

# WALLINGFORD ENERGY COMMITTEE

## Minutes of the September 5, 2017 Meeting

Ken Welch called the meeting to order at 6:35. Present: John Armstrong, Milton Moore, Ralph Nimtz, Ken Welch and Jay White.

**May Minutes.** No one could recall the May minutes. We tabled the matter.

**A New Member.** Ken introduced Nick Benjamin who recently moved to Wallingford with his wife and year-old child. Nick's wife just became a first grade teacher at WES.

Ken suggested that we introduce ourselves and explain our interest in energy. Nick told us about his work on large wind and solar projects for NRG, a Fortune 300 renewable energy development company. "I've done a number of big industrial solar and wind projects but I'm also interested in things like low head hydro electricity. And, of course, in energy efficiency. If you don't use so much you don't have to build so much." Nick agreed that Vermont ought to have ample small hydro resources. [The Public Service Department runs a [Small Hydropower Assistance Program](#) to expedite federal authorization of small hydro projects.]

**WES Monitoring.** Ken and John reported on the installation of an energy monitoring system WES. Ken's preliminary observation: "I was surprised to see that the building uses 7 to 10kW of electricity even when is not occupied at night or on weekends. There's something that's not being controlled as well as it could."

Students at WES and members of the public will soon be able to log onto the monitor from any computer or smart phone. Instructions will be posted on Front Porch Forum. We will also soon install a kiosk in the school corridor to show a continuous gauge of the building's usage and its solar generation. Ken will follow up about this with the principal and the science teacher.

Ken also announced that Oscar Daubenspeck, the electrician who did the lion's share of the work on the WES monitor, had expressed interest in joining the committee.

**Energy Plan.** Wallingford has an opportunity to get a say in energy projects before the Public Utility Commission (formerly the Public Service Board). Getting "substantial

deference” before the PUC requires that the town obtain regional and state approval of a detailed plan showing how we expect to work towards meeting the state’s energy goal of 90% renewable energy by 2050. The planning process also gives the town the right to designate preferred and prohibited sites for renewable energy development.

Bennington recently became the first region in the state to file and [get approval of its plan](#) from the Department of Public Service. Jay showed some maps that the Bennington County Regional Commission developed as a part of their submission. “What they did,” Jay explained, “is take all the sites where solar generation is possible and narrow them down to a small fraction of the total. And they were able to designate these ‘preferred sites’ where development would have the least impact.”

Aesthetic concerns will play a major role in deciding what should and should not be preferred site for development. “The question,” John observed, “is how do you do it? I have seen a presentation suggesting that sites need to be reviewed by a Certified Aesthetic Consultant. It turns out that there is no such thing — outside the world of plastic surgery.

“But I don’t think this is really so hard. For example, if a location could plausibly be featured in *Vermont Life*, it shouldn’t be developed. Ditto if it dominates the view from a neighbor’s property. People will disagree of course, but I think we can find a process to resolve these disagreements.”

While towns are not required to complete this process, the committee agreed that Wallingford should go forward. “We have to do this,” Milt concluded.”

“And if we don’t,” Jay added, “we’ll have no standing.”

“So what’s the plan?” Ken asked.

“We should hold a information and discussion meeting as soon as we can,” John replied.”

“But would this just be about solar?” Jay asked. “What about transportation and all the other aspects? What conclusions are we going to present?”

“I don’t see us presenting any conclusions,” John replied. “It’s much too early. I think we just need to explain how the process works and ask for feedback. And Jay, there are two reasons to focus on solar. Solar is what people are worried about and, with industrial scale

wind off the table, 100 acres or so of solar farms is the only way to meet the energy targets the town has been assigned by the PSD and the RRPC.”

The consensus of the committee was to hold a weekday evening meeting, preferably at the school, which will explain the process and seek comments.

**VECAN.** Ken proposed that we put together an AV presentation about the projects at WES for presentation at VECAN's Annual Conference in December.

**Electric School Buses.** Ken asked John to report on what he learned at VEIC's conference on electric school busses in July.

“I learned two things. They work. They look like school buses and drive like school buses. I also learned that current electric busses are essentially handmade and therefore expensive: as much as \$350,000 for a vehicle comparable to an \$80,000 diesel bus.”

“But there are grants. The most interesting one is from the Volkswagen settlement. Vermont will be getting \$18 million that has to be used to mitigate the pollution problem that VW caused. It can't just disappear into the general fund.”

Ken proposed that we should get input from the school board and offer our expertise.

“So Nick,” Ken asked. “What do you think? Do you want to join?”

“Yes,” Nick replied. “I do.”

“Great. Let's adjourn.”

The meeting was adjourned at 7:59. The next meeting will be Tuesday, October 3 at 6:30.

— Submitted by John Armstrong