

Minutes

The meeting was opened at 7:00 p.m., chaired. by Andrew Airasian Attending members and citizens: Edward Lewis (Town Energy Manager), Laurel Schwab (Town Environmental Planner), Meredith Fields (co-chair), Lauri Murphy, Pat Rathbone, Lissa Gifford, Brian Hebeisen, Deborah Peterson, Ernesta Krackiewicz, Janet Jameson, and Jeanne Trubek.

1. Introductions were made. The minutes of 11/18/19 meeting were approved as written.

2. Announcements

On Wednesday, December 16, the monthly meeting of Watertown Citizens for Peace, Justice and the Environment will include discussion of Watertown becoming a BEE City. The meeting will be in the Watertown Savings Bank room of the library from 7:00 pm to 9:00. (Laurel will discuss in her report what becoming a BEE City involves.)

On Wednesday, January 8 the full School Building Committee will meet at 6:00 pm. Solar array planning and other sustainability planning will continue. Attendance is encouraged.

MIT is holding a series of climate symposia this year. The December symposium was on Decarbonizing the Electricity Sector. There will be three more symposia during the spring semester. These are open to the public (you need to register if you want to attend) and are available online. For more information, see <https://climate.mit.edu/symposia>.

Our next meeting is January 27, 2020.

3. Energy Manager Report

Voting for the 2021 International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) is completed. There were 96 proposals, some of which were very progressive, including solar requirements on commercial buildings over 5000 square feet and solar requirements on residential buildings. Massachusetts has not yet adopted the 2018 code; this code might get adopted in 2023. The Internal Standards Committee puts the approved items as recommendations for building code. States have the option to not accept this.

The Watertown Connector Shuttle, run by the Transportation Management Association (TMA) is launching Monday, January 6, 2020. It will serve the Arsenal Street Corridor and will be open to use by employees of participating businesses and by residents of participating buildings. The hope is that this will be an initial program and route, and that later on the TMA program will be expanded to more routes and become available for general use by residents.

The annual report to Green Communities has been submitted.

4. Environmental Planner Report

The first part of a two-part stakeholder meeting for Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness has been held. The question addressed was "How can the town address various hazards due to climate change that Watertown will face?" A diverse group of people, representing the varied issues that will be faced, participated in the meeting. The second part will occur this week. On January 23 there will be a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Public Meeting in the Watertown Savings Bank room of the Library from 6:30 pm to 8:00. All are urged to attend.

Laurel is the Conservation Agent of the Conservation Commission. The Conservation Commission is in agreement with Watertown becoming a BEE City. People from Watertown Community Gardens are also interested in this. To become a BEE City requires a staff person be designated and that a resolution be passed by the Town Council. Other requirements, such as an integrated pest management program and educational programs, are already in progress.

Laurel attended a meeting with the Department of Public Works and people from other towns and organizations about collaborative efforts to share best practices for storm water management. The Charles River Watershed Association was part of this meeting. They will work with the town on storm water issues.

5. School Building sustainability update

Brian reported that the elementary schools will have space and plumbing for dishwashers. The superintendent of schools emphatically supports recycling and composting both in themselves and as teaching tools.

The School Building committee is hiring a consultant to evaluate the pros and cons of the two ways of financing solar installation – ownership versus Power Purchase Agreement (PPA). The architect is trying to plan enough solar panels with each of the new schools to reach 100% solar electricity, currently considering how to accomplish this at Cunniff. The council president Mark Sideris has stated his support for the new buildings to be Net Zero.

6. Watertown Electricity Choice update

The working group is drafting a letter to the community to encourage people who opted out last summer to opt in, and encouraging all to opt up. This will be sent in February so people can realistically compare Watertown Electricity Choice rates with Eversource winter rates. The working group is looking at multiple ways of reaching people.

7. Gas Leaks

Ernesta Krackiewicz gave a report on what is happening locally and regionally concerning gas leaks. The Gas Leaks Allies is a coalition of organizations, communities and activists working to cut methane emissions. They are focused on both getting the gas suppliers to repair gas leaks from aging distribution systems and to transition from gas to renewable energy sources. They convened a meeting of communities served by National Grid, and sent letters to National Grid, and National Grid met with them. The group pushed the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) to develop new regulations on gas leaks. The worst leaks are SEI's (leaks with Significant Environmental Impact). These comprise 7% of the leaks by number but 50% of the leaks by volume. New regulations will require that the gas company repair SEI's. Independent audits of gas leaks may divulge many more leaks than National Grid currently finds. The Future Act is a bill currently before the State Legislature that will create a path to a safer renewable energy future, address the neglected gas system's current leaky pipes and reform the DPU.

Next meeting January 27, 2020.

8:30 Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
J. Trubek