

Strafford Energy & Climate Committee (SECC) Meeting Minutes

6/09/20

7:00 PM

Online meeting – Zoom

Meeting called by: Kevin Grady

Type of meeting: SEC meeting

Facilitator: Kevin Grady

Note taker: Jim, from Zoom session

Attendees: Kevin Grady, Doc Bagley, Matt Christie, Susan Hodges, Gus Speth, Barbara Smith, Jim Schley plus guest Curt Albee for first portion of meeting

Next Meeting: July 14, 2020, 7 pm — LOCATION TO BE ANNOUNCED, but probably in-person

Minutes

Action Items from this meeting:

From item 4: ACTION ITEM: Doc will talk with Terry Garrison about the windows at the Newton School.

From item 5: ACTION ITEM: Gus offered to talk with Kevin about other regional foundations that he's aware of, with an emphasis on climate work. / **ACTION ITEM:** Jim will pull highlights from our minutes and post an update to the list-serve each week, including information about how to get involved with the committee's projects. / **ACTION ITEM:** Kevin will ask Lisa what the rule are for posting minutes and agendas for town committees and commissions, and will also request that meeting minutes not yet posted will be added; also that the committee's revised name be reflected on the web page (<https://www.straffordvt.org/energy-commission>): Strafford Energy and Climate Committee.

From item 7: ACTION ITEM: Kevin will choose a location, possibly the Morrill Education Center or Barrett Hall, both of which would allow us to be spread out.

Agenda Items:

1. Minutes: Review minutes from May. Approved.

2. Town Office Renovation: Curt Albee described the working/Phase I plan for the renovation of the Town Office. This is a challenging project, because of historical significance, central location, and the fact that the lot on which the building sits is only five feet from the exterior of all walls, according to Lisa Bragg.

Curt was asked to be involved in the planning process by Kate Seipmann and others. He has been a building contractor and also clerk of the works for a number of complex municipal and institutional projects.

When Curt was the interim zoning administrator, he met Tom Bachman, an architect with the firm gbA (<http://gbarchitecture.com/>) in Montpelier, who designed the education building at the Morrill Homestead about a dozen years ago. Curt has worked with him on projects in Windsor and elsewhere.

Tom agreed to take a look at the town office project, and for about \$4,100 he did a Phase I plan, including consultation by a structural engineer. The town has the option to proceed into Phase II with the same architect, or go to someone else.

The plan they devised has an estimate of \$400,000. A summary was distributed at Town Meeting. There has been ongoing discussion about allocation of space (Lisa's office possibly on second floor, etc.). Others were surprised at the projected cost, Curt was less so, since demolition of failing stairs and other components is included. If local builders were involved in the demo and clean-up, could potentially save \$50,000 in the prep work, so the contractor could start with a clean site.

Kevin asked about heating, insulation, windows, and other elements that are primary concerns of this committee. Curt responded that the roof was done not long ago by Blake Spencer, so that wouldn't need to be touched. Starting from the bottom: the stone foundation, according to the structural engineer, is sound, but there is a hole into the crawl space that precipitation and silt are running into, which would need to be sealed, with a hatch installed where the stairs now is. On the first floor, which is really one space with partitions, the proposal is to strip that to the studs (which are either 2x4s or 2x6s, unconfirmed); modernize wiring and lighting; reconfigure work and meeting areas; with the bathroom brought up to code and possible addition of a kitchenette. The second floor renovations are still being discussed.

Because this is a “historic” building, the town could possibly apply for grant money, but a funder might restrict renovation options. For instance, Tom Bachman said we might have to leave the windows alone (they’re single-glazed, with aluminum storm windows). Or perhaps they could be replaced with the visual equivalent: two-over-two, properly glazed, with no storms. As for heating and cooling, the building gets so hot that they’ve needed air conditioning. Asked about cold-climate heat-pump heating, Curt said this is part of the plan with an on-demand water heater and the existing propane boiler left for back-up. The septic system has been rebuilt and is fine.

