Windham Energy Committee Minutes

Nov. 30, 2017

Members present at the meeting: Buddy Behrendt, Vance Bell, Dawn Bower, Bill Dunkel, Tom Johnson, Cathy Stover.

Meeting called to order at 4:32PM.

Minutes of the11/2 meeting were unanimously adopted.

Bill update the committee on last week’s public hearing on the Townshend Town Plan conducted by the Windham Regional Commission. He and Bob Bingham were the only members of the public to attend. They expressed their approval of the Townshend Town Plan, especially its strong stand against industrial wind turbines on ridgelines. It is virtually certain that the WRC will approve this plan.

Bill mentioned that the WRC will hold a public hearing next Monday (12/4) a the Townshend Town Hall on the WRC’s draft of a regional energy plan. Bill and Vance plan to attend.

The committee reviewed our recent energy fair and everyone felt it was successful and reasonably well attended. Concern was expressed that members of the Windham community who may need assistance weatherizing their homes were not in attendance at the fair and may be reluctant to admit that they need help. Buddy reported that the Citizen's Advisory Council has funds available to help low income residents and that the CAC expressed interest in cooperating with the Energy Committee to inform people about the resources that are available to them. Buddy also noted that assistance, such as low interest loans, are available for families at many income levels.

The committee voted unanimously to cooperate with the CAC. Bill will contact Maria Clinton and Jerry Dyck and inform them of this.

The balance of the meeting was spent discussing the Select Board’s request that the EC conduct one or two public hearings about a possible solar array in the field adjacent to the cemetery and town office.  In short, the committee does not think it is wise to do so at this time for several reasons.  First, we do not have reliable data about the cost of installing heat pumps in any of the public buildings in town, or the potential savings that might be realized by installing CCHPs and powering them with electricity from the solar array in question.  Without that information, the only scenario which could be presented to the public would be one in which the town only purchased enough net metering credits to cover current electricity costs in public buildings.  Under that scenario, the revenue the town would realize would be considerably less than potential savings from heat pumps.  The committee thinks it would make sense to contact a professional heat pump installer and get up-to-date information so that we would be able to present both scenarios to the public at Town Meeting.  In addition, because the school's budget is separate from the town's, we do not know whether the school's electricity meter could be included in a net metering agreement with Green Lantern.  We also would like greater clarity about whether the fire house and the meeting house would want to be part of a net metering agreement. Further, the committee feels the first thing that we need to know is whether the Windham community is open to having solar panels near the cemetery for any purpose whatsoever.

Taking all this into consideration, the Energy Committee decided to recommend the following course of action:

1) Put an article in the next issue of Windham News & Notes which contains basic information about a possible array near the cemetery.  This would include a map of the proposed layout, info about screening, the number of panels, etc. Tom volunteered to write a draft of the article and circulate it to committee members for their feedback.

2) Put the same information on the town web page. Committee members are encouraged to send Vance ideas about what information should be posted.

3) Invite residents to respond to a poll on the web site indicating how they feel about possibly having an array in that location.  We may need a way for people without computers to respond to the poll.  Please send any ideas you have about this to Vance.

4) Get accurate information on the cost of CCHPs in public buildings and the possible savings that could be realized.  This also would include getting accurate info on the cost of better insulating several of these buildings because it would not make much sense to install CCHPs without reducing heat loss. Bill will contact Mark Russwick from ARC Mechanical about providing an estimate for us.

5) Determine the status of the school, fire company and meeting house in a possible net metering arrangement.

If the poll indicates that there is not strong opposition to an array in the field by the cemetery, the committee will make a presentation at town meeting about both of the potential scenarios mentioned above.  If the poll indicates there is overwhelming opposition to panels on said site, then the project is dead and there is no reason to make a presentation at town meeting.

Bill will convey the energy committee’s suggestions to the Select Board.

The next meeting of the energy committee will be on Thursday, January 18, 2018 at 4:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bill Dunkel