

Meeting called by: Dorian Yates

Type of meeting: SECC monthly meeting

Facilitator: Dorian Yates

Note taker: Jim Schley

Attendees: Dorian Yates, Susan Hodges, David Lutz, Susan Tiholiz, Matt Christie, Doc Bagley, and Jim Schley

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

Minutes

ACTION ITEMS from this meeting:

Action item: Dorian and Susan T will work on early stages of a town Climate Action Plan (CAP) or timeline with milestones toward carbon neutral by 2030. **Ongoing.**

Action Item: Dorian reported that she has been in touch with superintendent Jamie Kinnarney concerning the school energy assessments the supervisory union is planning to do with a consultant for all the member schools; they have postponed their planning meeting until March.

Action Item: Jim will meet with Doc to talk about possible “commercial contract” with WindowDressers to make inserts for the United Church of Strafford.

Action Item: Susan will send to committee members information about a 350VT “Climate SOS” letter-writing campaign and also a letter from the Thetford group about the Clean Heating Standard bill that’s being developed in the legislature.

Action Item: We should keep abreast of the planning process for the town office to continue to advocate for an “all-electric” design.

AGENDA

1. Review and approve last meeting’s minutes.
2. Action Items from last meeting:

ACTION ITEM: Doc proposed that he and **David** create a simple one-page sheet explaining what the cost per watt will be, how the shares are organized, estimate of the “payback” (about twelve years), and a succinct summary of how the Renewable Energy Credits pricing works. What’s needed is an explanation page then a contract page. Those of us on the committee can offer “intended audience feedback” for this document. **Doc reported that Geoff Martin is working on this one-page explanatory document with the law school’s Energy Clinic.**

ACTION ITEM: Dorian and Susan T will work on early stages of a town Climate Action Plan (CAP) or timeline with milestones toward carbon neutral by 2030. **Ongoing.**

ACTION ITEM: David will talk with Susan H. about the Community Solar issue, since she'll be hosting a session with the Thetford / Tim Briglin group on that topic. **Done.**

ACTION ITEM: Dorian reported that she has been in touch with superintendent Jamie Kinnarney concerning the school energy assessments the supervisory union is planning to do with a consultant for all the member schools; they have postponed their planning meeting until March.

She expressed concern about the role of "biofuels" in their projections; David commented that he feels there is a role for locally produced wood pellets as a transitional heating stock. The trouble is the terms are being used broadly and imprecisely: Green Mountain Power is buying "biofuels" (probably agricultural wastes) from the midwest then using the Renewable Energy Credits to purchase fracked gas from Ontario.

Doc noted that the assessment group that will be doing the schools is the same firm that did an assessment for the Strafford town garage, and their estimates for energy savings seemed to Doc very high; they're also the company that would do the retrofit and weatherization work. Discussion of whether this work would be put out to bid. The challenge right now is to find any contractor to do work like this, given how busy everyone is. Geoff Martin is part of the committee.

3. Long range discussions about a Climate Action Plan for Strafford:

Dorian asked about the report of the Intermunicipal Energy Coordinator (IREC), and how the figures gives about "metric tons of carbon" for municipal activities can be translated into more understandable terms:

David said the figure for "mobile combustion" represent 17,000 gallons of diesel fuel.

David finds the figure for "stationary combustion" is confusing; both the town office and town garage burn propane for heat. But essentially we need to remember that our goal is zero.

Dorian asked, if we are trying to go from 17,000 gallons of diesel to none by 2030, what are our options? David said that he doesn't think there are currently electric plow trucks and dump trucks available, but could be within three to four years; EV school buses are available, and also excavators and smaller construction equipment.

Matt mentioned that there is a "Heavy-Duty Construction Vehicle" compact involving twenty states, including Vermont.

Dorian said that in thinking about when improvements may be viable, we'd be more likely to see those positive impacts in the second half of the coming decade.

In terms of residential uses, how would we determine or estimate the fuel loads. Could we begin by asking Rymes about quantity of fuel sold to pre-buy customers each year.

Matt said that 1,500 gallons per year for older houses is normal for fuel use. Square footage and age (which generally corresponds to insulation quality and level). We burn 17,000 gallons diesel per year. Matt explained:

It takes 98 tons of prehistoric biomass to get to a gallon of diesel.

One large tree is about 2 tons.

