

Strafford Energy and Climate Committee (SECC)
Meeting Minutes Approved

4/8/25
7:03 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, Jim Schley, David Lutz, Matt Christie, Vanessa Rule, Kazmira Nedean and guest Didi Pershouse		
Next Meeting:	Next meeting is May 13, 2025, on Zoom		

Minutes

ACTION ITEMS FROM THIS MEETING

NEW ACTION ITEM: Dorian will contact Micki Colbeck and Kate Bass as chair and co-chair of the Conservation Commission to introduce the idea of co-hosting an event.

NEW ACTION ITEM: Kaz will tell Sonya that we're now more interested in the downstairs at Barrett Hall and a date in early June.

NEW ACTION ITEM: Vanessa and **Kaz** will work on a draft agenda for the event, and **Kaz** will develop a cool flyer.

Next meeting: We will focus on the elements of the plan and publicity and preparations.

Next meeting: Further discussion of thermal imaging camera, which the library can lend out.

ACTION ITEM: Jim will request annual data on use and generation (from the GMP bills) from the array for the four partners: Newton School, Barrett Hall, the United Church of Strafford, and the Morrill-Harris Library; **Harry** will do some research into whether or not new partners could be added if owner of the array changed. Carried over: more complicated than foreseen, because GMP invoices don't provide year-to-date information on the solar credit, only monthly.

ACTION ITEM: Kaz is creating a Google.doc where we could put ideas:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YxnA9s4_g5yYBiMF1yCZP46K0K2ycQJ9ZUjQ_-NRjwU/edit?usp=sharing.

ACTION ITEM: Kaz will ask Sonya Schumacher who we need to talk with about scheduling events at Barrett Hall. See below. (Kaz asked if we think the upstairs or downstairs space would be more suitable for this event?)

Action Item: David will ask the Sharon representative on the IREC steering committee what kind of thermal imaging equipment they have that can be checked out from their library. Carried over.

Action Item: Send to **Dorian** your various phone numbers, so that if we can't reach each other by e-mail or if the Zoom weren't working, she would have a way to call. **Dorian still needs numbers from some committee members.**

AGENDA for this meeting:

1. Approve minutes from previous meeting. Approved.

2. Review & update re: Action items from last meeting

3. Guest speaker Didi Pershouse. Dorian introduced the topic of preventive and responsive planning for water-related impacts, for instance from flooding or drought. We were impressed by the damage in western North Carolina last summer, and the summer before in Plainfield, Vermont. We've been reflecting on the role of our committee.

Didi lives in Thetford, and is on that town's Planning Commission; previously on the Conservation Commission.

For the past ten years the focus of my work has been "The Soil Sponge": soil structure and integrity, which are the basis for climate resilience and mitigation:

We have the opportunity "forest and land diplomacy" with our midwestern brothers and sisters, because we have more forested land.

Introductory survey of her work. Aim: to be able to picture a situation and imagine/anticipate our response.

In Strafford, we've had flooding; we've also had drought, and have had wildfires not very far away. Streambed erosion and destruction of bridges and roads (it's natural for rivers to change where they go); culverts actually speed up water and increase damages. We also not far from places where the sea level is rising.

Reducing CO₂ is very important, but land use is the "forgotten leg" of climate change response.

Didi showed a photo/image of soil with multiple materials in the aggregate, with space between the clumps.

Then for contrast showed a heap of flour (unaggregated soil) that the water just runs off; the lower part of the pile is dry. And this is why in Vermont we

What runs off is really bad for the water life, and we're not recharging the groundwater. And trees, leaves, branches when they fall on degraded/unaggregated soil they don't decay and replenish the life underground in the soil.

Didi showed water falling on bread, which has structure — it can get wet but hold water. This is a huge difference, in terms of the landscape falling apart or not.

In Vermont, which is really hilly, we want to think about how to get diversity of plant matter (kinds, heights, growth pattern) uphill and soil structure — those plants are feeding the workforce underground.

The more we get heat waves, the more the plants can transpire (taking heat to evaporate moisture) like an air conditioner, so if we plan planting

Vanessa asked if they are working on these principles in Thetford? Not yet, Didi said: they are working on zoning regs currently, but she's hoping that next year when they revise the Town Plan that they can incorporate these ideas.

