

Strafford Energy and Climate Committee (SECC)
Meeting Minutes APPROVED

10/11/22

7:04 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, Susan Hodges, Susan Tiholiz, Matt Christie, Doc Bagley and Jim Schley

Next Meeting: November 8, 2022, 7 pm via ZOOM

Minutes

New ACTION ITEMS from this meeting:

ACTION ITEM: David will coordinate on an EV demonstration with a borrowed Ford Lightning, to be videoed and with several committee members on board. He’ll show several scenarios, including charging with fast and slow chargers; powering a house; and powering a contractor’s job site.

ACTION ITEM: At our DECEMBER meeting, we’ll plan some kind of open-house event in January, potentially at Matt’s house, which has a solar tracker, EV, heat pump, and induction stove to demonstrate; DORIAN will bring back the survey of committee members’ home energy-efficiency and renewable features.

1. Approve minutes (attached). Approved.
2. Review & update re: Action items from last meeting.

ACTION ITEM: Matt said he’d be willing to host another webinar on the consumer effects and impacts of the Investment Reduction Act (IRA). He could take questions on individual aspects of workforce and supply-chain problems for heat pumps. <<**Carried over to a future month**>>

ACTION ITEM: Dorian will share the IREC Priorities documents with the Planning Commission to begin to build agreement and cooperation on the goals and measures. Dorian will reach out to their current chair Donald Graham and offer to have a joint meeting to talk about the IREC goals and priorities. <<**Done**>>

Dorian reported that she also contacted David Paganelli about the Ashley Forest plan in process and requested a copy for our discussion at this meeting; he said only that they would be posting their report on October 17, and then there will be a public hearing. Susan T. had heard they were going to adopt their plan, then hold a public meeting. Dorian and Susan T. will follow up. Clearly the Energy and Climate Committee doesn’t have any special grounds for seeing the plan in advance of its public release.

3. IREC report from Geoff Martin:

— They’ve put in an application for an electric school bus; see here for more information:

<https://apnews.com/article/business-education-pollution-air-quality-climate-and-environment-ad9dc72b1ad662dfb618fcc317728f27>

— Dartmouth Thayer engineering students are consulting free of charge on the Town Garage to design a renewable-based heating system; David suggested they consider in their evaluation the concept of a district-heating approach, incorporating the school.

— They are working on research for the Green Buying Guide

— They’ve established monthly meetings of the Residential Building Energy Standards (RBES) and Climate Action Guidelines working groups, which are made of Steering Committee and Energy Committee members.

— A representative from Standing Trees will be speaking with the IREC group at their November 3 meeting, and David asked David Paganelli if he would speak at that meeting as well, as part of the Q&A.

— Susan reported that Gayle Giovanna from the Climate Action committee went to the Ashley Forest meeting and found the group, including David Paganelli, very responsive to the need for forestry “waste” to stay in the woods, rather than be shipped to the Ryegate biofuels power plant.

— Doc recommended that IREC look into grant funding currently available from New England Grassroots Environmental Fund (NEGEF) and We Are Youth Empowerment and Action / Regeneration Corps / Grow More Waste Less / BALE (Building A Local Economy).

4. Book club on trees and forestry, 4-month trial: 11 people are signed up.

5. Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions Resiliency event this Saturday, October 15:

Taj Schottland (Trust for Public Land) and **Zoe Richards** (Burlington Conservation Commission) will give keynotes on the growing movement of towns and cities across the country that are turning to nature-based climate solutions. Other workshops include:

- * Intact Freshwater Systems (Jon Groveman and Karina Dailey, VNRC)
- * Peeling “resiliency” like an onion (Ben Rose, VT Emergency Management)
- * Developing a Municipal Climate Toolkit (Marian Wolz, Climate Action Office at the Agency of Natural Resources)
- * Using BioFinder to Learn about Climate Resilience (Jens Hilke, VT Fish & Wildlife Department)
- * VT Climate forecasts and thoughts on Adaptation (Leslie Ann Dupigny-Giroux, State Climatologist)
- * Town Action Towards Resilient Community (Chris Campany, Windham Regional Commission)