You can grow about 30 large trees per acre.

That's 27,767 acres of tree-covered land, clear cut and turned to our fuel every year.

Strafford is 28,352 acres (44.3 square miles).

So, roughly, the fuel we burn just to service our town trucks is the equivalent of clear cutting a full-forested area the size of Strafford every year.

TRORC said that 40 percent of homes in Strafford are burning wood for all or part of their heating. How do we estimate those impacts?

Question: Can the listers (i.e. Tim Denny) tell us the age and the square footage of the homes in town? Matt said that with those two data points he could produce an estimate of fuel use per year.

Susan T. and Dorian have met a couple of times attempting to create a skeleton or framework for the Climate Action Plan, which they're hoping to share next meeting for comments. Geoff Martin had given Dorian an example of a town Climate Action Plan as a possible model.

Our goal is to help people envision and take specific steps toward carbon reduction. Dorian is imagining a map as well as a chart. For instance, if we need 20 acres of new solar, where would that be? Matt said it takes about a hundred tracker-PVs to make an acre. Another way of thinking about this, David

explained, is that each of 500 homes needs a quarter of an acre of solar, which is easier to picture than “twenty acres.” Matt said that if a home is fully electrified, with heat pumps and EVs, with a quarter acre of solar would only cover a quarter of your energy budget.

Dorian asked whether the Elizabeth Mine array counts as part of Strafford’s renewable energy credit? Doc said, “It depends who you ask.” Our regional planners at TRORC and state officials do count that as a Strafford asset, but in reality for the first ten years, until the RECs are retired, all those credits are sold out of state and can’t be counted by Strafford. The Maclay array is setting up slightly differently: that’s a power-purchase agreement, so the school, town buildings, library, church, and so on are getting credited on their bills for what’s generated there. The entities participating there could not take the tax credit, so the LLC owner took that credit. The participants cannot legitimately say that they’re “using renewable energy.” They can say they’re buying power from a renewable-energy provider (who is actually selling the credits elsewhere). The participants are also getting 10% less value because there are maintenance costs, etc.

Dorian asked how much is being offset for those town entities? Doc said that Geoff Martin estimates the town could use 20% more solar capacity to cover electric loads; but David emphasized that all of these entities are using fossil fuels too, so realistically to cover their transportation and fuel for heating, you’d need 300% more solar.

Sandy Preston continues to be interested in hosting a community solar array, and she has a prime site. We might work with a different partner there. Norwich Solar has a model agreement where lower-income households have additional incentives to buy in. One challenge at Sandy’s site is that there are 14 abutters, and there were more objections that we encountered on Alger Brook Road.

4. Sub-committee monthly updates:

Weatherization / WindowDressers: Doc reported on plans for this year. Doc and Bob Walker in Thetford are looking for new coordinators/administrators, and he’s inquiring if anything on our committee would be interested. This requires a couple of hours a week leading up to the measuring and building season, then some additional hours per week for a month or two prior to and during the “Community Build.” Our past program coordinators and the leaders of the WindowDressers program in Maine will help guide you through the process.

He’ll be sending out a question on the list-serve to gauge interest for participations, both in terms of acquiring inserts and also taking part in the community build, which Doc would continue to be involved in. There’s potential to apply for additional funding from the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund (we’ve received \$1,300 for each town in prior years; and Mascoma Bank Foundation has granted \$1,250 to each town: these were for lower-income subsidies).

WindowDressers is also looking for commercial contracts in the non-residential season, where there wouldn’t be a community-build; the windows would be measured then produced in Maine and shipped to install. David said it would be a great case study to see the impact on fuel use before and after installation.

Community Solar/renewables: Doc reported that the Certificate of Public Good hasn’t been fully granted yet; David reported that Green Mountain Power is demanding a much higher surcharge for adding the array’s output and upgrades to the grid (interaction charges for wiring, transformer, etc.) by about \$30,000. The cost per-kilowatt-hour will therefore be higher, and while the benefits if you think about this as “prepaid energy for twenty years” are still substantial, but the shorter term benefits may be harder for some potential customers to see. “The production from the community solar array will not correlate to direct kwh-to-kwh value. Instead, participants will receive the lowered value of utility-blended rate minus incentives for the production that comes from the community array. The potential customer for community solar will need to determine how much \$ value they’ll want to receive when purchasing a share in the community array.”

