

Meeting called by: Dorian Yates

Type of meeting: SECC monthly meeting

Facilitator: Dorian Yates

Note taker: Jim Schley

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

Next Meeting: May 10, 2022, 7 pm via ZOOM

Minutes

ACTION ITEMS from this meeting:

ACTION ITEM: “50 Shades of Solar”: Dorian has been receiving descriptions about how committee members are using renewables at home. Still waiting to hear from others (Jim, Susan T., Doc, Matt).

ACTION ITEM: Jim will contact Mike Scanlan and Co. to see if we can do a demonstration of electric and non-combustion yard and garden tools at the Recycling Center on May 14 and June 11.

ACTION ITEM: Dorian will ask Jenevra to bring to Strafford some of the actual posters for the Forest Carbon event.

AGENDA

1.

Approve minutes from previous meeting: Approved.

2.

Review & update re: Action items from last meeting: Will be folded into the meeting’s discussions.

3.

Intramunicipal Regional Energy Coordinator (IREC) report: David reported that the main work of the steering committee has been a climate-action plan for the seven towns, and they’re planning to host an evening and outdoor potluck (potentially in Norwich) to present for discussion the plan-in-progress. Likely to be Thursday, May 25, late afternoon.

In Geoff Martin’s monthly IREC report, he noted that “The Municipal Fuel Switching bill that I referenced at the February SB meeting, and which could fund a substantial amount of the energy improvements at the Town Garage, passed the Vermont House and is now in the Senate.

Discussion of Clean-Heat Standard: Susan H. reported that some critics of this bill would like to see it killed, since it has so many gaps and weaknesses, including awards for use of biofuels; but others have been lobbying for improvements, and in response the Senate has now held up the bill to better understand its components and impacts.

The Weatherization and Conservation programs have been getting too little attention, in Susan H’s view.

4.

Home energy reports from committee members “50 Shades of Solar”: Dorian has been receiving descriptions about how we’re using renewables. **ACTION ITEM:** Still waiting to hear from others (Jim, Susan T., Doc, Matt).

Susan T.’s family has a share in a community solar array in Thetford, and they didn’t calculate correctly how much they’d be using with two new heat pumps; is this a helpful and instructive story to share? They can’t buy into another community solar array, but they could pay for a share from someone who has excess generating capacity; or they could add more solar at home.

Doc explained that you can only be part of one community solar project; it’s absurd, but this is a PUC rule.

5.

Community Solar project in Strafford:

Doc has been actively recruiting members.

Doc has been working on a quote form and spreadsheet (in consultation with Geoff Martin and Kevin McAllister from Catamount) that potential members could use to calculate their household uses and prospective future uses (adding heat pumps, adding electric vehicles). They’ve quoted for six Strafford families, two from Thetford, one from Athens, Vermont, and are getting inquiries from others. They’re putting out invitations through list-serves around the region, following up on Catamount customers who don’t have good sites, and also through the IREC network.

There might be “sticker shock” for the cost of joining (around \$19,000), because you are prepaying your future energy expenses, but you’re eliminating an annual electric bill, vehicle fuel cost, home-heating fuel cost, and other expenses; a residence will get their payback for joining in thirteen years, while a business (which is eligible for an extra state tax credit and depreciation) would get their payback in about eleven years.

Doc has been in touch with local businesses, as well, who may benefit even more directly, and they can justifiably market their business as solar-powered, because the RECs are not sold elsewhere.

Big challenge will be getting equipment in a timely way; panels and inverters are available, but there are delays with ancillary components.

Susan Grady was very touched and very supportive of the idea of the new project being named in honor of Kevin Grady, former chair and longtime member of our committee.

6.

