

St. Johnsbury Town Energy Committee

October 7, 2024

Members Present: Steve Isham, Donley Johnson, Pam Parker (Chair), Susan Parker, Ben Deede, Jason Kaiser, Lynn Wurzburg

Guests: Robert Michael

1. Review September minutes

Minutes passed.

2. Announcements

Steve said this Friday at 11am at St. Andrew's Church there is a meeting about the Main Street Thermal Network. Representatives from Passumpsic Bank, the Congregational church, Dr. Kozlowski's office, the state, the Athenaeum, Rural Edge and Jared Rodriguez plan to be there. People will bring building specs to take a step toward the feasibility of being part of the network. Steve asked that members of the Energy Committee attend.

3. WindowDressers – Oct 17-24 at the Lyndonville Congregational Church

Pam said Window Dressers received a \$2,000 donation from the Vermont Community Fund. There are about 220 orders.

Tasks to be completed:

- Still open slots for (6) shifts and shift supervisors. Saturday afternoon 1-5 and Monday or Tuesday has some openings. Asked for more people at the end of this week.
- Collect cordless drills that are charged. Ben, Susan, and Robert can donate them for Friday.

4. Energy chapter for updated town plan

Reports from Susan Parker

Susan spoke with Brian Keith of NETO and Rebecca Lewis at NEKCA about how to learn more about the concerns of people with high energy burdens. They both said that people they work with struggle just to pay their electric, heating, and transportation costs. For many owning a gas car is too expensive and electric cars would be even further out of reach. Brian works with clients on electric weatherization to bring down their costs. Rebecca helps people obtain fuel assistance during the winter and rides from RCT to get to appointments. Rebecca said that having more ride options in the NEK would be a huge benefit to the people she works with. Brian said that many of the challenges of the people he works with need to be addressed at the policy level. Susan is going to participate in a Community Partners meeting to hear from other agencies about the needs they see from people with high energy burdens. Brian is going to try to connect Susan with some of his clients to hear firsthand about their needs. Brian also said that other energy committees hold regular community events or have booths at farmer's markets to get input into their work. Brian is available to come to talk to us or participate in an event we might organize.

Ben shared an outline of an enhanced energy plan that we could start from. Steve said that the previous energy plan had a lot of action items and wondered if we could prioritize them. Pam said that if we had made a lot of progress in areas to highlight those. Susan suggested we talk first about where we made progress on objectives. Members noted the following areas of progress: working with landlords on energy efficiency measures, thermal networks, and window dressers. Ben said that could go in current state.

Steve suggested that if we generalize our objectives going forward it could be easier to put new areas to address that come up under those general topics. He also suggested incorporating the mission statement of the energy committee into the plan. Donley said that specific action steps could be necessary to give guidance to our work. Steve said we could have separate action items for the committee that we follow.

After discussion, the committee agreed to include objectives only in the enhanced energy plan and to ensure that it is compatible with the regional planning board plan and includes the guidance of Act 174, which wasn't in place when the last plan was created. The committee will include action steps in a separate document to provide guidance for our work.

5. Biomass Update. Lynn Wurzburg

Lynn went to a meeting at the Lyndon Campus of Vermont State University about the proposal to build a biomass generating system in the Lyndonville industrial park. She said that the project proposes to use low grade wood from logging operations to make bio char that will produce electricity. One question is whether there will be toxic emissions that will be harmful for the community. Lynn said that one of the biggest issues is that the project has received expedited approval from the Public Utility Commission (PUC), which gives little time for public input. Representatives from the biomass project noted that they did not ask the PUC for expedited approval. Lynn said a petition is circulating asking for a longer process before the project is approved. Jason said he attended a Zoom meeting from people who were opposed to the project. He said there is a legitimate concern about particulate emissions.

The next meeting is Nov. 4 from 5:30pm to 7pm on Zoom.