Didi mentioned how beaver ponds eventually fail and create verdant meadows. We can do that, too: "human beaver-ing," some people call this "gulley stuffing" (see:

<https://dnu7gk7p9afoo.cloudfront.net/sficasestudypowdermilltrust.pdf>) or “leaky dams.” Didi feels like we in Strafford and Thetford could get the necessary permits and do some of this in our streambeds, layering branches and reducing the speed of streams. Didi lives on Sawnee Bean Road and Barker Brook is fed by streams every hundred feet.

Dorian asked if we could identify five priority areas and attempt some of these mitigation strategies and involve volunteers. Didi said we all go for walks: following streams up, you can see the 20 or 30 places where subtle changes could make a difference. Mapping gives you some important information but this kind of looking is best done on foot, and local people know the key places.

Another approach is to pay people to manage land differently: let the grass be twice as long, possibly not haying on a given year; how much is the town paying for erosion and culvert replacement and road repair?

Dorian asked about mowing your yard, and Didi mentioned the “Raise Your Blade” movement — how much higher can we let our grass grow and still enjoy our lawn? People often want to plant clover instead of grass, but clover fixes nitrogen and for reasons we don’t yet understand nitrogen diminishes soil aggregation.

Also, a lawn can have a wider range of plant types, with deeper roots. And we don’t need to mow before winter — better to have a thicker matt, which insects and other creatures will eat as it dries and transfer nutrients down to the roots. And remember that it’s essential to have no bare ground.

Discussion of Strafford Village Farm, and Sloane’s interest there; and Didi mentioned the idea of involving the farmers in these discussions as important partners in the process. Her son Skylar (Schuyler?) might also be interested in trying some kind of

Riparian zones and bank stabilization are very interesting too, Didi said: people want to keep cows away from streams, but if they’re there temporarily the cows can change cut banks into ramps that grass and trees can grow on. Cows have only one set of teeth, so they don’t nibble down to the nub of the grass, as horse do, with their two set of teeth.

Discussion of Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) and how we could educate and engage planners in these principles: Flood-proofing roads.

Didi said this conversation is useful to her in thinking about “What’s the handout?” Helping people learn about their own lawns and gardens is one aspect, and helping town policy makers and planners understand these issues on a broader scale is also crucial.

Jim said that enthusiasm is a great ally, and people got really excited (for instance) about pollinator gardens, which has been a graspable concept, very appealing to gardeners. Didi said that in China they are creating “Sponge Cities,” converting concrete aqueducts and canals into wetlands. We could help create a club in Strafford to create a “Sponge Village.”

Didi has a curriculum about soil health that has been used in Thetford Elementary and she thinks also at the Newton School. Cat Buxton uses this when she teaches: “Understanding Soil Health and Watershed Function.”

In May, Didi will be hosting a planning-and-plotting gathering to generate ideas about pilot projects: <https://www.landandleadership.org/may-2025-lake-morey-retreat.html>

Vanessa asked about our committee’s relationship to the town’s Conservation Commission. Dorian feels that they would be interested; they have been the ones who have been involved in riparian projects. We could reach out to them to co-sponsor an event or project.

Didi is really interested right now in building partnerships and building capabilities.

4. Ongoing discussion about future “Preparedness” forums and planning

We’ve identified household preparation as one issue, and town/regional preparation & response as another. What length of event would be most inviting? Kaz wondered iff we have two sessions, will we lose people? Matt suggested a deep dive into on topic (say, 45 minutes) then a lightning round introduction to other topics. Vanessa said that giving people information is one aspect, and getting people involved in an active project is another. We could have breakout groups around specific issues: “What are you worried about? What would you want to work on for preparation and mitigation.” What seems most meaningful to Dorian is to help people think in new ways about how water and fire and drought affect us: farmer to farmer, gardener to gardener, neighbor to neighbor. David suggested we use a slogan like “Strafford Strong” to accompany an “Are You Ready for Floods” theme.

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5. **David** had a recent experience helping a person with a limited budget by an EV from a private seller through an online “dealer” (KeySavvy: www.keysavvy.com/pay-private-seller/ev) that provided the tax credit that requires an intermediary (normally a regular dealer).

6. List-serv postings for 2025:

February: Transportation DAVID
 March: Lawn & Garden Dorian posted
 April: Building efficiency MATT
 May: Farming/agriculture, food DORIAN
 June: Recreation & Travel _____?
 July: Electricity MATT & DAVID
 August: Household products & pets _____?
 September: Fashion/fiber DORIAN
 October: Forests _____?
 November: Garbage & recycling JIM
 December: Plastics or holiday issues SUSAN H.

Meeting adjourned at 8:56 pm. Next meeting is May 13, 2025