Legislative Report from Susan Hodges (from written notes):

Weatherization bill: As of Monday, April 11, Sen. Bray mentioned that S284, the Weatherization bill, which asks for a one-year study committee, has been folded into the appropriations or budget bill. He said that is what they did last year as well. So, weatherization is mainly part of the budget and authorizes 80 million dollars for four years and 20 million dollars for the next year for low and moderate income weatherization, along with some money for the Vermont schools that are teaching the plumbing, electrical and HVAC skills that energy-efficiency workers need.

Clean Heat Standard (CHS) bill: 350VT took the lead on organizing around this bill, which is currently in the Senate Natural Resources Committee. This Committee was pushing to vote out the bill by last Friday. However, a specific effort by 350VT (calls to the Sergeant at Arms on Tuesday morning asking that the speakers recommended by 350VT be given time to address the Committee) was successful. On last Wednesday four powerful women testified on 350VT’s behalf to the Senate Natural Resources Committee: **Beverly Little Thunder**, founder of Kumsi Keya Tamakoce and Seeding Power, **Judy Dow**, executive director of Gedakina, **Kim Hayden**, environmental and energy attorney, and **Rachel Smolker**, co-director of Biofuelswatch. You can watch their inspirational and powerful testimonies [here](#). (And see how your Senators responded.)

- Judy called on Senators to develop energy policy that will reduce our consumption, not continue to fuel our unquenchable thirst for energy at the expense of the most vulnerable citizens and our life-sustaining ecosystems.
- Beverly asked how low-income people would benefit or lose as a result of the Clean Heat Standard and asked for equity for people and the land to be at the center of the policy.
- Kim asked that Vermont energy policy be in line with the human rights and ecological protection measures that are central to the Paris Climate Agreement and that we make our electricity truly clean.
- Rachel brought information the Senators hadn't heard about how biofuels markets work and how Vermont's participation in these would contribute to the destruction of food crop land and the rainforest.

Monday's vote on the CHS bill was **delayed** as Senators acknowledged that some people haven't been heard and that there is an imbalance of influence in terms of who's at the table and literally in the room as this bill gets edited and finalized. We are waiting to see what, if any, amendments will be made to the bill. Within the climate change activist community, there are a range of opinions regarding whether "any" bill, regardless of its weaknesses and loopholes, is better than "no" bill.

7.

Climate Action Plan for Strafford

Dorian proposed tabling this for the time being, while the seven-town action plan is being developed, which we can adapt and customize for our town.

8.

Discussion of the Vermont Public Utility Commission's apparent hostility to solar development.

Matt explained that we're in a transitional time, and presently it's very expensive to operate the grid, so regulatory bodies in many states, including ours, are trying to put road-blocks up for self-generation; they believe that the utilities need to be protected and preserved as a "public good," and they are mostly responding to the utility's requests. What we need to address is non-logical obstacles to renewables while also allowing for alternative developments.

Doc pointed out, however, that everyone who is generating their own electricity is saving the utility from building new generation facilities.

9.

July 4 renewables booster event:

Everyone is enthusiastic. We will make plans when we get closer.

In addition we could do some demonstrations at the Recycling Center. **Action Item:** Jim will contact Mike Scanlan and Co. to see if we can do this on May 14 and June 11.

10.

Forest Carbon Group:

The partnership between Sustainable Woodstock and [Northam Forest Carbon](#) has produced a very illuminating 24×36 poster, *How Can Family Forests Help Mitigate Climate Change?* which is now available in print and digital formats (download a PDF [here](#)).

Dorian has distributed a poster in PDF to the committee's e-list. **ACTION ITEM:** Dorian will ask Jenevra to bring to Strafford some of the actual posters.

11.

WindowDressers

Doc reported that the program is presently on hold, because no one has stepped forward to take over the coordination role. He is focusing now on the Community Solar project and has been disappointed

that there hasn't been anyone willing to keep the Strafford community-build going, again in partnership with Thetford (which has also had no volunteer to take over for Bob Walker).

Next Meeting: May 10, 2022, 7 pm via ZOOM

Adjourned: 8:15 pm

Enthusiastically submitted by Jim Schley, Recording Secretary