

WALLINGFORD ENERGY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the November 7, 2017 Meeting

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

We were joined by Lynn and Judy Edmunds, Wallingford residents who used to run a hardware store in the building now occupied by Family Dollar. “We wanted to come because we were disappointed that last week’s meeting of the planning commission didn’t address solar, and this is something that concerns us. Years ago we got rid of the billboards — but solar panels could be just as bad if we don’t find a way to hide them. Do towns have a say in this?”

John explained that the reason there was no discussion of energy at the planning commission meeting is that the commission asked our committee to take on that section of the town plan. “As for giving towns a say in energy development,” John continued, “that’s exactly what we’re working on. Act 174 defines a process through which towns and cities can earn standing before the Public Utilities Commission if they write an energy plan that demonstrates that the town takes the state’s energy plan seriously.”

Jay moved that the October minutes be approved as written. Doug seconded the motion. There was no objection.

Open Meeting Law Presentation. Ken suggested that we start by reviewing the presentation the attorney [James Barlow](#) gave in September about the state’s Open Meeting Law. “A lot of it had to do with when you can and cannot go into executive session which clearly isn’t very relevant to our work.” John recalled that Barlow agreed that, particularly for advisory bodies, it was better to have late minutes that give an actual insight into a committee’s work rather than proforma minutes that meet the statute’s five day deadline.

Committee Budget. Ken asked whether anyone thought we should ask for an increase in our annual \$500 budget from the town. There was a consensus that level finding was appropriate. (This budget request is for July of 2018 through June of 2019.)

Community Energy Meeting.

John: “People have a lot of concern about how much renewable energy the town will need to develop and where it is going to be put. I think that is what we should focus on, and there are two things we need to explain. First, it will be possible to meet our portion of the

state's 2050 energy production targets by, for example, finding 80 to 100 acres for solar arrays. The second thing we need to explain is that it is not terribly difficult to come up with criteria for where development should and should not go."

John passed around some [preliminary criteria concepts](#).

"The principle here is straightforward. Put development on land that is already developed and keep it away from scenic assets."

Ken: "In addition to explaining the process we also want to welcome people who are interested in participation, especially people who have an extra 10 acres that is not very productive."

John: "That's principle three: nothing happens without the consent of the landowner."

Doug: "I have a question. Are forests off limits? Vermont has a lot of trees but we don't have a lot of pastures. It's obviously easier to build an array in a cleared field than in a forest, but shouldn't we encourage landowners to consider this kind of land use?"

Ralph: "So what you're saying is that we're looking for south sloping, low growth forests and for landowners who want to develop land nobody sees."

Doug: "And we need to have policies that preserve prime agricultural land and create a balance between small and large development. In other words, we need to optimize small scale residential development and then find places for larger arrays that the people of the town can be comfortable with. We also need to remember that solar doesn't involve heavy construction. No diesel trucks going 'beep, beep, beep'"

John: "And it's not permanent. Nothing gets paved."

Energy Plan Deadline. Ken and Jay raised the issue of a February 2018 deadline for completing the town plan. John promised to check with the Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC) about whether this deadline applies to an enhanced energy plan. [After the meeting, John discussed this issue with Barbara Noyes Pulling of RRPC who explained that since her organization has not yet finalized its municipal energy template, there is no expectation that town energy plans be complete by next February. John shared this with the committee via email.]

Energy Forum Redux.

John: "So when should we hold this meeting?"

Ken: "Before Christmas? Probably not."

John: "There's an opportunity right after the holidays when all the parties suddenly stop. What about mid-January?"

[John proposed Thursday, January 18 via email. There were no objections. After a series of back and forth suggestions, 7 PM seemed to do the least damage to peoples' dinner hours.]

Milt: "We need to do a series of announcements in FPF and in the Wallingford Newsletter.

Ken: "We need to form a subcommittee to come up with a campaign: save the date, different takes on the agenda; at least one press release; outreach to the radio stations ..."

John: "Ken, a few months ago you said you didn't want to do anything political. It sounds like you've changed your mind."

Ken: "We don't have any choice."

Doug: "John, your site selection criteria are a good starting point and we should add them to the presentation. And most important we need to make sure we are totally open to comments. We can't do this alone."

Ken: "So who's going to do this notification? We need a committee of two."

John: "I volunteer."

Ken: "Jay?"

Jay: "I have a meeting every night this week."

John: "I'll reach out to Nick."

Ken: "He is, after all, a solar developer."

Lynn Edmunds: This is a good meeting. You are engaged and realistic and you're really working on this. We're glad we came."

Ken: "With that, my wife informs me that the stew is almost ready. Let's adjourn."

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50. The next meeting will be Tuesday, December 5 at 6:30.

— Submitted by John Armstrong