

Minutes: Town of Watertown Environment & Energy Efficiency Committee (WE3C)
May 18, 2020, 7 p.m., via ZOOM Meeting

Minutes

The meeting was opened at 7:00 p.m., chaired by Andrew Airasian. Attending members and citizens: Edward Lewis (Town Energy Manager), Meredith Fields (co-chair), Audrey Schulman (HEET Cofounder), Laurel Schwab (Town Environmental Planner), Lauri Murphy, Emma Clement, Steve Steadman, Varun Saluja, Brian Hebeisen, Pat Rathbone, Ernesta Krackiewicz, and Jeanne Trubek.

1. Introductions were made. The minutes of 4/27/20 meeting were approved as amended.

2. Announcements

The May 21 monthly meeting of Watertown Citizens for Peace, Justice, and the Environment will be Thursday, May 21, at 7:00 pm via Zoom. The speaker will be Adam Sacks, Executive Director, Biodiversity for a Livable Climate. He will discuss the importance of biodiversity and the power of eco-restoration in different habitats. For more information, see <http://watertowncitizens.org/event/biodiversity-for-a-livable-climate/>

Watertown Faces Climate Change will meet Sunday, May 24 at 4:00 via Zoom. For information about how to participate, email Ann Munson - annmunson@gmail.com

We received a very nice email from Brandon Rabbitt, Director of School Nutrition thanking us for our letter of appreciation.

Our next WE3C meeting is Monday, June 15, 2020.

3. Presentation by Audrey Schulman, cofounder of Home Energy Efficiency Team (HEET)

HEET was started 12 years ago with the goal of rapidly reducing carbon emissions. They adopted a Triage approach to reduce emissions. The gas delivery system is very old. There are over 16,000 gas leaks in Massachusetts. Problems from gas leaks include explosions, adding methane to the atmosphere (a potent greenhouse gas), damaging plant and animal life (soil saturated with natural gas kills trees), customers pay for the leaked gas. In Watertown there were 92 unrepaired leaks in 2019 and 117 unrepaired leaks in 2020. The HEET website <http://heetma.org/gas-leaks/gas-leak-maps/> has maps of the leaks in towns throughout Massachusetts. Approximately 20% of the state's greenhouse gas emissions are from gas leaks. Super emitters, which comprise 7% of the leaks, cause 50% of the emissions. In 2016 a law was passed that leaks with significant environmental impact must be repaired. Leaks with significant environmental impact were identified using the leak extent method: if more than 2000 square feet of the surrounding soil is gas-saturated, this is significant environmental impact. "Saturated" means more than 500 parts per million of gas, using a probe to get below the surface. The repair period is between 12 months and 5 years, depending on the size of the leak and local plans. Verification is done by HEET using random selection. The utility must report the information to the Department of Public Utilities (DPU). 2018 was the pilot year for this program. National Grid did not participate due to the lockout of the workers. Maps of super emitters in Watertown will be available from HEET soon. It would be good to post these on the town website to encourage National Grid to do repairs. According to a Harvard-Boston University study, about 2.7% of the gas that utilities report delivering to customers ends up in the atmosphere due to leaks.

HEET is looking at affordable ways to transition off gas. One proposal is ground-source heat-pump networks. These could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60%. Eversource will do 3 pilots in Massachusetts. National grid is also looking at this in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York.

4. Energy Manager Report

Ed Lewis reported that as one of the components to our Climate and Energy Action Plan we are assembling a Sustainability Dashboard as a resource for residents, businesses & landlords to provide information about what the Town has done for sustainability and resilience, including actions that are currently ongoing and what future plans are. The dashboard also illustrates what they can do now (and in the future) to increase resilience and sustainability. This will give people a great 'one-stop-shop' to find details that previously may have been listed in several places in the Town and other Websites. Work is preliminary but Ed will provide a look-see at a future WE3C meeting.

Plans are being made to apply for a grant for the Climate and Energy Action Plan along with a smaller 'shovel ready' project that can be accomplished quickly.

Ed reviewed the state databases on solar deployment and Watertown just passed 4 MW of installed solar in town (under both the SREC and SMART programs) - this is great for our four square miles of area. Solar deployments in residential, commercial and municipal buildings in town include: residential - 267 installations, 1,493.14 KW; commercial - 18 installations 2,591.42 KW.

5. Environmental Planner Report

Laurel Schwab reported that the initial fact-finding part of the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program is completed. Results were reviewed and are posted on the town website at <https://www.watertown-ma.gov/777/Energy-and-Sustainability>. Laurel is actively writing a grant proposal for the next stage of Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness to include the Climate and Energy Action Plan. In this next stage they also hope to include more immediate community-based projects that give near-term results. Laurel contacted the Watertown High School chapter of the Sunrise movement and held a focus group with 9 members and hopes to involve students in the actions.

6. School Building Committee working group report

The Hosmer & Cunniff School bids have been received by the Town. The low bid is less than the estimate. The School Building Committee is meeting Wednesday, May 20th at 6PM to review. The construction schedules originally set are still being followed.

Next meeting June 15, 2020.

8:30 Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
J. Trubek