6. Sub-committee and other reports:

— **Transportation:** David reported on seeing many more electric cycles and vehicles around town. Also noted the State program: up to \$3,000 credit to retire older vehicles, 10 years older or more. Matt just bought a Bolt: the local dealer gets one a month and is required to keep it on the lot for five days, then they tend to sell it to a wholesaler who will sell it on to a buyer in Texas for much more. Matt acted fast and got the car. The current buyers’ market is really tight. Do your research ahead so you can make a choice quickly.

David happened to talk a car dealer in Bethel, who has a Ford Lightning. What he realized is that people are very accustomed to and dependent on a certain routine of charging, ideally while the car is sitting, at night or in a parking lot. She had a horrendous experience because she tried to charge in the way we fill up at a gas pump, and she says she won’t sell them. But Ford is going to push out dealers who don’t sell them. David asked if he could use that truck and she said, “Take it now!”

David is interested in setting up a set of demonstrations: Use of a fast-charger; powering a house (lights, computers, well pump, range, water heater); powering a work site. Doc proposed a video, and knows a person who could be interested. Or Bob Farnham (the Green Guy).

Matt said that presently there are 100,000 chargers in the whole country; the IRA has money for 500,000 in five years.

We've talked about a charger at the Strafford park-and-ride lot, but our town wouldn't be as well suited as Sharon. **ACTION ITEM:** David will coordinate on an EV demonstration with a borrowed Ford Lightning, to be videoed and with several committee members on board. He'll show several scenarios, including charging with fast and slow chargers; powering a house; and powering a contractor's job site.

— **Community Solar/renewables:** Doc reported on Alger Brook community solar project: ground has been cleared, racks will be installed by Peck Electric of Burlington; PVs are on hand; inverters are a challenge, since they need a dozen or so, and these are harder to source, but they're getting them from different places. Waiting for the Law School to provide a final operating agreement for the members of the LLC. Geoff Martin and Doc need to get members to take on some leadership roles. There are twenty-one members.

They're eager to get this on line so members can take advantage of the 30% this year as well as next year.

Discussion of a possible show-and-tell open-house tour for people to see how solar and heat pumps. By January, Matt's house will have its heat pump. His house could be visited even in mud season. Solar, induction stove (better speed to boil, control, and safety), electric car. Good opportunity to show many options. **ACTION ITEM: We'll plan some kind of open-house event in January, to be discussed at December meeting; DORIAN will bring back the survey of committee members' energy-efficiency and renewable features.**

Susan T. asked Doc if the renewal of federal (30% credit) support will help encourage community solar, and he said there are still obstacles; anyone trying to do a ground-mount installation need to get preferred site status, which can be difficult (really helped for Alger Brook). Our state is going the wrong way in de-incentivizing net metering. Doc is pleased that the Alger Brook array sold out, because it demonstrated a good method of developing a project, including the partnership with the Law School, but 4 cents per kilowatt hour return less because the Renewable Energy Credits are retired; yet now with the new incentives that difference is only 2 cents per kilowatt hour.

New Hampshire electric rates have doubled in the past couple of months; our rates are much more stable, and our increases have been far smaller (linear instead of exponential hikes).

Dorian asked if there's any appetite to do another community solar project in Strafford? Sandy Preston's site is already certified as a preferred site. The trouble there is fourteen abutters, some of whom have expressed concern about inverter noise, etc. Doc thinks the next time it might be better to turn the project over to a firm like Norwich Technologies and not need as much of one of us to coordinate.

Our Enhanced Energy Plan specifies 20 acres of solar, and we need to be thinking about how and where we locate that.

