

Meeting Minutes 20150211

Town of Underhill  
Energy Committee  
02 February 2015

DRAFT MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Jerry Adams, Pete Bennett, Peter Duval, Tom Moore, and Chris Miller in attendance, the regular meeting was called to order at 6:41pm in the Town Hall Kitchen, with Chris in the chair and Peter D. recording minutes as secretary.

Agenda

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Town Plan Energy Chapter  
Town Infrastructure

Future meeting: Mission Review

Public Comment

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None

Town Plan Energy Chapter

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Pete B. reminded the committee that we had previously rejected the CCRPC greenhouse gas emission inventory and the assumption that carbon dioxide from wood is not a greenhouse gas, and had requested that these be removed from the plan. He referenced the CCRPC Climate Action Guide at Appendix B paragraph 7, where "only methane and nitrous oxide emissions are reported" for biomass. Burning wood is not carbon neutral.

McNeil Generating Station and the impact of forestry practices was discussed. Peter D. said that he worked on a district heating project attached to McNeil many years ago. Even then it was obvious that the emissions should be counted. He suggested that we make our concerns in writing.

Citing the work of Bill Keeton at UVM, Pete B. explained that large trees absorb carbon faster than small trees, so harvesting trees not only causes greenhouse gas emissions, it damages the forest's capacity to sequester carbon. There is only one carbon cycle – that includes all carbon dioxide emissions from all sources.

Tom said that the committee could write an informational piece that uses the articles and documentation, already written, that explain the issue. He outlined the letter as 1) FYI here are some articles recently reviewed and 2) the assumption that burning trees is carbon neutral is a fallacy, with 3) a few bullet points.

Pete B. explained how burning a tree produces about 50% more carbon emission per unit of useable energy than fossil fuels, because the complex carbohydrates in wood have fundamentally less net energy when burned than the molecules that make up fossil fuels.

A Mountain Gazette article was also discussed, as a follow-up to the letter. Committee drafting was discussed, before Pete B. volunteered to draft a letter for review.

Peter D. said that there is another angle on the issue that doesn't require knowledge of climate science: the EPA is going to regulate biomass, and the only reason that it hasn't already done so for major stationary sources is that biomass received a special temporary exemption. "Prudent anticipation" of future regulation is sufficient to stop substituting wood for fossil fuels. It may be more expensive or even impossible to burn wood in the future.

He described participating in a regulatory process many years ago that helped incorporate environmental externalities into utility decision making and helped steer utilities away from polluting electricity supply. EPA is now regulating for greenhouse gas emissions. Because of the relatively early and serious planning, Vermont is the only state exempt from the EPA Clean Power Plan. It is a real benefit to be ahead of the crowd.

Tom used outdoor boilers as an example of how wood has been aggressively marketed as carbon-neutral. Opinions shared about burning wood for heat. Peter D. mentioned a wood drying experiment described at [www.cchrc.org](http://www.cchrc.org). He suggested, as moisture is a significant factor in wood burning efficiency, that cordwood drying would be a good local initiative.

Discussion about the process for drafting and approving the plan. Chris said that it is disheartening that the final draft does not reflect the concerns of the Energy Committee.

7:13

Solarize Underhill

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Chris paraphrased a report from Steve Webster about the Solarize Underhill project. He is disappointed about the small response to his call for organizing members, but he did receive stronger interest in buying systems. There is interest in Cambridge. He wonders if Essex

should be included. He thinks it will be important to ask installers if a larger area increases the cost. The library and town hall are available for meeting. The library is probably a better location.

Pete B. is skeptical as there is a lot of work involved in this project, and the Upper Valley group was well-funded. Peter D. asked if the work done in the Upper Valley worked out the kinks in the process and might make it easier for Underhill.

Chris thinks that it is not straightforward. He wonders how a customer knows that they are getting a good deal. Even with the standardization of components, each system is a custom installation. And he feels a little uneasy about picking one installer for the whole area.

Discussion of solarize versus community solar approaches.

7:24

Town Infrastructure

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Without Bob to report on the current situation with the Town Garage, this item was deferred to a later meeting. The lights will be installed.

7:35

Other Items

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Jerry described the potential for a community solar project at his house. Discussion of agriculture versus solar. Pete B. asked, "What makes sense for Underhill?" Tom said that we always support individual systems, but pursuing bigger projects will achieve more progress.

Chris imagines a process where if we find a generic landfill project makes sense, then a specific analysis would be worth doing. Jerry is going to do some research.

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Pete B. mentioned that Two Towns Online is used more regularly by the Jericho Energy Task Force. Should we do the same? See entry #1814.

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Tom wondered about trying to get solar on the schools. He will investigate.

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Chris reviewed options for the meeting schedule. Conflicts were discussed.

Minutes deferred to next meeting.

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Peter D. reviewed the Jericho Market. The selectboard doesn't appear to be interested in the project, even though it is in the Flats area. It would have a big impact on the local stores. Phil Jacobs has 500 signatures on his petition opposing the supermarket.

Pete B. described what happened in Richmond, with a couple of stores being folded into the supermarket there. Peter D. said that the proposal in the Flats is different, a suburban supermarket in an area that is supposed to be for new urbanism.

The Town of Underhill is a statutory party and as an adjacent municipality could exercise significant influence on the project. Jericho's handling of the Dollar General project suggests that Jericho is not well-organized to regulate the Jericho Market. For Dollar General, the Jericho Selectboard watched the process and did not participate until after the appeal trial was finish, then they submitted a brief opposing the project. But it was not considered, because it was too late.

He said the problem is that the supermarket is designed for cars. If you don't drive a car to the supermarket, and leave with a few bags of groceries every time you visit, the market will fail.

With the three small stores around Underhill, quite a few people have walking and biking access to at least one store. Replace them with a supermarket in Jericho and not only has Underhill lost businesses, but everyone has to get in their car and drive to the supermarket. It would be a bad change from an energy perspectives.

Discussion about whether all three stores will close, or if Underhill Center stores would survive. Pete B. feels that Underhill Country Store is not threatened, but Jacobs would be.

Discussion about the process of the project review by the DRB and going on to Environmental Court. Pete B. noted that Jericho is approving a project that doesn't affect Jericho but affects Underhill, and that this is as much a political question as an energy issue. Peter D. said that he thinks we should express concern about the transportation effects of the project. Pete B. said that if there was a study that the committee could discuss then this issue could be addressed.

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Peter D. said that the correspondence blog is not being used consistently and the we should switch to an email-based system. Peter D. MOVED, and Pete B. SECONDED, to convert the correspondence blog to a Google group. PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

ADJOURNMENT

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By CONSENSUS, the meeting was adjourned at 8:08.

Respectfully Submitted,

Peter Duval, Secretary

Approved \_\_\_\_\_  
date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Chris Miller, Chair