

Energy and Climate Action Committee Meeting

Virtual Meeting

Minutes – 1/6/2026

Approved 2/03/2026

Committee Members Present: Michael DeChiara, Gail Fleischaker, Nate Heard

Committee Members Absent: Greg Day

Public: None

Michael opened the meeting at 7:03pm

Public Comment

None

Updates

Clean energy funding opportunities

ECAC acknowledged that all members present participated in a joint committee meeting in December to explore strategies to take advantage of two upcoming state grants that could advance clean energy projects in town. The meeting included the Select Board, Finance Committee, Buildings Committee, Capital Planning Committee, School Committee, Town Administrator, and ECAC.

Michael shared that following that meeting and in order to make the town eligible for the Green School Works grant, Frank McGinn set up an appointment for MassSave to do energy audits of all the town buildings. This will be on Jan. 13.

Also, as follow-up to the meeting and the expressed interest in geothermal at the elementary school, Frank reached out to GZA, the firm working on the town dam. Similarly, Jeff Quackenbush, also on the Building Committee, reached out to past colleagues at UMass who are working on the UMass geothermal project. However, Michael conveyed that Jeff was not hopeful that a consultation would occur quickly enough for the grant deadline given that those firms were likely very large and the small scale of a Shutesbury project might not be of interest. Nate reported that he and Anna Heard, of the School Committee, had not yet been able to get good information about other school-based geothermal since these tend to be in the development phase. He and Anna are trying to connect with the geothermal vendor for the Amherst Fort River geothermal project.

Nate shared that they got a recommendation for a firm, LN Consulting, that has expertise with commercial geothermal and might be able to assist in providing cost estimates for the project. He was unsure of the process for securing their services and also if used, how their participation might impact a future bidding process. There was further discussion that prior to getting cost and technical estimates, there might be a need for a basic feasibility study. Michael recommended that the School Committee should request funding for a geothermal study as part of the FY27 budget process; this could be presented as a strategy to deal with the ongoing operational costs and problems related to heating at the school. Michael suggested that having the heating problem be identified as a shared goal for the town was a major accomplishment for the joint meeting and is likely a helpful way of advancing the geothermal project — from feasibility to technical study to grant seeking.

Gail offered to inquire from her geothermal installer where one might get a feasibility study. Michael suggested to Nate that he might reach out to Dandelion Energy, which is also a residential and commercial geothermal installer.

In summary, Michael offered that the Town might still be interested in the Green School Works grant, although our ability to be ready to apply is unclear. However, ECAC should begin to think about what we'd want to get funded through an August 2026 Climate Leader Community grant opportunity. He suggested it would be good to get this done soon since with few municipalities yet eligible, there is currently less competition.

CCA status

Nate reported that Colonial is poised to send out a postcard to Eversource customers in town to alert them to the existence of CCA. The delay was that Colonial had some remaining questions. While most were not consequential for the full committee's consideration, Nate raised one question for committee input. While Eversource customers in town cannot join the CCA to participate in the default option since their pricing is better than what the CCA offers, these households could join the CCA if they were interested in the 100% REC option. While information about this is too much to include on the postcard, Colonial has offered to provide this information for Eversource households on their website. Nate suggested that ECAC could also update our FAQs regarding this option and point people to the Colonial website. All members present supported this approach.

Nate reported that on Feb. 1, the National Grid price will be going up to \$0.15372. This indicates that the decision to lock in the prices through the CCA was a good economic decision for town residents. Michael thanked Nate for advancing the committee's work on CCA.

Nate stated that ECAC will be getting regular updates from Colonial.

Michael also shared that Colonial reported that the number of people opting out of the original CCA enrollment was low, better than the average municipality.

Gail suggested that with CCA operational, ECAC should pick up the other discussion with Colonial about seeking a community solar project using our aggregated buying power.

Stormwater committee

Michael reported that the new town committee focusing on townwide stormwater issues has not been finalized; they are still waiting for other members to be recommended by committees and for residents to express interest. However, Greg is confirmed as the ECAC representative.

Discussion: Next steps for ECAC

Michael noted that ECAC has successfully accomplished two major initiatives - CCA and Climate Leader efforts. So the question before the committee is "what next?" Based on the prior discussion, it seems like the two options identified by the committee were 1) advancing clean energy projects based on upcoming grant opportunities and 2) exploring using the CCA to secure appropriately sited solar generation.

Minutes

Nate moved to approve the minutes of Dec. 9, 2025, Gail seconded.

Gail – aye, Nate – aye, Michael – aye. Motion passes.

Items not anticipated by the Chair

Michael reported that there might be interest from a resident, Charles Gillam, to join the committee. Michael will invite him to the February meeting. If he is not interested, Michael suggested sending out another Town Announce.

The next meeting will be Feb. 3, 2026.

Gail moved to adjourn the meeting, Nate seconded.

Vote to adjourn: Michael - Aye; Gail - Aye; Nate - Aye. Motion carries.

Meeting ended at 7:34

Respectfully submitted,
Michael DeChiara