7. Other Business: Correspondence

A. Received from Anna Guenther at Vital Communities ([Vital Communities](#)):

Vital Communities will be partnering with Efficiency Vermont's Button Up campaign to host an Upper Valley-wide (for both VT and NH residents) informational event to connect people to assistance resources this winter.

We'll host an "Affordable Energy for All" drop-in info fair sometime in late November at an accessible location. We hope to have assistance providers represented there along with information and applications for open programs.

* We'll provide a suite of energy burden outreach materials (posters, flyers, fact sheets, and digital assets like social media and listserv posts) for you to disperse in your towns.

* Please email me back *one way or another* with your interest in supporting, attending, or any plans to host a “Button Up” event. Once I have a rough idea of the capacity and interest, we’ll move forward.

B. from committee member Matt Christie, in response to our previous meeting’s discussion of biofuels and landfill-sourced Renewable Natural Gas (RNG):

In our September meeting, I hadn’t yet read the details regarding the Vermont Gas filing with the PUC to approve RNG purchase from the landfill in upstate NY. So I didn’t want to comment out of turn. I’ve since done the reading, and respectfully disagree with 350VT’s stance on the petition. Here’s why.

Please remember that I’m coming from the same end-goal position as 350VT. I’m a committed activist and professional moving our society rapidly towards decarbonization and fighting climate change. I share the same goals. I’m also very active pushing against natural gas companies nationally. I have moved my company to intentionally *decline* to work with SoCalGas, Northwest Natural, and others. Gas companies around the country are greenwashing, obfuscating, and undermining the transition off of fossil fuels as they cynically protect their bottom line against the needs of society. It sickens me. There’s SO much bu##sh\$t coming out of gas companies.

This one, to me, is different. Stuart Blood and Vanessa Rule are both well respected for good reasons in climate circles. But both are upside down on this topic, and I think are punishing the good while hoping for the perfect, with a likely end result of getting the bad.

I can lay out more details at some point to whomever wants to listen, but in quick summary:

1. We *need* RNG as a society to combat climate change. RNG is a low-to-zero carbon, energy-dense liquid fuel, and there are certain end uses that require those types of fuel, mostly industrial and transportation.
2. There’s a lot of RNG greenwashing in the industry. This is not one of them. This is real RNG pulled off a landfill. If no one harvests this RNG for burning it is simply released into the air as methane from the landfill.

Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) play a critical and necessary role in getting a renewable industry off the ground. Once that industry is mature, you need to peel back use of RECs like we’re currently doing with solar accounting. RNG is *not* mature. We need buyers of RNG product, and it’s societally valuable to allow those buyers to be non-local for now. By buying the environmental attributes, we’re propping up development of RNG which again is *necessary* for our climate goals.

3. Yes, RNG is expensive now, but it’s coming down in cost and needs more demonstration sites producing it to have it keep coming down. This helps bend the cost curve.
4. Vermont Gas is by far, and I mean by FAR the most progressive natural gas company in America. They are earnestly working on a realistic, sober, customer friendly, aggressive, and self-destructive plan to stop selling natural gas (by self-destructive I mean they are actively trying to shut down the sales of their primary product quickly to be replaced by the unknown but certainly smaller sales of other thermal products, including RNG). I was just at a conference in California (ACEEE Summer Study) and a huge topic was “what to do about gas companies in a zero-carbon future.” The amount of hogwash was astounding and painful to hear at such a respected conference. The *only* sober take was from VGS. Other utilities are going kicking and screaming (and lying) into the future. VGS is leading the market towards *actual* decarbonization of their company. It is inspiring. They are not the enemy here. Trust me, I have worked with the enemy (SoCalGas being a prime example).

In addition, Matt gave an update on ways VGS is adapting and transitioning toward being a “thermal utility” instead of a fuel-based utility for servicing customers, including replacement of pipelines with water-bearing pipes that will give people access to district heating.

Adjourned: 9:00 pm Next Meeting: November 8, 2022, 7 pm via ZOOM

PEnthusiastically submitted by Jim Schley, Recording Secretary