

Watertown Environment and Energy Efficiency Committee

Meeting Minutes 5/17/2021

Attendees (13):

Ed Lewis, Laurel Schwab, Emma Clement, Jeanne Trubek, Meredith Fields, Lauri Murphy, Pat Rathbone, Ellen Menounos, Ernesta Krackiewicz, Helen Soussou, Brian Hebeisen, Jocelyn Tager, Samatha Vuppala

The meeting was chaired by Emma Clemment

1. Introductions were made.
2. Meeting Minutes from 4/26/2021 approved.

3. Announcements

Meredith: next Planning Board meeting is on Wed, June 9th. Topics include Alexandria's plans for Arsenal on the Charles, and BB&N's athletic complex on Grove Street. Calling on all interested people to attend.

Jeanne: Town councilor Angela is retiring. If anyone would like to run for that seat, please step up.

Helen brought up the topic of artificial turf, asking if there is any momentum to address it as a town-wide ordinance. Emma responded that it is one of the items being looking into by the Ordinances & Policies working group. Meredith mentioned that there is a petition to request town council to hold a public meeting on BB&N's plan to use artificial turf on the Grove St. property.

4. Energy Manager Report (Laurel & Ed)

Watertown Electricity Choice

Door Hangers:

Ran into a couple of snags on approval of the door hanger design. It has the town seal on there, which requires approval from DPU. Decision made to remove the seal, use modified version. Next step is to get them printed by Peregrine. Targeting 12,000 for now, will be drop shipped to Brian's house. Team is meeting on Tuesday to figure out logistics for distribution.

Bidding Process:

Still in process, Ed has to meet with the WE3C subgroup. Pricing has gone up a bit. Like Newton, we are going aggressive on the renewable requirements, which is driving the prices up. Our contract does not end till Dec 2021, but we need to act quickly to get a jump on it.

5. Environmental Planner Report (Laurel):

Climate & Energy Action Plan:

The Resilient Watertown advisor group met last Monday. Consultants went through a presentation outlining plan, expectations from advisor board, role of stakeholders, etc. They reviewed the information gathered so far, and goals from other towns' plans. Also talked through the guiding principles and issues to be addressed: greenhouse gas

reduction, economic vitality, equity and justice, etc. They have evaluation criteria to measure how they will positively or negatively impact the guiding principles.

The role of the stakeholder members is to go back to their groups, get the word out on events and opportunities, communicate the work done, etc. Seeing a great opportunity to work with the WE3C group. There will be a survey in the coming weeks that Laurel will circulate. It is a one pager introducing the plan, outlines what Watertown has already done, how people can get involved, etc. Laurel is continuing to try to rope in more people, has some good leads on entities or groups that might be interested – has contacted minister at a chapel, Watertown Youth Coordination Center, Armenian group, etc. Haven't officially heard back from the Sunrise group, could use help in reaching out to them.

Meredith asked who was in the meeting last week Laurel responded that it was a diverse group, because of wide range of issues being discussed – attendees included DPW staff, Health Dept, Conservation Commission, Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Teens for Trees, Trees for Watertown, other environmental groups, Watertown Housing Authority, Watertown Council on Aging/Senior Center, Alexandria Properties, Arsenal Yards, Charles River Watershed Association, and a couple climate science experts.

Brian: in general, the process is going well, moving quickly. The consultant is moving things along, lot of good progress has been made. Greenhouse gas inventory is pretty far along. Thinking of a few things in concert with the Net Zero working group. There is general concern that the Resilient Watertown SEG meetings are not public meetings. Consultant has responded to that, believes that it is a logistical burden to include the public, there are other ways that the public can stay engaged.

Suggestion was made to have the meetings be held in webinar format, which would allow the public to watch and be aware of what is being discussed, without sacrificing the efficiency of the proceedings. Laurel thinks this is a good approach, will propose it.

Per Brian, a second issue is that there appears to be more focus on resiliency, less on mitigation. Laurel responded that this may be a result of some residual language in the presentations and documentation, from a previous process set up with KLA. Laurel will take this back to the consultants, make sure that there is a good balance between the two. It could just be that resilience is meant to be a catch-all term, is used more because of the branding of 'Resilient Watertown'.

MVP Action Grant:

Laurel: Proposal went in, we will not hear about it till August. Grateful for the support received. Will be working with the Conservation group on planting pollinator gardens. A pollinator garden has been planted in front of DPW, will be doing lots more of that in the coming months. Town is very amenable and eager to do more of that.

6. MBTA Plan for Electric Buses

Helen: Been in touch with Transit Matters and Vehicles Alliance, the two advocate groups. Attended the call, read materials from the MBTA meeting. Heard afterwards that many people had called from Watertown, left voice messages. Been told that people from the T have been looking into in-motion charging buses. Advocates are asking for battery operated buses. In the 4/26 meeting, it was mentioned that there will be no diesel hybrid buses for the long run. Diesel buses will be used during the renovation of Mt. Auburn. MBTA has no intention of bringing the catenary structure back. Their plan is to retrofit all garages for electric buses - hopefully in 10 to 12 years. Watertown and North Cambridge will be the first since there is already some infrastructure in place. Next will be Quincy since it will be a new building. MBTA is hoping to be done with the conversion by 2026 (Roxbury, Dorchester, etc.).

Jeanne: The issue with battery buses is that when it is cold out (40 degrees or lower), the engine has to be kept warm using diesel. 1 gallon of diesel per hour. It would be a step backwards to go from fully electric (which they currently are in Watertown), to these 'hybrid' buses that use diesel.

Every two weeks, there is a meeting. It is encouraged that people call the MBTA and leave a message by Monday 11 am of the respective weeks for the May 24 and June 1 meetings.

7. Working Group reports

Outreach to Schools:

Ellen: the group is still working on attracting new members. Reaching out to people in town. Patrick Fairbairn from the conservation commission recommended a couple new teachers and other school people to reach out to. Per Ed, tech team i.e., electricians, plumbers, etc. will be the first to be trained on the new bldgs. Hoping to leverage that training, give it to teachers and others.

Emma: Laura Wiener (town transportation planner) read our agenda, noticed the school outreach item and was interested in talking to the outreach team. Hopefully, she and Ellen will connect soon.

Ordinances & Policies:

Emma: working group has been meeting on a bi-weekly basis, looking at drafting artificial turf ordinance and trees ordinance, to start with. Have been studying ordinances from other towns, to learn how they have approached various issues. Should be able to share something more concrete with the group in the next WE3C meeting.

Brian: Landscaping using leaf blowers must be looked at. Cambridge has a leaf blower ordinance – it addresses issues such as dust, smoke, noise, etc. An ordinance on landscaping in general and leaf blowers in specific will be appreciated. Perhaps could include a rule banning their use on town property.

Letters Sent:

Jeanne: Letters sent to Alexandria – have not received any responses or acknowledgement of receipt. Of the group cc'd on the letters, can only confirm that Ed and Laurel have received them. Presumption is that all others got them too. Sent a letter to town officials on BB&N artificial turf as well. WE3C should make every effort to have a good turnout at the planning board meeting next month.

REMINDERS: MBTA meetings on May 24th and June 1st, Planning Board meeting on June 9th.

8. Meeting adjourned 8:30 PM. Next meeting: Monday, June 21st.

Respectfully submitted,
Samatha Vuppala