

Sustainability Committee Meeting Minutes
January 10, 2023

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Gary Martin via zoom. In attendance were Gary Martin, Marc Aronson, Holly Langer, Pat Canonica and later joined by Keith Sampson.

The minutes were approved from the Sept. 20, 2022 meeting. It was decided we would alternate minutes taking by the members at large.

Gary displayed a graph showing largest energy users in Boxford. Noteworthy is that the Town Hall with its new Heat Pump HVAC system is only about half the police station.

National Grid has given estimates to upgrade both Cole and Spofford Pond Schools with heat pump HVAC, respectively at \$1,375,000. and \$1,086,000. Grants are available from National Grid, Federal and State programs to cover the bulk of cost if not all but time is of the essence as grant funding can disappear, programs may change with administration. It was discussed that already the School Committee has a boiler replacement in its capital budget. Mass Save sets incentives for a three year period.

DOER has bumped up grants to \$500,000. for HVAC. Holly and Marc want to attend School Committee meeting scheduled for this Thursday at Cole School. Major site projects are about to commence at both schools.

Gary Martin reported that Selectperson Barbara Jessel and Town Administrator Matt Coogan want a warrant article at Spring Town Meeting for design funds for new HVAC systems for both schools. Design costs may be about \$125,000. The School Committee should be made aware of the possible need to upgrade electrical power service especially with site projects as they are most likely underground and may require new/larger cabling.

Gary Martin advised the Committee that the new Stretch Code the State was promoting included "net zero ready" which means homes or major renovations must be wired sufficiently for all electric design and easy conversion from fossil fuel heat to electric. We need a Town Warrant to adopt this. Failure to pass may mean less funds available through Green Community Grants. Marc asked if the new Stretch Code would apply to the Willows condo development and Gary said since it was phased, maybe the new Stretch Code if passed this Spring would kick in for later phases. The code requires more efficient building envelopes, which reduces the size and cost of HVAC systems. It has been found that the total construction cost for many very efficient buildings has been similar to that of less efficient buildings. Even when the construction cost is higher, this is offset by lower heating and cooling costs.

At this point the enhanced Stretch Code would not prohibit gas heat, but it requires pre-wiring to enable easy conversion to electric later. Renovations would depend on percentage size increase. Pat and Gary to work on this.

Keith Sampson gave a detailed report showing graphs with the increase in value of solar credits created by our Town PV Solar Array. He has been reviewing bills and data and caught two malfunction periods in which Agilitas failed to make timely repairs. He complimented Kathleen Benevento monitoring data and managing PV system/electric invoices but advised that she is preparing to retire and the Town currently has no one employed to handle this important function. It is imperative that someone scrutinize monthly National Grid bills to insure proper monthly credits.

More credits may be up to \$20,000./month by this summer. Boxford received \$45,000 this year from Masco for our excess solar credits. Keith suggested we ask Matt Coogan to assign someone from the Town staff to administer Solar System. There had been a proposal for Boxford to “buy back” Solar System from Agilitas/Radian but Marc couldn’t imagine Town managing system at this point without someone trained in this field.

Holly asked how Gary made out asking Select Persons how to make allocations and he reported Matt Coogan looking into it. Schools have facilities people but not sure of their knowledge on utilities. The Solar asset will only increase with rising rates as it is at a fixed rate and in past 22 months has generated \$189,000. in savings. Marc asked that maybe Matt should put out a solicitation to see costs for an outside consultant to manage system on say a 10 per cent of savings basis. Maybe costs of consultant could be shared with Masco.

Good news is we’re making money with system; bad news is we have to manage. Electric heat is now cheaper than gas.

Weatherization of Fire Station to be complete by end of February.

In regards electrical aggregation, Gary reported there were no objections at DPU hearing to Boxford’s application, but it just takes time. Holly asked if maybe we should ask Bruce Tarr to get involved to expedited DPU approval as purchase contract rates will be down this Spring and a good time to buy but we can only if Boxford’s application is approved. This will provide a great benefit to Citizens as well as allow selection of renewable electric sources.

Gary asked Marc to contact Nico from Radian and get a buyout figure for Solar System and Gary said he would set up a meeting with Matt Coogan for himself, Marc and Keith to explore a purchase using 5% capital. Holly suggested we wait until we either have a Boxford person to manage system or someone (consultant) under contract to manage.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:48pm

Respectfully submitted,
Pat Canonica