

Bennington Energy Committee

Minutes, June 16, 2020

Meeting conducted on Zoom

Present: Michael Kuser, Wendy Sharkey, Jeannie Jenkins, Bruce Lierman, Nancy Thompson

Advisory members: Madison Kremer, David Durfee

Guests: Kelly Hawkins, intake specialist for BROC's weatherization program.

The meeting was called to order at 7:06 p.m. Michael Kuser welcomed guest Kelly Hawkins from BROC.

First order of business was approving the revised May minutes. Jeannie moved to accept the minutes. Wendy seconded. The minutes were approved.

Second order of business was a presentation by Kelly Hawkins regarding the process for BROC's weatherization program. First step is determining eligibility. The next step is entering the applicant on a WAP (weatherization assistance program) ranking system. The rank number determines where the applicant is in line. High ranking numbers determine the most need, timing is not based on the date of application. The process includes assessment by a specialist. Kelly explained that potential deterrents are evaluated on the first visit. The second visit by an auditor determines what range of work needs to be done and what the areas of opportunity are. After this visit, a plan is drawn up and reviewed with the homeowner. Furnaces are omitted if the occupant is a renter rather than a homeowner (furnaces are landlord responsibility). Average time spent on the work is anywhere from a few days to three weeks depending on size. After the work is completed, a quality control inspector reviews the work to make sure everything has been done correctly. The program generally does not do windows; the state and federal government have determined that the best use of money is on insulation. Kelly noted that not many people apply for the program; it is unknown why people don't apply.

Jeannie noted that the committee is wondering whether it can help with advertising, and that advertising does not seem to be apparent/prevalent. Jeannie also noted that other parts of the state are overrun with requests for weatherization work. Kelly noted that it has been hard to get into Bennington, but that truck ad signs seem to make a difference. Neighbors see the truck when a house is being worked on, and they ask about the program. Kelly agreed that there is a disconnect between Bennington and the rest of the state; there is almost a year's wait list in Rutland, for example.

Wendy noted that if she were asked about BROC, she would have to search for info to give the person; there are not brochures, for example, to give people that advertise the program and make info easy to access.

Eligibility is based on 80% of area median income (AMI). For example, a family of one can currently earn \$44,240 after July 1 and be eligible for the program. SSI is an auto-qualifier. Child support is not counted.

Jeannie asked about trailer parks renovations. Kelly said that many need floor insulation, which is the main focus. BROC does not do skirting, even though many do need skirting. Because trailers are low cost jobs, doors are often replaced. Fans are also assessed. Heating systems are replaced only if they are broken or unsafe. Otherwise, a "clean and tune" for heating is contracted out to specialists. Kelly noted that BROC also tries to work with NeighborWorks to get homes to code using lowest amount of loans possible.

Kelly advised the committee that Bennington and Rutland residents are in two different queues. Work is being done inside homes right now, but there are new cleaning measures in place that extends the time of the jobs. Kelly also explained to the committee that most of the funding comes from federal weatherization grants. Kelly stressed that BROC work is free, which is why the agency has to strictly adhere to the income guidelines. She also noted that HEAT Squad provides a comprehensive checklist of everything that needs to be done, which BROC cannot do, and that the cost for HEAT Squad's audit is \$150. Kelly explained that BROC gets more calls from landlords for multi family homes in Bennington Co. than it does in Rutland. If landlords utilize BROC services, they need to rent to lower income renters.

Kelly was asked whether BROC's CEO might be willing to meet with folks in Bennington to talk about how to get the message out here. Kelly advised that she will talk with the marketing director, who has assumed that role of getting out the word. Kelly indicated that "call Kelly" is the approach taken by the CEO. Therefore, there isn't much information on the website since the focus is on making a personal connection. Kelly will send info to Michael Kuser to be distributed to GBICS and other locales.

Item three was action items from members. The following list is a summary:

- Advertise what building stretch codes are; create a sheet with the stretch codes that can be handed out.
- Get contractors certified and licensed
- Get buildings inspected during the work and after the work is completed.
- Run a weatherization program.
- Connect people with money and available services.
- Have a mentor program to connect applicants with mentors.
- Resource/Incentive fair online: a webinar on all the incentives that we have identified so far regarding transportation and weatherization.
- Have a Banner column on the incentive programs that are available.
- Clearing house: where to get materials, how to make connections. Like a FPF for people undertaking home work.
- Possibility of partnering with Habitat.
- Window Dressers, although that is temporarily on hold because of COVID.
- BROC is an asset that should be supported, including by handing out BROC brochures.
- Look at low income houses needs and how to rehab what we have. Housing needs to be habitable.
- CAT-TV and/or YouTube video.

Wendy noted that Zoom meetings can be recorded. In future, we should do this.

Madison commented that Efficiency Vermont is planning "Weatherization Wednesdays" this year rather than a big singular event. Madison will look for the email and forward it to committee members.

The committee briefly discussed geothermal and district heating.

The next meeting will be July 21, 2020. Action items: we will work on distributing the BROOC brochures. Michael is writing an article on EVs. Jeannie suggested partnering with others so that subsequent articles can follow and reaching out to the Banner to see if they would be interested in our doing a monthly energy column. Madison will reach out to Allison at the Banner. Nancy will reach out to Habitat. Bruce will follow up with Efficiency Vermont.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.