

WALLINGFORD ENERGY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the May 12, 2015 Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Ken Welch at 6:35. Present: John Armstrong, Doug Blodgett, Ralph Nimitz, Milton Moore, Ken Welch and Jay White.

April Minutes. Doug, Ralph, Milt and Jay met on April 7 but Milt cannot find his notes. The major topic of discussion was whether it would be a good idea to poll Wallingford residents about their support for energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy. This discussion was continued at the May meeting.

Polling. Ken was skeptical about the role of a poll. "If the state energy plan guidelines ask for towns to provide usage data, we can simply extract data from the [draft for a regional plan](#) by the Regional Planning Commission. As for community attitudes, I'm concerned that this will just take us away from our task."

Jay countered with the reaction he got to a renewable energy presentation he made to a group at a Rotary meeting. "The opposition was vehement. 'Windmills? Take 'em out!'"

Doug was also skeptical about the value of a poll. "I'm not sure of what it would tell us. What do we do with favorable results? What about unfavorable results? I think we should just be leaders — being careful, of course, to not lead people over a cliff."

"Here's what worries me," Ken explained. "We know there are naysayers. There always are. But I don't want to provoke a repeat of what happened in Rutland Town when a few people were able to stop an entire program. I agree with Doug. We're a knowledgeable group."

Ralph suggested that the Energy Plan should simply state that the Town is open to the development of new energy resources. "Once we submit a plan there will be plenty of opportunity for comment."

John argued for the usefulness of a survey. "I think there's a lot of good will in this Town. I remember calling voters a year ago about coming out to reaffirm the school improvement bond. Sure, some people were negative. That always happens. But a lot of people were happy to hear from me and enthusiastic about the project. So if we could gather some good, statistically significant data to document that there is solid support for moving forward, we'll have a mandate. If that's not what we find, we'll get insights into how to craft a plan that will find support."

Doug asked whether this was worth the effort. Jay reported that Rich Clark of the [Castleton Polling Institute](#) told him that a simple mail survey would cost about \$3,000 while a more sophisticated study with methods to prevent selection bias would cost about \$14,000. Ralph thought both of these were out of reach. "But this," Jay said while holding up a one page survey that Castleton could put up on [SurveyMonkey](#), "is free."

Milt asked us to recall what happened to the Governor: "He wasn't listening — or maybe he was just listening to people in his administration. Either way, he had to learn the hard way that the people weren't with him on single payer. I can't see why it would hurt for us to do some listening."

Jay pointed out that some of the proposals the Committee has already approved are very specific. "For example, we support a property tax exemption for the value of residential solar electrical projects." A discussion of the distinction between residential and industrial projects got diverted from solar to wind energy. Jay and John expressed their preference for large scale turbines over a profusion of small-scale unregulated windmills. Doug said that if someone proposes a big wind project, you'll hear about it! Ralph steered the discussion back to solar and Ken explained that solar projects are usually classified into those generating less than 150 kW, those between 150 and 500 kW and installations larger than 500 kW. The Committee agreed on supporting a property tax assessment exclusion for projects generating 150 kW.

Ken concluded the discussion. "Let's table this — but I think we gained some ground."

WES. "So Jay, what can you tell us about the school?"

"There's really not much that's changed recently. All the significant work will be done this summer."

Doug asked about solar panels. "They're in," Jay assured him. But the pellet boiler is out. It's too expensive. And unfortunately one of the two oil boilers isn't working." John asked what would happen next winter if there was not backup. "What's broken is one of the burners. It can be repaired. And the good thing about not spending money on a pellet boiler is that we've freed up funds to add back some of the other projects we thought we couldn't afford. For example, we're doing the entry vestibule."

Ken asked about the kitchen.

"It's done."

"Are we still getting peak demand surcharges?"

"I'll find out."

Doug argued that if the changes to the kitchen do not bring an end to peak demand surcharges, we should go after the classroom refrigerators. Ralph pointed out that small refrigerators are not a peak demand issue but Doug was adamant. "We're an energy committee. We need to get rid of the refrigerators."

Jay emphasized the importance of following the changes in energy use at the school. Ken suggested that we involve the science teacher. "This is a teachable moment." He then returned to the discussion of the pellet boiler. "Pete Nadler analyzes a lot of these pellet projects and his costs are much lower than the estimate for the school. How much did they say it would cost?"

"\$224K."

"Is this because of a need to modify the building? Pete talks about pellet projects that come in at \$45K."

Jay responded that the control system alone for another school project was about \$100,000. John found this hard to believe after 50 years of Moore's Law.

Community Solar Projects. John described a pasture that seems less than fully used and promised to approach the owners. Doug reported that Suncommon has been having on and off again discussions with a landowner in East Wallingford. "It's slow. But nobody has said 'No.'" At least not yet."

Membership. There was a short discussion about people who might accept an invitation.

Summer Recess. John proposed that we adjourn until after Labor Day. Doug seconded the motion. Ralph was concerned about the Town Plan and Jay wondered whether this would make it impossible to have a fall activity. Ralph proposed that the committee meet in June but take July and August off. This proposal was adopted unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45. The next meeting will be on Tuesday, June 2 at 6:30.

Submitted by John Armstrong.