

Bennington Energy Committee

Meeting, February 2, 2021

7 p.m. via Zoom

Members and advisory members: Michael Kuser, Wendy Sharkey, Bruce Lierman, Jeannie Jenkins, Deanna Oakes, Madison Kremer, Nancy Thompson

The meeting was called to order at 7:04.

Michael went over the process of making recommendations to the Select Board. Jeannie noted a request for this meeting's minutes and the recommendations.

The minutes of the last meeting were reviewed. Bruce moved to accept the minutes, and Jeannie seconded. The minutes were approved.

Michael shared his copy of the recommendations to the Select Board. Jeannie explained that the recommendations will go into the Select Board's packets. Discussion was held around how best to copy edit the recommendations.

Michael reviewed the PowerPoint overview of the recommendations that will accompany the recommendations when presented to the Select Board.

Bruce suggested adding to the PowerPoint that there is a network of energy committees. The PowerPoint was edited with comments from the committee members.

Michael noted that he and Bruce will do the presentation to the Select Board together. Jeannie will make sure they have the link to the meeting.

The discussion turned to the Window Dressers meeting. Michael referred to three documents from last week's Window Dressers meeting that went to all committee members. Jeannie briefly summarized what Window Dressers does (create and install high quality plastic window inserts). Bruce shared one of the documents, the coordinator's guide, and went over the various roles and responsibilities. The first person needed is the local coordinator. Jeannie explained that there will be a Northshire and Southshire event. We will want to coordinate with the Norshaft (North Bennington-Shaftsbury) energy committee and with the Pownal community. We will also want to work with partners to build out the team with people who are known to the community. We will be able to use the Bennington Area Makers Space for the community event. The workshop will be run in early December or in November. Taking of orders will be September-October. Outreach to promote the program will happen in summer. Recruiting volunteers will begin immediately. Jeannie pointed out that anyone who wants an insert automatically becomes a volunteer. About 20% of the inserts we build will be for low income individuals. Grant writing is being done to cover the cost for low income individuals so that they will not be charged. For others, the fee is based on a sliding scale. Recipients can be renters as well as owners. Michael asked if there is any information about the proportion of rentals that do vs. do not cover heating costs. Bruce explained that the thermal advantage of the window units is not significant, but the infiltration advantage is significant

(i.e., the units are effective at stopping drafts). Michael, Jeannie, and Madison volunteered to be involved in the effort. Members discussed the process of production and organizing. Nancy volunteered to do some measuring. The next Window Dressers meeting is on Feb 24 at 5:30 over Zoom.

The next energy committee meeting will be March 2 at 7 p.m. Michael suggested having a speaker. Jeannie suggested having someone from the Vermont Energy Dashboard. Discussion was held around finding possible speakers, including from the planning commission.

Member tasks for next meeting were discussed. Builder/contractor packets were also discussed. Michael will be in touch with everyone in a week once he, Madison and Bruce do some outreach around contacts and possible speakers.

Jeannie will finish copy editing the recommendations and will send them to Nancy for inclusion with the minutes.

Bruce moved to adjourn at 8:13 p.m. Wendy seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:14 p.m.

Bennington Energy Committee

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Recommendations to the Select Board for 2021

Background

Our charge was to take the comprehensive list of 47 recommendations provided in the Energy section of the Town Plan and make recommendations to the Select Board on areas of particular focus.

As suggested at the beginning of 2020 by Select Board Chair Donald Campbell, we have organized our recommendations into three groups: Town, Energy Committee, and Partner Agencies.

Town Focus Areas

The Town has done excellent work in energy reduction and efficiency programs for municipal buildings, identifying renewable sources of electricity generation for municipal needs, and developing collaborative relationships with energy efficiency organizations such as Efficiency Vermont.

Specifically, the Energy Committee recommends:

1. Lead by example in efforts to mitigate climate change through smarter and cleaner use of energy. (Rec 31)
2. Maintain an active energy committee and seek recommendations that support energy conservation, efficiency and renewable energy strategies as outlined in the Bennington Town Plan under section 8.3.
3. Allocate money for new EV charging stations at the Rec Center and at Four Corners North (Rec 27), and use this information in marketing materials.
4. Explore purchasing the most energy-efficient (electric/hybrid) vehicles for municipal needs. (Rec 33)
5. Work more closely with the Green Mountain Community Network (GMCN) to promote use of public transport. (Rec 22)
6. Update the Town of Bennington Article 6 – Housing, Building, and Life Safety Ordinance to include the new state energy standards, with a focus on improving compliance. (Rec 3, 5, 6, 14)
7. Require buildings to be inspected prior to drywall going up to ensure applicable energy standards are met.
8. Provide a contractor package addressing the benefits of high efficiency structures on the Town website and in print to applicants for building permits, as well as to developers contacting the Planning Board concerning projects under consideration. (Rec 5)
9. Utilize form-based design standards to encourage cluster development, mixed-use housing and downtown infill. <http://www.bcrvvt.org/benningtonludr.html> (Rec 2)

Energy Committee

Specifically, the Energy Committee should:

1. Publicize ways for local residents to improve their lives and save money by reducing their use of energy, especially fossil fuels. (Rec 7, 8, 9, 11, 47)
2. Work with realtors and building material suppliers to distribute energy-efficiency information similar to the contractor package.

3. Work collaboratively with the Planning Commission to review and, as appropriate, revise the Town Plan to provide a clear description of the town's energy goals and assist in analysis of data toward those goals.
4. Promote weatherization, particularly in older homes, and for low-income households, with a focus on programs including Button Up Vermont, Window Dressers, and Efficiency Vermont, and with programming through local entities including NeighborWorks and Bennington Rutland Opportunity Council (BROC). (Rec 7, 8, 9, 10, 11)
5. Identify funding sources to assist in community energy efficiency improvements.
6. Identify programs and organizations from other communities that provide experience and models to improve energy-efficiency in transportation and buildings.
7. Work with BCRC and other energy committees in the county on publicizing energy-related issues and regional programs through op-eds in local media, joint projects, etc.
8. Analyze available data, including any in the Town Plan, to evaluate annually whether energy and land use goals are being met. Evaluate the town's progress toward state energy and land use goals and share the findings.
9. Establish a baseline to measure progress based on the parameters in the Vermont Energy Dashboard Energy Atlas and post updates to the measures on an annual basis. Publish the information on the energy committee's page on the Town of Bennington website.

Partner Agencies

Both the Town of Bennington and the Bennington Energy Committee should cooperate with as many partner agencies as possible, including the following:

- Efficiency Vermont
- Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network (VECAN)
- Vermont Energy Action Network (EAN)
- Bennington-Rutland Opportunities Council (BROC)
- Vermont Energy Education Program (VEEP)
- Vermont Energy Investment Corporation (VEIC)
- NeighborWorks of Western VT
- Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC)
- Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD)