

Minutes: Town of Watertown Environment & Energy Efficiency Committee (WE3C)

October 18, 2021, 7 p.m., via ZOOM Meeting

The meeting was opened at 7:00 p.m., chaired by **Emma Clement**

Attendees: Emma Clement, Ed Lewis, Laurel Schwab, Lauri Murphy, Jeanne Trubek, Brian Hebeisen, Pat Rathbone, Helen Soussou, Meredith Fields, Ernesta Krackiewicz, Steve Steadman, Samatha Vupalla, Ellen Menounos, Deborah Peterson

Welcome and introductions were made & 10/18/2021 minutes were approved as amended.

Announcements. The invitation to come to one of our meetings was sent to Town Council members and Councilor Palomba responded and will be our first visitor; he will come to the next meeting.

Emma announced that she is moving to Waltham from Watertown and can't co-chair. We thanked her for her service and all said they would miss her. And now we need a new co-chair to serve with Jeanne.

Energy Manager's report. Ed reached out to Andy about a return to this group, but due to graduate school and other commitments, Andy can't do it.

The new Cunniff is open and is amazing! The Hosmer is on schedule and there will be a gut rehab of the Lowell with the boilers going and with high efficiency technology similar to the Cunniff and Hosmer. For the High School, net zero is the goal, though it is tricky.

Watertown Electricity Choice went out for bid during a challenging market. Weather events, the increasing price of natural gas, etc., will make the next two years tough. REC prices are up and so is demand, which is great, but our electricity will cost more. Our Energy Broker / Consultant estimates that Basic Eversource winter rate will be about 14 cents/ kwh, but down in the summer, making the average cost about 13 cents. We negotiated a two year contract with a default of 12.99 cents, 50% renewable with 23% of that local RECS and 27% midwestern wind RECS. The wind RECS help displace coal generation and are more affordable. There will be no biomass in the Massachusetts RECS. The basic rate will be 12.723 and before the end of the year there will be a press release to announce this. We are waiting for Eversource to announce their winter rates in November. Our cost will be 15.63 cents for 100% class 1 Mass RECS; this is more expensive, but Eversource rates will be higher too. There has been a slight increase in those choosing 100%, from 2% to 3%, approximately. We thanked Ed who did a great job in a terribly difficult situation. We recovered a few of the opt-outs, but not many.

Faire on the Square was successful. We were in a different location with other sustainability groups: WFCC, Climate Action Plan, Energy Manager, much discussion of the new Zero Net schools, the Climate and Energy Action Plan, Watertown Electricity Choice and free energy audits from Mass Save.

Environmental planner's report

Laurel reported on the Pollinator garden programs: there is the one at DPW and now recently a new one at Filippello Park which, because of children and neighbors, is designed to attract butterflies, not bees. Hopefully there will be two new sites by spring.

MVP grant is in the analysis and mapping phase and is recruiting three residents to the core team at \$15/hour to keep the program on task and plan for engagement activities. Later they will hire three community ambassadors, young people preferably, to talk to community groups. For the first three positions, a knowledge of sustainability issues is preferable; for the second team, it is not important.

The Climate Action Plan draft sent to all of us is not a "draft plan." Detailed feedback has been sent in by the community and has been useful in moving forward. WE3C's letter was discussed for an hour at the meeting.

Brian added that the discussion was good and the feedback taken seriously. Laurel says the plan is going to be reviewed every five years and can be reevaluated as prices for renewables go down, etc. Brian said we can later adjust the dates. Meredith saw this somewhat differently; the time frames, she said, are "wildly slow" for the emergency we face. She suggested focusing on what we can do immediately - or a year from now, etc. What would it take to get things done now?

Laurel agreed there are things we can do now. Brian said he wants the town to pass everything we can and to hire and pass ordinances to achieve all that. He thanked Meredith for her email.

Transportation report

Jeanne said let's put the town's weight behind the T not eliminating our green buses! Who speaks for the town here? Who can talk to the MBTA and tell them what we want. Ed said that Laura Weiner is the one who attends the T meetings. Deborah said Laura needs Town Council backing to fight for that. Helen and Deborah have been working together with the Sierra Club movement to accelerate the electrification of the MBTA buses. Jeanne and Emma will sign the Sierra Club petition for WE3C and others are encouraged to sign individually too - and right away!

Working groups

Schools: Ed will show Ellen and any others the Cunniff technology.

Hosmer issue of artificial turf? This is confusing because some say there is no artificial turf there, while others have examined it and says it is exactly what that green piece is. Mark says it will be "gone."

Pat told people to go to the high school building committee meetings if they can because crucial net zero issues will be coming up soon.

Helen mentioned the DOT hearings on the reconstruction of Mt. Auburn St project. Laura Weiner will know by 11/4 what the date is.

Transportation Working group

Jeanne: the Allston/Brighton transportation group is addressing issues similar to ours and we should collaborate. The Better Bus plan is being redone, but they are using current ridership which is still down from the pandemic. Jeanne will continue with these meetings which deal with the reconstruction of the turnpike and which will dump tons of traffic into Newton Corner: how will these cars get from there to Cambridge, etc? Town Councilors need to be involved in this traffic mitigation effort; this traffic will affect ghg emission and our Climate Action Plan. Steve Owens had someone from his office at that meeting.

Ordinances working group

Meredith: Still working on a tree ordinance, using Newton's and planning now to look at Arlington's and Somerville's too.

Also working on an ordinance to get rid of artificial turf. The Biden attempt to get rid of forever chemicals may help.

Again, Councilor Tony Palomba wants to talk at the November meeting so Jeanne will ask him to be the first person to come on Nov. 15. We can question him; he can question us.

Motion introduced, seconded, and approved to end the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Rathbone