

Strafford Energy and Climate Committee (SECC)

Meeting Minutes **DRAFT**

3/9/21
7:04 PM
Online meeting: Zoom

Meeting called by: Doc Bagley

Type of meeting: SEC meeting

Facilitator: Doc Bagley

Note taker: Jim

Attendees: Matt Christie, Susan Hodges, Gus Speth, Doc Bagley, Dorian Yates, Jenevra Wetmore, David Lutz, Jim Schley, and guests Robyn Jacobs and legislator Tim Briglin

Next Meeting: April 13, 2021, 7 pm via ZOOM

Minutes

Action Items from this meeting:

ACTION ITEM: **Jim** agreed to contact the School Board after Town Meeting to see if they would be receptive to having an energy audit for the main building and the gym. Geoff Martin is also pursuing this idea with the superintendent's office.

ACTION ITEM: for the March 11 **Compost, Soil Health and Climate Change presentation by Cat Buxton:** Susan has been publicizing this on the Strafford list-serve; **Dorian** will post the announcement on Thetford list-serve; and **Doc** will post on the Upper Valley list-serv. **Jenevra** can help Susan with the question of how to share a recording after the event.

ACTION ITEM: **Doc** will check with NEGEF to see if WindowDressers program doesn't go forward this year, could money be used for a different project?

ACTION ITEM: **Doc** will ask Steve Willbanks where the Planning Commission is with their review and revision process for the Enhanced Energy Plan.

ACTION ITEM: **Doc** suggested that we revise our Mission Statement to incorporate the Climate Emergency Resolution. **Dorian** offered to work on this with **Doc** and **Jim**. (See below for current version; we didn't have time to discuss this at the March meeting.)

1.
Discussion with our legislator **Tim Briglin, chair of the** House Energy and Technology Committee

Tim's observations about the current session:

The policy work the legislature has been doing has been fairly light, due to the limitations of video meetings. There is a lot of money presently available for economic relief, including quite a bit of "one-time" money (\$200 million dollars) from the federal government, and they're trying to put \$5 million into weatherization for town and municipal (maybe also school?) buildings, plus low- and middle-income homes, which has multiplying benefits in saving energy and money over time.

New federal legislation is likely to pass this week: There may be a billion dollars for Vermont, and the governor has been consistently acknowledging "climate resilience" as a priority.

For decades in the legislature, the Transportation Committee has focused on paving projects and little else; three years ago Curt McCormack became chair, and he's really focused on climate issues; last year for the first time the committee brought forth climate-related transportation bills. There's also a new bill — **Transportation Modernization Act of 2021**, co-sponsored by Tim and Jim Masland — to increase electric vehicle incentives; expand charging infrastructure including for multi-family housing; provide education for car dealerships to improve awareness and competence both about the technology and also the incentives/subsidies available for customers; a electric bike incentives program; and a trade-in program for older gas guzzlers for EVs. Many of these programs will emphasize access and benefits for lower- and middle-income Vermonters.

Transportation is the largest contributing sector to VT's greenhouse gas emissions (~45% of emissions) and presents a tremendous opportunity to reduce pollution and costs for our state.

Thirdly, the committee that Tim chairs did a lot of work on the Global Warming Solutions Act, and now they're focusing on implementation, with three "gates": 5 years, 2030, 2050. The Climate Council had a slow start, but they are now moving. They're looking at successes in neighboring states (particularly Massachusetts and Maine) as models for

potential Vermont initiatives. Tim believes the climate-related legislation that comes to the fore next year will be coming directly from the Climate Council. 2022 is going to be a big policy-work year, with in-person meetings allowing for more substantial discussion and collaborative work.

Tim's Energy and Technology Committee is responsible for:

- regulated energy utilities: electric and (one) gas utility
- telecommunications, broadband, and e-911
- web/technology applications for state agencies
- facial-recognition issues

Susan asked: How can local citizens help?

Tim works closely with Lauren Hierl at Vermont League of Conservation Voters and Joey Miller at Vermont Natural Resources Council, who bring information and advocacy from activists and energy committees from throughout the state. They've been able to provide really specific examples of successes: What kinds of weatherization, for instance, work best on the local level? Tim urged us to connect with these organizations.

Also, he said, our legislatures are really well positioned to listen to us. Jim is on the Ways and Means Committee, which writes all the tax policy; and similarly Mark MacDonald is on the finance committee; he is also on the Senate Committee Natural Resources and Energy, which is at the center of climate work.

Doc asked about the lack of EVs allocated to Vermont dealers. Tim said that we need to overcome the perception on the part of car companies that there isn't a market here.