These issues need to be resolved, so we can begin recruiting people to sign up; once the PUC approves, we have a year to complete the installation, and we wouldn’t want to be doing this work in the winter.

Dorian asked how much will the Alger Brook community solar contribute to Strafford's need to add approximately 20 acres of photovoltaics. Doc replied that this would only be about an acre, and 20 – 30 households participating.

Susan reported on some community initiatives in plastics reductions specifically in the food-products industry. Dorian spoke about the potential of involving the Coburns in exploring certain offerings that are more eco-friendly and not difficult for them to introduce (laundry sheets instead of jugs, for instance).

State Legislature: Susan Hodges reported that she is Susan has continued meeting with the Thetford group, and with 350VT regarding the development and status of legislation. They have had two meetings with Tim Briglin, but he is too busy to meet again before the end of the month. They are now connecting with a similar small group in Tunbridge to start working on Sen. Mark MacDonald, who has two of the important committees in the Senate (the Clean Heat Standard bill will eventually go to his committees).

The Thetford group has been focusing on the **Clean Heat Standard**, a bill that is also being developed by Tim Briglin's Energy and Technology Committee. A draft has just become available (you can find it at: <https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/WorkGroups/House%20Energy%20and%20Technology/Bills/22-0398/Drafts,%20Amendments,%20and%20Legal%20Documents/W~Ellen%20Czajkowski~DR%2022-0398,%20Draft%208.1,%202-1-2022~2-1-2022.pdf>), and it is very disappointing. It includes a system for trading the biofuel "RIGs"; basically the same system as RECs for electricity, with lots of room for misrepresentation of actual use of renewables (greenwashing), and leaving the nuts and bolts of oversight up to the Public Utilities Commission (which has no mandate at all to consider greenhouse gasses etc.). Susan provided a succinct description of the problem, which Stuart Blood put together. They are working on another letter regarding what needs to be in the bill for us to support it. However, everyone is "under the gun" as it is required that this bill be passed by the end of this session...

There are other bills in the works, some of which 350VT is especially focused on. One is a **Weatherization bill (S284)** which calls for a task force, two members each from House & Senate. They have no specific deadline for their report, and there is no mention of outreach to marginalized populations etc. or incentives for landlords to weatherize their rental properties. Also, to actually weatherize 120,000 homes, we must hugely scale up many systems: currently we lack the work force, there are no standards in place, we would need Heat Standards. Financing this could be problematic. People think the Committee has been working hard, but needs to hear from constituents. Susan's view is that we can't get "clean heat" without weatherization.

A **Transportation bill** is being written by the Governor (presumably using the Transportation Innovation Act as a model?). So far, it is not strong on public transportation. It is in or will soon go to the House Transportation Committee. According to 350VT an Op Ed is in the works; 350VT feels this is an issue that needs to be put in the public eye.

In an effort to get more public attention and more people involved, 350VT is holding a **"Climate SOS" event in Montpelier 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. on Friday 2/18**. The event will include art making, "Water rising over the State House" (with tarps and sheets etc.), speakers, connecting visual event with the bills, etc. 350VT will have a printable flier ready soon. https://350vt.nationbuilder.com/350vt_climate_sos_rally

350VT has some good resources on climate justice considerations: <https://350vermont.org/peoples-climate-action-plan-resource-info-page/>

ACTION ITEM: Susan will send to committee members information about a letter-writing campaign.

Town Office: Matt reminded that we need to keep an eye on the design and development process, since they're involving new people, new plans, possibly a new site. We need to keep emphasizing the need for an all-electric plan. There will be a forum on the town office on Wednesday, February, 9, 2022, at 6pm, Strafford Town Office. Public can attend remotely by following this link Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84845583569?pwd=K1BicG45VUpiRndDbFlHdUp5ellMQT09>. See the working committee's report here:

https://www.straffordvt.org/files/ugd/0580b2_66749c6c14694baaaa8e49603486ad79.pdf

Matt said, “If you’re building to Vermont code, building all-electric now is less expensive, both in terms of short-term capital costs and also long-term. We need to make sure that everyone understands it’s not a case where the ‘energy geeks’ are asking for more money.” **ACTION ITEM:** We should keep abreast of the planning process for the town office.

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

Adjourned: 8:59 pm

Enthusiastically submitted by Jim Schley, Recording Secretary