Discussion of whether this project could go for Zero-Net Energy (ZNE): Would the town have appetite for the extra efforts and expense? Matt said that heat pumps will easily heat that building, but the building couldn’t generate enough of its own energy with its small roof and tiny lot to actually produce what it’s using. Discussion followed of whether the town’s existing solar installations could be counted, but Matt reminded us that Net Zero really means generating on-site everything a building needs.

Even so, the renovations as proposed will be a big improvement, as long as we’re including heat pumps and spray foam insulation. Gus raised the possibility of replacing the propane generator with a Tesla power wall from Green Mountain Power. But a power wall would be another \$10,000. Curt said that the propane generator could be sold, probably; Matt suggested that — even though the climate resolution aims for all-electric, with no fossil fuels — we could use the generator for a while, on a now-and-then, as needed basis, and revisit later the option of a power wall for back-up electricity. A space for a power wall could be provided in the renovation but the expense could be deferred. (Added comments from David via Zoom chat: Power Wall/ Battery needs to be close to electrical panel; also, I'd recommend moving the servers close to a heat pump, taking advantage of the heat they generate.)

Kevin asked Curt what the plan was for going forward. The plan *had* been to have an informational meeting, then a special town meeting with a warrant to approve the expenditure, with a project that would be completed this summer and fall, but everything is now on hold. Looks now like we’re going to have to wait a year.

Kevin asked if we have a consensus that the Energy and Climate Committee would like to have the opportunity to review the proposed equipment, insulation, and other conservation measures prior to finalizing a plan, and Curt said this would certainly be possible.

Brief discussion of the value of having a really nice meeting area on the second floor.

3. Regional Energy Coordinator (REC)

The Intermunicipal Agreement for the Regional Energy Coordinator (REC) was reviewed at a May 20 Selectboard meeting; Strafford’s lawyer approved the agreement, and presently the other participating towns’ attorneys are reviewing it; and an advertisement has been placed for the position by the Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission. Please publicize this opening: <https://www.trorc.org/about/employment-opportunities/>. Kevin is the Strafford representative on the REC Steering Committee, along with Toni Pippy on behalf of the Selectboard; Doc will be the alternate.

4. Sub-committees: MONTHLY UPDATES

- Transportation: No report this month from David.
- Weatherization / home heating / construction: Matt spoke with Efficiency Vermont, and they are preparing training materials for town officials and contractors. Jim spoke with building inspector / zoning administrator Brian Johnston and he expressed interest in training and in having educational materials for prospective builders; Brian mentioned that one challenge is that there’s a town “tradition” of not contacting the administrator until the building is essentially done, but he said he’d be happy to talk about his possible role.
- State Legislation: Susan confirmed that the Strafford Selectboard did send the letter to the governor, with copies to Senate Pres Pro Tem Tim Ashe and Speaker of the House Mitzi Johnson. The Climate Action Committee is setting up a blog, where initiatives of that group and the Energy and Climate Committee can be shared.

Kevin added that the Global Warming Solutions Act and the Act 250 renewal are before the Senate; and the legislature may be on the verge of taking a break until August. Susan will e-mail Mark MacDonald and urge him to sign the Global Warming Solutions prior to a recess.
- Agriculture and forestry: Gus, Barbara // Gus reported that he’d invited Sharon to meet with us, but he hasn’t heard back; probably this will need to wait till after the growing season.
- Outreach: Discussion of the possibility of hosting a Strafford Solar Home Tour, either in person or virtually, with a tablet to film a walk-around. This could even be made available via YouTube as a video that could be watched later, not a one-time Zoom.
- WindowDressers: Doc reported that while WindowDressers is discussing the possibility of not doing home programs this year with large groups of volunteers, Thetford has asked if they’d consider doing a project at the Thetford Elementary School, which has very old, single-pane windows. Doc looked into the status of windows at the Newton School, and John Freitag confirmed that windows in our school have been replaced in batches in recent years (by Terry Garrison). John said that the gymnasium is the building that would benefit from inserts, so maybe there is a way to piggy-back with Thetford and do that building, if WindowDressers would allow a school-focused municipal project. Doc also reported that he saw a Capstone truck at a Strafford home on the Morrill Highway, which resulted from someone hearing about assistance at a poorly attended meeting in Thetford

last year; at least one family who was represented at that meeting has followed up with getting help for weatherization and efficiency measures.

