

Shutesbury Energy and Climate Action Committee

Minutes for May 31st, 2022

Virtual Meeting Start: 7:00pm

Members Present: Leslie Cerier, Michael DeChiara, Gail Fleischaker, Nate Heard, Graeme Sephton, Zoe Weizenbaum

Members Absent: Miriam DeFant

Public: Marianne Connor

7:00PM Check in with members present

7:10PM – Graeme moved to approve the minutes of April 26, 2022; seconded by Leslie. Vote: Unanimous; Gail-Aye, Graeme-Aye, Leslie-Aye, Michael-Aye, Nate-Aye, Zoe-Aye.

7:15PM — presentation on Community Solar by Marianne Connor, Shutesbury resident and manager of Coop Power

1 — Marianne Connor, presented a slide show, details and information about a cooperative approach to solar development that is community-led and community-owned.

Marianne cautioned the committee to be aware that the term "community solar" ONLY means that a non-residential array is generating solar for distribution to households through the utility. Under this definition, corporate-owned large arrays such as those discussed for Shutesbury are also "Community Solar" -- even though they are not community-led or community-owned.

Marianne's slideshow provided examples of Community Solar, including one at River Valley Co-op store in Easthampton which serves the store and also serves low income families in Eversource territory in Western Massachusetts. There's a 15% discount on electricity for low-income customers for the River Valley Project, which includes zinc-ion battery (rather than lithium-ion) storage for energy resilience that can be sold back into the grid, as needed. Co-op Power finances solar arrays through a Tax Equity Investment "Flip" model that supports local Community Energy Cooperatives and towns to own their Community Solar Arrays in 5 - 7 years, and then the generation of the array helps build wealth for the owner.

Marianne explained how to finance a Community Solar Project like River Valley Co-op Easthampton store, which could be built on a municipal, building or site, farm, parking lot, school, church or other community building.

The main point is that the money generated from the solar arrays stays in the community for community development.

Leslie asked if financing through Co-op Power, SMART incentives can be used to put solar on the new roof of the elementary school, its parking lot, & other sites in town without taking down the forest.

Leslie indicated that she has had Co Op power providing her electricity through community solar with a 15% reduction on her electric bill and learned that her electricity is being generated from the Berkshires without any deforestation.

Co-op Power leads an education and outreach campaign with workshops to teach community groups and town members about how to form a local Community Energy Cooperatives (CEC) which works to determine community criteria for solar development in their town or region. The CEC helps Co-op Power find appropriate sites for Community Solar development and work with community partners on site leases and Power Purchase Agreements.

Co-op Power is committed to siting solar on the built environment and "brownfields", like landfill.

Co-op Power does not remove forest lands to build solar since it believes that this is counterproductive in regards to climate change, which relies on forests for carbon sequestration, watershed protection and ecosystem regeneration.

Working with Coop power to create Community Solar, Shutesbury would use existing built environment like parking lots, rooftops, landfills, paved areas, etc. The new school roof could be part of the project.

Co-op Power would have the Town sign a Letter of Intent, and Co-op Power would explore if it could put together the financing for an array for the new Elementary School and on the parking lot, among other places in town.

If Shutesbury were interested in working with Co Op power, the Letter of Intent would designate a specific period of time, generally 18 months, to see if Co-op Power can finance an array on a specific site.

Financing might be done through municipal bonds or through tax equity investment and debt financing as well as any available grants.

For the first five year, the Tax Equity Partner owns the array through the Project LLC, but the Community Energy Cooperative or Town can buy back the array around years 5 - 7, depending on financing at about 10% of the original cost of the array. This allows Towns to take advantage of the 26% Investment Tax Credit and own their own solar arrays and receive the money generated by them within a decade or less.

Coop Power puts together the financing structure and brings in trusted solar installers and community partners for solar subscription enrollment. Eventually the local CEC can buy the arrays for 10% of the original cost and then the profits after that go back to the local Community Energy Cooperative to use towards another solar project.

Marianne noted that community-led, community-owned solar development is smart because it works with communities to develop and finance the solar projects they want, connects them with other CEC's throughout the region to learn together, and has a financing model that leads to CEC ownership in 5 - 7 years at about 10% of the cost of the original array.

Marianne is happy to come back and help us understand how to finance community led, community solar.

2 — Nate will continue his research on Municipal and Community Aggregation to supply electricity to our town, and report on how green these choices really are at our next meeting June 21, 2022.

Nate gave an update on Market and Public Aggregates, CCA updates, and CCA steps. Shutesbury is at step #1. According to the slides, Nate shared, slide #7 could take about a year. Slides are on our Google doc.

3 — Nate introduced discussion about the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness ("MVP"). Plan, the town's Budgetary Support for Climate Adaptation Fund, and how can the town could finance resiliency. There was also discussion about updating the Master Plan for Town.

The committee identified priorities from the MVP plan: Walkability, Library, Electric Car charging Stations, School Air Conditioning.

4 — Gail will gather information learned from the Household Energy Survey and report on it at next meeting, June 21, 2022. She will send announcements on NextDoor Shutesbury, to members of town committees, and Town newsletter. Michael will send it to Ecricket to encourage folks to fill out the survey.

So far, the survey shows that folks in town are interested in: Community solar and solar in general, reduce electric rates that will benefit everyone in town, and make more efficient energy systems in all town buildings.

Action needed: -Get an energy audit on town buildings, and going for green community add-ons.

Gail is willing to gather the info and report the results to the town and keep us posted.

5 — Zoe will gather information on skills and skilled people in town as resources. As a follow-up she will contact Mary Anne Antonellis, town librarian, about possible workshop and Penny Kim about prior efforts to create a town inventory of people's skills.

Next Meeting June 21, 7PM

Graeme moved to adjoin; Leslie seconded.

Vote: Unanimous; Gail-Aye, Graeme-Aye, Leslie-Aye, Michael-Aye, Nate-Aye, Zoe-Aye.

Meeting Adjoined @ 8:30PM

Leslie Cerier, notetaker