

Energy and Climate Action Committee Meeting

Minutes – 03/21/2023

Virtual Meeting

Meeting Start: 7:03pm

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

Committee Members Absent: None

Public: None

Public comments

None

Minutes

Chris Mason - Department of Energy Resources (DOER)

Chris Mason is the new DOER Western Massachusetts Regional Coordinator. Chris noted that Shutesbury has secured funding to improve energy efficiency at municipal buildings. This is a great place for a community to start in its climate action efforts. There is also widespread discussion around electrifying everything. It's possible to electrify buildings first (e.g. put in heat pumps) and then improve the energy efficiency of a building envelope second, but it typically makes sense to do it the other way around.

ECAC should feel free to reach out to Chris with questions. Chris then mentioned several resources and opportunities that ECAC might investigate. Dr. Benjamin Weil teaches building science at UMASS, where he focuses on energy efficient buildings (<https://ag.umass.edu/people/benjamin-s-weil>). Sometimes his students seek projects that might align with Shutesbury's need for analysis on building modifications.

National Grid has a deep energy retrofit program that might be worth looking into. Chris mentioned Tom Croteau, an Energy Efficiency Specialist at National Grid.

Michael gave a summary of ECAC's work thus far. Committee members introduced themselves and what brought them to ECAC.

Stretch code

Massachusetts updates its building code every three years. There is a base energy code, which all new construction must meet. There is a new stretch energy code, which requires greater energy efficiency in construction. It's also a requirement for municipalities that are Green Communities. Shutesbury is a Green Community, so these requirements already apply to us and took effect on January 1st. An example of a stretch code change is that new construction must have Electric Vehicle-ready wiring.

There's also, in addition to "base" and "stretch", a new "opt-in specialized stretch code", which defines what a net-zero building is and sets specific net zero performance standards. The opt-in code outlines requirements for electric, mixed fuel, and passive house construction in a way that will help get Massachusetts to net-zero-by-2050. The codes only apply to new construction and major renovations.

Municipalities can opt into the specialized stretch code with a vote. Most people would not be affected by it. ECAC agreed to continue to do research on the issue and devote attention to it after Town Meeting. The next action items would be to gather and distribute information to the town, laying the groundwork for an informed, future vote.

Conservation Commission Wetlands Bylaw Overhaul

Shutesbury's General Wetlands Protection Bylaw differs from the State law that protects wetlands. The Conservation Commission has concerns that the bylaw is out of date. Updates would more clearly define standards and exemptions. However, bylaw revision can cut both ways, either resulting in the strengthening or weakening of existing bylaws. Bylaws must be more strict than federal and state law to remain in effect.

Bylaws are passed by a vote at Town Meeting. However, regulations are passed by the Conservation Commission. If towns don't articulate scientifically grounded regulations, challenges can lead to a reversion to the more permissive state law. There are important interactions between wetland ecology and climate resilience (carbon sequestration, etc.). Therefore, climate science will be an important scientific grounding for wetland regulation and bylaw revisions.

The Conservation Commission will be drafting a document on regulations and looking for public comment, including from ECAC. It may be necessary to revise the bylaw itself, but that is a more involved process.

Conway School

Leslie was in touch with the Conway School of Landscaping Design about a potential collaboration to produce a guidebook for Shutesbury residents. The guide would focus on how to live "greener" as a climate adaptation measure. A Student Team would work with community members to develop the guide. Their project fee is \$17,000. Plainfield used a grant to fund the development of a Climate Resilience Plan.

Regenerative design

ECAC was featured in an article appearing on February 28 in The Reminder, "Soil health a hot topic at Shutesbury ECAC meeting," <https://www.thereminder.com/localnews/franklin-county/soil-health-a-hot-topic-at-shutesbury-ecac-meeting/>.

School Committee Liaison brief

Nate forwarded to the School Committee information about a Federal grant opportunity at the Department of Energy called Renew America's Schools, <https://www.energy.gov/clean-energy-infrastructure/grants-energy-improvements-public-school-facilities>. It's a grant for making efficiency

improvements or even larger ticket items like a ground or air sourced heat pump – which could help get the school off fossil fuel. The committee invited Nate to talk about the grant and introduce ECAC on January 26.

Much of the discussion was centered around identifying which aspects of climate change response and Hazard Mitigation Plan implementation the School Committee would take the lead on. For example, the Building Committee would have a lead role in deciding whether to replace the school's furnace or water heater with a heat pump. It wasn't entirely clear from the conversation exactly who would fill out an application to the Renew America's Schools grant opportunity.

Similarly, regarding the set of school-related priorities in the Hazard Mitigation Plan, the School Committee would rely on the Emergency Management Team when it comes to whether the school might at times act as an emergency shelter. The EMT includes Jackie Mendonsa, who is the School Principal.

Committee member terms

Committee member terms end on June 30th. Members should expect a query on whether they are interested in continuing to serve.

MVP action grant widow will open

The inability to pay for consultants with MVP grants raises issues for Shutesbury since effective applications for some projects requires technical input. Progress on solar, for example, requires answering the question of how to put solar panels on municipal buildings. There may be an opportunity to leverage MVP funds to put solar on the library, which is a building that is already being designed and that is in the permitting phase. Feedback on the proposed stormwater project at Lake Wyola was difficult to interpret. Dialogue with the MVP representative continues.

Minutes

The committee considered the minutes of our February 20, 2023 meeting.

Vote to approve the minutes: Gail moved to approve the minutes. Leslie seconded. Gail, Aye; Leslie, Aye; Michael, Aye; Miriam, Aye; Nate, Aye; Zoe, Aye.

Motion to Adjourn: Leslie moved to adjourn the meeting. Graeme seconded. Gail, Aye; Leslie, Aye; Michael, Aye; Miriam, Aye; Nate, Aye; Zoe, Aye.

Meeting Adjourned: 8:45pm