5. Town's Climate Emergency Resolution (as below):

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE CITIZENS OF THE TOWN OF STRAFFORD:

1. Declare that a climate emergency threatens "future generations", our town, the State of Vermont, and the whole world;
2. Commit to integrating the need to act urgently on climate into all future decision-making, while incorporating transitions that are just and equitable, and to working toward a goal of zero greenhouse gas emissions in Strafford by 2030;
3. Direct the Strafford Select Board to ask the Strafford Energy Committee, in collaboration with other organizations and individuals, to report periodically on the Town's greenhouse gas emissions and to present information and ideas for achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions in Strafford by 2030; and
4. Urge the government of the State of Vermont to promptly initiate and enact legislation needed to ensure that Vermont's goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions are met, and take steps to mitigate any resulting harm to vulnerable populations in Vermont.

Continued discussion about how this now-approved resolution should inform what we do: How to we establish a baseline carbon footprint for both the Town of Strafford as well as the agricultural and commercial businesses and the general population of homeowners? Meaning actions and steady progress towards achieving the net zero carbon emissions goal. Susan emphasized that we can go beyond what's in the resolution.

During Dori Wolfe's tenure as committee chair, she was able to find grant money (for instance, weatherization for the Masons Hall and the town office vault); some of her funding came from the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund. Doc suggested we look at the "Dori's storage disc" on the Google drive to see if there's more information there about funders. Kevin suggested we cruise the funding sources directories for the state to see if there are other sources of support. Doc mentioned that if WindowDressers doesn't run programs this year, we could ask them about the option of shifting their funding to some other project.

ACTION ITEM: Gus offered to talk with Kevin about other regional foundations that he's aware of, with an emphasis on climate work.

Gus also observed that we need to establish an understanding with the Selectboard that according to the resolution we approved, initiatives are supposed to come from them. And yet this doesn't appear to be their highest priority. Susan observed that our committee's role is to generate very specific ideas for them to take action, as was done with the letter to the governor and legislators, which all they had to do was sign.

Kevin suggested that we set up a schedule so that some member of our committee of our committee posts to the list-serve every week, highlighting the activities and initiatives we discuss at our meetings. **ACTION ITEM:** Jim will pull highlights from our minutes and post an update to the list-serve each week, including information about how to get involved with the committee's projects

Doc posed the question if we should be posting our Minutes on the list-serv, and also our Agenda? **ACTION ITEM:** Kevin will ask Lisa what the rule are for posting minutes and agendas for town committees and commissions.

6. Planning Commission: Kevin will meet with the Planning Commission on Monday, June 15, to update them on the Enhanced Energy Plan we've been working on for a couple of years. Others are welcome at the Morrill Education Center or via Zoom I think.

7. Meeting plans: In person or continue via Zoom? As other groups are resuming in-person meetings, Kevin asked about our committee: Are we prepared to resume meeting in person? Gigi Graner offered Barrett Hall as an option. Several members strongly endorsed resuming in-person meetings. Decision: On July 14 we will meet in person, with the location to be announced. **ACTION ITEM:** Kevin will choose a location, possibly the Morrill Education Center or Barrett Hall, both of which would allow us to be spread out.

8. Sustainable Woodstock Carbon Forest Action Group would like to invite you to join us next Monday for a discussion with Nick Richardson, president of the Vermont Land Trust (VLT).

We will hear about VLT's latest work with forest carbon sequestration. Among other topics, Nick will discuss the Cold Hollow to Canada carbon project in northern Vermont, VLT's new Forest Carbon Cooperative and strategies for pursuing carbon sequestration projects with smaller landowners.

Watch this short video to learn more about their initiatives! <https://www.vlt.org/forestcarbon>

When: Monday June 15, 2020 5:30-6:30pm Where: Zoom //GUS Tii and David

Zoom Meeting Details: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/381312277> Meeting ID: 381 312 277

One tap mobile +19292056099,381312277# US (New York) / Dial by your location +1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

Contact: **Zachariah K. Ralph, Program Coordinator** www.sustainablewoodstock.org/

Adjourned: 8:49 pm. / Respectfully submitted by Jim Schley