Jim asked about education of contractors and building/zoning administrators education and realtor education. There are many challenges in engaging contractors — but could there be training and accreditation for green builders. Tim said that there are twenty or thirty legislators very interested in this.

Gus asked about forestry and farms issues. Tim feels that on the forestry side, the right leaders are now in place (Amy Sheldon of Middlebury is the chair of the committee), though likely not the right governor, since he and his team are not strong on this issue. We're not doing very well, really, given the forests that we have — both in terms of carbon sequestration but also weather- and climate-related resilience. Also, we have new data about unforeseen and poorly understood problems: It's very alarming that insect population in Vermont has declined by 40 percent!

And our agriculture practices in this state are very antiquated: we're underperforming in our ag policies and practices.

Matt asked where in the energy and climate sphere would Governor Scott be responsive? Tim feels the most important action we could take is for Vermont to join the Transportation Policy Initiative. We need more money for greenhouse-gas mitigation, and this program can generate revenues. Phil Scott has said he's in favor of regional solutions, and this is regional: from Maine to Virginia. But the governor pushed back on the Global Warming Solutions Act, even to the point of threatening a lawsuit. Tim is currently working with people in his administration, and they're good people, even though there isn't much leadership. And Tim is appreciative of the ways Scott is now regularly speaking about climate resilience and weatherization as among his administration's highest priorities.

Tim urges us to write to the governor to urge use of stimulus money for long-term resilience, since this pandemic is a dress rehearsal for what will come twenty or thirty years from now.

2.

Sustainable Woodstock report: Jenevra described the Energy and Transportation committee in Woodstock, which has begun looking at different means of verification for energy-efficiency building standards with Inter-Municipal Energy Coordinator Geoff Martin. Matt, whose field is energy compliance for homes, said he doesn't believe the ResNet Home Energy Rating Score program (1-100 points, the higher the worse) they're moving toward is sound as a basis for this region. He mentioned these reservations:

There are no certified raters or providers here. And there needs to be some form of enforcement process, which would need to be funded, probably statewide. A real lever for these kinds of compliance efforts is to withhold occupancy permit until the standard is met. Many owner-builders or smaller contractors here have no oversight.

However, Matt said, the new Residential Building Energy Standards (RBES) allow for consultation, and we do have qualified and knowledgeable contractors locally — Blake Spencer, Ethan Cole, Sam Newman, for instance — who do high-performance buildings and could be brought in to advise on others' projects.

In response to a question, Matt confirmed that the 2019 California code requires solar to offset electrical load for each new home (3 kw is sufficient in that mild climate; here a home would need 8 kw).

Jenevra said that Sustainable Woodstock is also doing presentations for landowners as part of their Green Drinks series to inform people about forest carbon sequestration. And they're also expanding solar installations to meet the municipality's goal; considering separating the two parts of the town to increase the cap.

3. Susan announced a workshop on **Compost, Soil Health and Climate Change**, which will be on **March 11, 2021 from 7:00–8:30pm, presented by Cat Buxton**. The emphasis will be reducing kitchen wastes, utilizing these materials, and prevent methane. **ACTION ITEM:** Dorian will post this on Thetford list-serve; Doc will post on the Upper Valley list-serv. Jenevra can help Susan with the question of how to share a recording after the event.

4. **WindowDressers 2021:** Doc reported that he, Michael Keiss, and Bob Walker met with Laura Seaton at WindowDressers HQ to gather information about local interest. Most volunteers from last year expressed interest in being involved again, if virus safety allows. Both Thetford and Strafford have \$1,300 from the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund (NEGEF), but to tap into that money allocation of the windows need to be done by August. Barrett Hall is the prospective site for the workshop this year; if that turns out to not be possible, the North Thetford Church is still an option (jigs are still set up there from last year).

*****UPDATE (3-15-21):** WD has decided to move forward for 2021. Doc will reach out to all those recipients in Strafford from the 2019 program to see if they want to receive more inserts (the limit was 10 per home in 2019 and some had more windows measured). Doc is also working on a draft list-serve announcement to find out about interest among potential recipients of inserts and to invite volunteers for a late summer / early fall Community Workshop (CW) to build all the inserts ordered. There will be a big push for CW volunteers once we know the timeline. An important position from each town is lunch and snacks coordinators. We will also plan on a re-training session for the TIM software used by the Measurers (M's) for recording the window data and providing pricing.

