

Energy Committee Meeting

November 26, 2019

BCRC

Members attending: Michael Kusar, Wendy Sharkey, David Traver Adolphus, Bruce Lierman, Jeannie Jenkins, Nancy Thompson, Deanna Oakes

Seven community members attended

Guest: Jim Sullivan, BCRC

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM.

The meeting opened with introductions by the committee and of guests.

Introductions were followed by a presentation by Jim Sullivan. Goal of presentation: to help the committee focus its efforts. Jim presented history, including information about the previous energy plan (2008). Jim noted that over time, much of that plan went nowhere and the town actually backslid regarding energy use. A major concern then was price and availability of energy going forward. The 2008 plan was followed by the state comprehensive energy plan, which included a goal of 90 percent renewable energy use by 2050. This resulted in funding for regional energy plans. Much of the data in the current plan comes from that long process. Now we are trying to figure out what kinds of changes we must actually make in order to reach goals (rather than just supporting energy changes in theory).

Big picture takeaways: Transportation -- no more gasoline or diesel powered cars in the fleet by 2050. That means EVs, alternative transportation (such as bicycling if the infrastructure is constructed), improved public transportation, concentrations of development in mixed use centers. Homes – major efficiency improvements to reduce energy use. An important cornerstone is weatherization of older homes. It was noted that the new project built by Shires is using electric resistance heat because the buildings are so tight that the cost of electric resistance heat is not prohibitive and the electricity is clean. Town buildings are not a big piece of the puzzle, but it's important for the town buildings and services to provide models. BCRC is now working with Efficiency Vermont on a program for outreach, so Jim will keep providing the committee with info on events and activities.

The committee asked if there are any updates to the estimates in the 2018 plan. Yes: Town staff provided spreadsheets with updates since plan was drafted. The committee now has those spreadsheets. It was noted that the town and state are doing well with electricity. The committee suggested that what is important is overall consumption; if overall consumption is low, then perhaps the committee should focus on less successful areas, such as transportation and buildings.

The committee asked what energy standards are applied to residential buildings. The distinction was noted between code and enforcement of code. Studies have been done about the level of compliance, and studies indicate that compliance is approximately 70%; however, that rate is most likely optimistic.

The committee asked the difference between the regular standards and the "stretch" standards. The difference is performance. It was noted that contractors do not need to be licensed and so there is no way to hold them accountable for meeting standards.

A question was raised about how COs are issued in municipalities without building inspectors. Guests commented on the usefulness of the Efficiency Vermont incentives. Discussion was held around the costs of energy retrofitting in rehabs (an example was given of \$113,000 costs on a 2500 sf house, with rebates covering only \$11k; the offset is that energy use will be cut by approximately 80%).

It was noted that most of our oil and propane use sends money outside the region.

The committee asked if it still has an Efficiency Vermont liaison. Some history of working with Efficiency Vermont was provided, focusing primarily on experience with rental properties. The point was made that to make a big impact on the housing market in Bennington, it is important to work with the rental market. Efficiency Vermont consults with all municipal building improvements in the town.

All town buildings have had energy audits done. It was noted that the town has been proactive overall. Examples were discussed.

Jim S noted that people need to be made more aware of the improvements they can use and how those improvements will beneficially affect them. It was also noted that fuel dealers should be educated to help consumers make more efficient choices and to simultaneously move into alternative fuels.

A question was raised about electric buses. It was noted that a problem is that relatively few students take the buses; instead, cars are used to transport students. The committee brought up the idea of incentives for faculty and students to use buses rather than cars.

The committee brought up the idea of working on several fronts and perhaps in study groups as a way of coming up with recommendations. Additionally, an idea was proposed about making the ideas of the town plan more clear to the general public. A committee member noted the importance for the committee to provide education and information to make energy an important part of the public discussion. A suggestion was made to focus on energy opportunities rather than just challenges. Lighting was discussed, on both the town and individual levels.

It was noted that Benn Coll, MCLA and Williams do weatherization projects for free each year. However, the weatherization blitz starts the work but does not finish the work as it is just one day per year. Need to make people aware of various programs (BROC, Neighbor Works, EV) was discussed.

The suggestion was proposed for committee members to propose priorities via email before the next meeting. One suggestion is to be proposed for each sector. Suggestions are due to Michael by December 10.

Next meeting will be Tuesday, Dec. 17.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:28 pm.