

WALLINGFORD ENERGY COMMITTEE Approved Minutes of the June 8, 2021 Meeting

“Look at this,” David exclaimed. “We’re meeting in person and everyone is here!”

“And it’s great to see faces,” Ralph added.

David called the meeting to order at 6:30 from the stage of the large auditorium in Town Hall. Participating: John Armstrong, Doug Blodgett, David Castonguay, Katherine MacLauchlan, Ralph Nimtz, Robbie Stubbins, Ken Welch and Jay White.

Minutes. Jay moved and Ken seconded the approval of the May minutes. All were in favor.

The Building Committee. At its meeting the previous night, the Selectboard revived the Wallingford Building Committee and, by consensus, appointed the following members: Energy Committee members Rob Stubbins and Jay White; Joyce Barbieri, Wallingford’s former Town Clerk; the plumber Bill Lohsen; and an engineer, Anthony Fakhouri. [Is this the correct spelling? Search engines return results for Fakhouri but not Fahouri. There are no hits for either name when the search is limited to Wallingford or even to Vermont.]

Rob explained that a core responsibility of this committee is to determine the scope of a project and prepare bidding documents. “This is critical,” he explained. “It is important to put things in clear and precise language so that every bidder bids on the same thing. It’s also critical to use that bidding document at the end of the job to verify that the contractor has done the requested work.”

“The building committee has a related responsibility,” Jay added, “and that is to advise the Selectboard about goals and practicalities. But they are the ones that make the decisions.”

John related that he had spoken with Sandi Switzer about this committee. “One of the things she mentioned was the condition of the boiler. I would hope that we would not recommend replacing the boiler with a new one. That commits the town to burning fuel for 50 years. I think we should look for a heat pump solution.”

Rob suggested that we might need a boiler as a backup. John agreed. “In the winter I set my furnace to fire from 5 to 6 in the morning. The heat pumps do the rest.”

David suggested that the new committee develop a ten year plan.

The Energy Plan. John was concerned about the sequence of approvals. “I understand that people would like to get something approved quickly but there’s a problem. The essential

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approval is not from the town but from the Regional Planning Commission acting as an agent of the Department of Public Service. The legislation is very clear about this. The Public Utilities

Commission is only obligated to take municipal energy plans into consideration if they have passed muster with DPS or its delegated regional authorities.”

Jay recalled the origin of municipal enhanced energy planning. “In 2016 a number of towns tried to assert municipal control over grid-connected energy generation facilities. The legislative result of this was Act 174 which does give municipalities a role in regulating energy facilities but only if they do it through a process controlled by DPS. Municipal zoning won’t do it.”

Rob recalled the controversy over the solar array on Cold River Road in Rutland. “They tried to regulate it with zoning and they lost.”

Ken asked who would check to see that property owners and developers follow the rules. David replied that all of these projects are governed by permits. “Yes,” Rob replied. “But do owners and builders follow them?” Ken wondered whether permits are recorded with the deed. Rob replied that they are recorded by the PUC in its on line database. Ken was not satisfied. “The permits should be with the deed.”

David summed up. “It’s important to get the plan approved since zoning is a waste of time. If the town wants power, approve the plan. Local regulation cannot replace state law.”

“But again,” John reminded the committee. “It is only relevant to get local approval of an enhanced energy plan once the regional commission agrees that the plan meets state requirements.”

American Recovery Act money. The next agenda item was supposed to be a report on what the legislature and governor have decided to do with Federal aid for energy and climate projects for the fiscal year beginning in July. John apologized that he had neglected to bring his notes from a VECAN conference call on this topic.

[Here is what he would have reported.

The multi-year climate and energy program will amount to \$250,000,000 or about a quarter of the entire federal assistance under the Act. The direct climate and energy appropriation for the next fiscal year will be about \$40,000,000.

\$23 million of this will go for weatherization, with an emphasis on low income housing. This includes a program offering free weatherization and also workforce training.

\$10 million for affordable community solar systems. \$5 million for climate equity.

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\$1.5 million for financial advisors to work with Vermonters.

About \$1 million for regional planning commissions to hire staff to work with municipalities and also to help smaller municipalities to hire staff to assist with energy and climate programs.]

The Energy Committee's role. David urged the committee to take on projects to get the word out about these initiatives. "There's free money here. Do we talk to people? Do we make posters and signs? Do we work with neighboring energy committees?" Ken explained that there is an existing system. "It's actually pretty good and includes organizations like BROCC, SROC and Neighborworks. The message is simple. If you make less than a certain amount, you should call BROCC."

Rob reported that he is friends with BROCC's CEO. "I'll give him a call."

[In an email circulated to the committee, Rob reported on a conversation with BROCC CEO Tom Donahue. Donahue explained that a large portion of the weatherization money will go through Efficiency Vermont and also probably through Neighborworks. About \$4,000,000 will go to the five programs in Vermont like BROCC that offer free weatherization. The free program is available for households earning less than 80% of the median household income in Vermont, that is, about \$50,000 a year. Rental properties are eligible so long as 50% of tenants (for example two tenants in a four unit building) meet the income requirement. Donahue also explained BROCC's high use analysis program which sends out auditors to assess peoples' appliances. If the appliances are old and inefficient, BROCC will upgrade them to energy star units at no cost.

Donahue was excited that our committee wants to help get the word out. In an email congratulating Rob on this email, Ken proposed inviting Donahue to visit the committee.]

Doug explained that his career working for the state showed him that appropriations have goals in mind and that these goal will be assigned to specific agencies. "We need to find out which agencies have been given these assignments, exactly who at each agency is in charge, and get in touch to offer our services." David offered to make some calls, as will Doug.

Solar Certificates. David reported that the town bought certificates and envelopes and that the packages will go out in the mail next week. He proposed that the mailing include a note to pick up an Energy Committee tote bag at Town Hall.

Future Initiatives. David plans to construct a do it yourself solar array next spring and will compile a blog explaining how this is done.

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Recess. We agreed to omit the July and August meetings and regroup on September 7. David proposed that we continue discussions of the path forward via email with appropriate reporting to the public on the town website.

Dinner. John reported that it was almost 8 o'clock. David responded: "That's it! Out the door!"

The meeting was adjourned at 7:58. The next meeting will be in person at Town Hall on Tuesday, September 7 at 6:30.

— Submitted by John Armstrong