The grant funds from NEGEF and contributions from local donors have allowed us to provide inserts for low income recipients. We will need to discuss guidelines for income-sensitivity recipients once (if) we get the program up and running. We need to have all windows measured and in the WD system by the end of **AUGUST** for NEGEF to release the \$1,300 grant they are providing. This is earlier than usual (cooler temperatures starting in September tend to get folks more focused on weatherizing), but we hope to generate interest while we are still dealing with the cold this early spring.

5. **Climate Partners Summit (sponsored by Vital Communities):** report by Doc, Dorian, Susan. Eric Osterburg from Dartmouth emphasized the need to think about both mitigation of climate impacts but also adaptation, and understand the difference: change is inevitable.

The range of activities and initiatives among the different organization in the area was really informative and inspiring. Other highlights:

- Need to rethink assumptions about 10-acre home sites vs. clustered.
- Hartford has been looking in great detail at resiliency, trying to assess vulnerabilities, model potential responses, and proactively anticipate disruptions
- The Upper Valley Land Trust has protected 50,000 acres: they're looking at wildlife corridors, carbon sequestration, water absorption in soil and wetlands, and erosion and other impacts of more extreme weather

6. **Sub-Committee Updates (if any):**

— **Intermunicipal Regional Energy Coordinator:** Doc (steering committee member) has been sending monthly reports from Geoff Martin. Please read these. Doc and Geoff met with Kevin Jones & Co. at the Law School's Energy Clinic, which is helping with permitting. First most likely project will be at Sandy Preston's land 150 kw plus, with 3-phase power available; the Orgains have also expressed interest. It's imperative that we secure a Certificate of Public Good permit, filed by the end of August, because from September on the Public Utilities Commission has eviscerated the economics for community solar. We can advocate that the Selectboard to identify one or both of these as "preferred sites," as part of the Enhanced Energy Plan component of the Town Plan, which would earn better rates. Then we would issue Request for Proposals to solar developers, inviting bids.

Doc and Geoff will be meeting with John McKinnon and Rhett Emerson and a representative of an energy audit firm to talk about evaluating the town garage.

—**Agriculture and forestry:** Susan appreciated the presentation on the Ashley Forest and the discussion of long-term forestry practices for maximizing woodland health and carbon sequestration as well as income from harvesting.

—**Enhanced Energy Plan (EEP):** Doc reported that this is with the regional planning commission (TRORC) and the Planning Commission; one of the hurdles is getting updated data, since we had 2016 data in our draft. **ACTION ITEM:** Doc will follow up with Steve Willbanks to find out where they are in this review and revision process.

7. **Mission Statement**

Dorian's draft revision:

"The mission of the Strafford Energy and Climate Committee (SECC) is to promote carbon drawdown, energy conservation, and alternatives to fossil fuels in heating or cooling buildings, powering vehicles, and generating electricity. With the resolution to achieve zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030 passed at Strafford's Town Meeting of March 2020, the SECC works as an advisory committee to the Selectboard, providing our town officials, members of other committees, and the residents of Strafford along with local farms, businesses, and forest managers information on energy and climate-related matters, with options for reducing our carbon emissions through best practices, sustainability planning and the sequestration and storage of carbon through soil, plants and forests."

Current version: "Our mission is to promote energy conservation and alternatives to fossil fuels in the heating/cooling of buildings, vehicles, and electricity generation. As an advisory committee to the Select Board, we offer town officials and members of other committees information on energy-related policy matters, and we provide assistance to the residents and businesses of Strafford in adopting efficient, cost-effective ways to be comfortable while reducing the negative impacts of human activities on our planet's well being."

From Town Report: "The mission of the Strafford Energy and Climate Committee (SECC) is to promote energy conservation and alternatives to fossil fuels in heating or cooling buildings, powering vehicles, and generating electricity. With the resolution to achieve zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030 passed at Strafford's Town Meeting of March 2020, the SECC works as an advisory committee to the Selectboard, providing our town officials, members of other committees, and the residents of Strafford and South Strafford along with local farms, businesses, and forest managers information on energy-related matters, including options for reducing our carbon emissions through best practices and sustainability planning."

8.

SECC Chair Position:

Doc has been discussing the scope and responsibilities of the committee chair position with Dorian. It will be important for the chair to be introduced to the key organizations and people in our network: VCAN (part of NRDC); Sarah Brock, the Energy program coordinator at Vital Communities; the Energy Committee chairs for neighboring towns and those also working with regional coordinator Geoff Martin; Colton Osborn at Efficiency Vermont.

April 13th is our next meeting

Adjourned: 8:38 pm. / Respectfully submitted by Jim Schley