

Minutes: Town of Watertown Environment & Energy Efficiency Committee (WE3C)
June 15, 2020, 7 p.m., via ZOOM Meeting

Minutes

The meeting was opened at 7:00 p.m., chaired by Meredith Fields. Attending members and citizens: Edward Lewis (Town Energy Manager), Andrew Airasian (co-chair), Laurel Schwab (Town Environmental Planner), Lauri Murphy, Emma Clement, Stephen Steadman, Varun Saluja, Brian Hebeisen, Pat Rathbone, Ernesta Krackiewicz, Charles Bering, Helen Soussou, Ari Stern, Elizabeth Gifford and Jeanne Trubek.

1. Introductions were made. The minutes of 5/18/20 meeting were approved.

2. Announcements

The Town Council voted to fully fund the two new net-zero elementary schools. Ed will say more about this in the Energy Manager's report.

Tuesday June 23, 6:00, there will be an overview of the budget by the Town Manager and Wed., June 24, 6:00 the Council will review and vote on the budget. Access to the meetings can be found on the Town website.

The schools are adjusting budgets in other areas but there will be no cuts in staff.

The Environmental League of Massachusetts (ELM) will hold the 10th of its series of 10 webinars on Wednesday, June 17, this one titled "A New Era for State Climate Action." All ten of the webinars can be accessed on ELM's website: <https://www.environmentalleague.org/wednesday-webinar-session-10-a-new-era-for-state-climate-action/>

There are bills in the state legislature concerning Environmental Justice and resource allocation, S464 and S453.

Our next WE3C meeting is Monday, July 20, 2020.

3. Energy Manager Report

Ed Lewis reported that Attorney General (AG) Healy is getting active with the Department of Public Utilities (DPU). The State legislature tasked the AG with taking a more active stance on how the DPU intends to help achieve Massachusetts's legally binding statewide limit of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

"In order to combat the climate crisis and meet our clean energy goals, we must transition away from fossil fuels and change the way gas utilities do business in our state," AG Healey said. "We want the DPU to take a close look at the future of the natural gas industry in Massachusetts and make the policy and structural changes we need to ensure a clean energy future that is safe, reliable, and fair." This decline in fossil fuel demand will have profound impacts on gas distribution companies.

Eversource and National Grid are increasing their offerings of flexible payment plans for people with bill payment issues due to COVID-19. Eversource just rolled out a "New Start Program" - under certain circumstances this will wipe out your old utility debt with a new set payment going forward. Ed has informed the Senior Center and the Housing Authority. If anyone knows of anyone who might need assistance - he will be pleased to talk with them confidentially and help with any utility or heat programs.

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) has developed a town wide Greenhouse Gas inventory tool as part of their "Planning for Net Zero by 2050" project - Ed is taking training on it next

week and will see if it might be applicable for Watertown. This could roll into our Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program grant as a town contribution. This model follows the *Global Protocol for Community-Scale Greenhouse Gas Inventories* and seems to be sensibly designed to help develop data-informed climate action plans.

The Town Council approved the loan-order funding request for the Hosmer and Cunniff schools. Watertown is on target to build the first real Net Zero schools in MA! This is a proud moment for Watertown and all who helped make this happen. Watertown is again leading by example. What a great message to send to the children and to other towns and cities. The Cunniff and Hosmer projects are starting to ramp up; construction will begin this summer.

4. Environmental Planner Report

Laurel Schwab reported on the progress with the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program. The deadline for submitting a grant proposal for the next stage of our comprehensive Climate Action plan is at the end of the week. She is finishing the proposal this week. This Climate and Energy Action Plan will include two early action initiatives: 1) a set of online resources and incentives for making homes more energy efficient and 2) identification of opportunities for additional green infrastructure projects. There will be a focus on environmental justice, that is, identifying areas that need the additional green infrastructure the most for both environmental and equity reasons. The MVP group will determine potential sites and determine the projects with the community. The deadline for submitting letters of support was June 4. Meredith and Andy wrote a letter from WE3C consistent with the committee's initial and on-going support for MVP. After the proposal is submitted it will be available online.

5. Working group reports

Net Zero: The Net Zero working group will follow up with Audrey Schulman from HEET, especially about geothermal energy.

Watertown Electricity Choice (WEC): We have received nothing from the DPU on the modified letter. We are continuing to send letters to new residents as there is turnover in accounts.

School Buildings: There is uncertainty about the high school and Lowell school because of the economy.

Transportation: People from the transportation working group met with people from the Bike-Ped committee and Watertown Faces Climate Change (WFCC) to discuss how we can all join forces and work on common goals. Two goals discussed were the Mt. Auburn St. redesign and making it safer for bikes, and getting a sidewalk snow-clearing ordinance in the town.

6. Other issues

WFCC is collecting signatures for two ballot questions, one on transparency in government and one to set a state goal of Net Zero by 2040 (rather than 2050). These are both non-binding questions.

A follow-up meeting to last year's symposium on composting is being planned.

We should think about the impact of the pandemic on WE3C. How will the pandemic affect our goals and projects? What will the impact be on mass transit? How will energy prices be affected? Brian will organize a discussion.

8:30 Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
J. Trubek