

WALLINGFORD ENERGY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the July 5, 2018 Meeting

Ken Welch called the meeting to order at 6:35. Present: John Armstrong, Doug Blodgett, Katherine MacLauchlan, Ralph Nimtz, Ken Welch and Jay White.

Minutes: Jay moved that the June minutes be approved as written. Ralph seconded the motion. There were no objections.

Wallingford Solar LLC Proposal: Ken reported that he had had an informal meeting with Ed Bove, the Executive Director of the Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC) who said that the proposal for developing a 17-acre solar farm on the former quarry off Creek Road looks good and that the planning commission expects it will be approved. This project, together with other existing or planned renewable resources in Wallingford will generate over 3.5 GWh of electricity. This exceeds RRPC's 2025 targets for the town and is a quarter of the way to meeting the 2050 targets. Ken added that the same developers are also planning solar projects on tailings piles in Poultney. "It's an interesting time," he concluded.

Ken said he was encouraging these developers to work with an interested landowner in East Wallingford. "There's a lot of potential."

Doug brought up the issue of Renewable Energy Credits or RECs. "I worry that we will be burdened with hosting generation sites without getting the credit." John said that both RRPC and from the Department of Public Service (DPS) that RECs play no role in Act 174 energy planning. "The electricity is generated in Vermont and almost certainly gets used in Vermont. RECS were a useful way to attract investment 10 or 15 years ago when photovoltaics did not make economic sense. Now solar is simply a good investment."

Energy Planning: Ken said that Bove had told him that the energy plan is simply an addendum to the town plan. John reviewed the highly detailed requirements DPS has established as a condition for winning standing before the Public Utilities Commission. He showed the approved regional plan for Bennington County. "It's 161 pages long and goes into detail about a lot of topics. I think we're expected to produce something similar."

Referring to the completion schedule proposed in the July agenda, Ken wondered why the plan outline is would go to RRPC and DPS but not to the selectboard. John replied that DPS's municipal planning guidelines suggest that plans be renewed for compliance before being submitted to a selectboard for approval. "I think this comes from the detailed requirements for these plans. Why ask a selectboard to review and approve something if it won't pass muster with the region and the state? In addition, both the region and the state have assured me that they will review an outline. Why go to the trouble of turning an outline into prose if there's something you've left out?"

Ken added that Bove assured him that we have plenty of time. "That's what I've heard as well," John added, "but I'd just as soon get this over with by the end of the year."

Doug asked about the audience for the report. "That's a really interesting question," John replied. "We have a long list of requirements some of which are highly technical. There are also issues with legalese, of 'shall' instead of 'should' and 'must' instead of 'may.' On the other hand, the plan is really meant for the residents of the town, not all of whom agree with us on energy issues. It's an interesting challenge." Doug and John agreed that we should make it readable and even skimmable. "Just make sure it doesn't scare people, John," Doug added.

Ken asked about the mention of a "layout" step in the completion schedule. "Do we need a budget for that?" John replied that we didn't but that he would like to recruit Katherine to help.

There was agreement that the final document should be distributed as a pdf. "In fact," John added, "I see the plan as a dynamic document that can be revised as we learn what does and does not work. Planning doesn't mean spelling out exactly what is going to happen in 20 or 30 years. It means thoughtfully engaging with what might happen so you're not blindsided."

Ken summed things up. "This has been a very productive 30 minutes. John, you've got our comments. You'll get us a revised outline in a few weeks and then send it to DPS and RRPC to review in August. That means we can take a recess until September."

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20. The next meeting will be Tuesday, September 11 at 6:30.

— Submitted by John Armstrong

