s notes from conversation with Jeff Forward (see below).

Vanessa had a conversation on January 5, 2026, with Jeff Forward, who was recommended by Jonathan Dowds and Peter Sterling of Renewable Energy Vermont); he is the principal at Forward Thinking Consultants, which works primarily with municipalities, K–12 schools, colleges, and university decision-makers to help them evaluate energy efficiency and renewable energy opportunities. (Jeff’s listing at LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jeff-forward-a029897/>). Here are excerpts from Vanessa’s report to the committee:

Jeff suggested **three potential options** to make it financially viable for our town to purchase the solar array.

##### **Option 1: Seller Waits / Town Creates a Sinking Fund**

Have the seller wait while the town sets aside money annually through a sinking fund until sufficient capital is available for purchase. Towns do this all the time toward purchasing equipment.

##### **Option 2: Interim Private Ownership with Future Town Purchase**

Work with a private buyer who would purchase the array in the short term, take advantage of available tax benefits and depreciation, and then sell the array to the town in approximately 5–7 years, after those tax benefits have been fully used.

A private entity can take tax credits and depreciation, which the town cannot. During this period, the town could establish a sinking fund, putting money aside each year toward this capital expenditure.

Jeff noted that he and his business partner have played the role of buyer with other towns and might be interested in playing this role here. He and his partner are former selectboard members and are accustomed to working with towns, energy committees, and municipal processes. He also said Norwich Solar might be interested

### **Option 3: Vermont Bond Bank Financing**

Work with the Vermont Bond Bank, which has a program that provides municipalities with low-interest loans for energy projects. This option would still require a town vote to purchase the array.

Jeff noted that unlike equipment such as a dump truck, a solar array generates revenue. The financing could be structured for **positive cash flow**.

They are highly motivated to fund projects like this, and the town would likely qualify. Under this option, the town could hire Norwich Solar to handle routine maintenance. Jeff indicated that the financial modeling should be relatively straightforward, though he emphasized that he does not yet have all the necessary information.

He recommended reaching out to the Vermont Bond Bank as soon as possible:

<https://www.vtbondbank.org/>

### **Other thoughts and information Jeff Forward shared via Vanessa:**

- Jeff advised that it would be politically wise to begin conversations with the selectboard and the town early to discuss what this project might entail and what options exist that would not negatively impact the tax rate.
- Vanessa asked Jeff what he thought the asking price might be for a 10-year-old, well-maintained, 100 kW ground-mounted array. He estimated a price between \$1.00 and \$1.50 per watt. That's half of the asking price, or less. (V. did not share the current asking price with him.)
- This project could be a meaningful step toward achieving 100% net-zero by 2030, while also generating long-term revenue. The primary benefit of town ownership is achieving a 100% return on investment, which can eventually offset any borrowed funds.
- Whoever owns the array is responsible for billing the off-takers. While not a large administrative burden, someone must manage it.
- Off-takers receive reduced electric bills and pay the array owner approximately 90–95% of the net metering credits, and in some cases up to 100%.
- There is expected to be a growing market for used solar systems due to the reduction in federal tax credits for new installations. Depreciation still applies, potentially offsetting up to 20% of the cost, depending on an organization's tax appetite.
- The projected useful life of the system is greater than 20 years, and likely longer, given the lack of moving parts.
- Inverters typically last about 15 years, and replacement costs should be factored into routine maintenance and long-term budgeting.

This discussion will continue at our February meeting.

**5. Renewal of Intra-Municipal Energy Coordinator (IREC):** The IREC position at Twin Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission (TRORC), currently filled by Harry Falconer, is funded by contributions from member towns and is up for its annual review and renewal as part of this year's budget deliberations and town meeting. Harry wrote to Dorian that he has submitted his request to the selectboard to re-authorize the program. **Matt** will be our committee and select board's new representative on the IREC advisory board.

**6. Follow-up on Flood Forum: Kaz:** On 1/25 there will be a follow-up for the **Turnpike Road** group; Susan is working on a follow-up for **Redden Road**; **Alger Brook Road** has been scheduled for 1/24, to be hosted by Vanessa and Scot and Becky and Jim but may be shifted to February, because many neighbors who've expressed interest are not available this month.

**Alger Brook Road:** Gathering will be hosted by Vanessa and Scot and Becky and Jim on Saturday, January 24 at 1 p.m.

**ACTION ITEM:** We will share reports and testimonials from these neighborhood gatherings on the list-serve. WHAT IS URL FOR GOOGLE DOC ON RESILIENCE PLANNING?

**7. Thermal camera: Matt** has roughed out the educational materials. Matt will let us know when he has completed educational material for the thermal camera and when his home is available for a demonstration, etc. **Vanessa, Kaz,** and **Susan** will also participate in some form of community presentation to introduce the new camera. Perhaps this could be done at the library, which is where the camera will be available for loan?.

**ACTION ITEM:** To be discussed in **February**. **Susan** offered to help.

**8. Energy-efficient households visits:** This is an idea that needs to be discussed and developed. We could feature one home at a time (for instance, on the first Saturday morning of the month), or we could offer several homes to be visited on a specified day. The idea would be to show a variety of approaches and allow people time to see what choices are available, with time to ask questions. **ACTION ITEM:** To be discussed in February.

**9. Strafford Climate Action book group for coming year:** Community Read of Robin Wall Kimmerer's *The Serviceberry* on **Wednesday, February 4 at 6:30 at Barrett Hall**; on the Sunday preceding, Gayle Giovanna will speak about this book at United Church of Strafford at 10 a.m.

Strafford Climate Action are also helping Cat Buxton with her Upper Valley-wide composting in the schools program. Newton School program ended badly when structure was forcibly removed for some reason none of us knows. Susan suggested that there is a role for us in a town-advisory role to help reestablish a program at our school.

**9. List Serve postings renewals:** Plan for 2026: **ACTION ITEM:** Discuss and fill in at February meeting.

**Meeting adjourned at 8:31 pm.      Next meeting is January 13, 2025 at 7 pm on Zoom.**