

MEAC Minutes 3/19/24

Attendees (Voting): Karl Johnson, Amy Gamble, Julia Leopold, Tim Favorite, Ken Jones, Peter Sterling, Geoff Fitzgerald, Amanda Sardonis

Attendees (Non-voting): Chris Lumbra

Agenda and minutes: approved

Public Comment: No public to comment

Upcoming Events: Efficiency Vermont Better by Design conference April 3-4.

Sustainability Coordinator update: The city is moving forward with working with Efficiency VT to expand District Heat. Efficiency VT has a spreadsheet with all available buildings along the District Heat loop, as well as some slightly off loop, including heating types, distributions, and perception of owner interest. VEIC's contact will schedule some site visits. She has been provided with historic usage numbers as well as current oil prices. Hoping price comparison will be more favorable to DH now. Also discussing how much we need to add to the current system to make prices more competitive with oil. Have had a few prospective customers say they would be willing to switch once prices are more competitive. Oil prices have not trended in the direction hoped. Peter points out that we should try and make the case that the social cost of carbon makes oil less favorable. Julia asks about potential financial incentives. Chris: VEIC looking at potential incentives. Chris also mentions connection costs are \$20-50K per building. Working on repairing equipment damaged in July's flood (meters, fiber network, etc.). Most controls are being elevated out of basements. Cost of repair: around \$400K.

Citywide LED retrofit - significantly delayed by flood. Contractor is now available and as of last week, DPW equipment barn complete, shop and office partially complete. Fire Dept, Police Dept complete. Targeting midsummer for completion.

DoE thermal energy storage grant moving forward at Rec Center. Information being provided on a weekly basis, no indication of any problem. System has not been designed yet, but the goal of the grant is to generate data to compare energy usage between similar buildings, some with thermal storage, some without. The solution will likely involve water tanks, heat pumps, and a new electrical system. Building currently uses 7K gallons of oil per year, equivalent to DPW campus usage. Ken asks if GMP is a partner on this, citing peak demand as a point of interest. Chris: not yet. Ken asks if it's a potential cooling system also - this seems unlikely. Amanda: What is the timeline? Chris: don't anticipate building will be taken offline, primarily will be work done in the basement. DoE wants to study the data in 2026, so the system needs to be up and running by the 2025-26 heating season. It's too far from the District Heat loop to get hooked up. EV chargers: met with representatives from GMP, moving forward with permitting and design for 4 DC fast chargers between Drawing Board and Shaws. There are floodplain concerns in play, which will need to be worked around. They are for public use and users will need to pay to charge. GMP has an aggressive goal to get these in downtown areas.

No EVs have been purchased lately, due to budget crunch, none have been budgeted. Will see what happens in budget development for upgrades of any kind.

DPW fuel switch still on hold, powered by biogas and pellet boilers. There has been difficulty in tracking the amount of biogas used in the boilers accurately, but we are very likely not generating enough gas in the winter to provide sufficient heat. We are not able to get the amount of high-strength waste material that we expected from the phase 1 project - led to believe we'd be able to obtain more. Julia: Are there opportunities to collaborate with other municipalities and VT businesses to get more of this waste? We are talking to creameries like one in Barre. Chris suggests that MEAC could be helpful in researching high-strength waste streams. We would need to be brought up to speed in terms of contacts and available capacity. Chris Cox would be a good contact for that information. Ken: VT Gas supposed to be providing its potential for the renewable gas world - intending on replacing a good portion of their fossil gas production with renewable. There is competition for this material which might make it challenging to find, so it might be good to find a niche, as we are a smaller player.

City Council Updates

Solar shading zoning update is an improvement (in terms of a better compromise on building vs. solar protection) on status quo, per Chris, and there is an opportunity to modify it further going forward. Sal, Kate, and Geoff have been having a dialogue on the wording of the policy.

Working Group updates

Window Dressers: no update

School: No progress on getting a meeting of the Ad Hoc Net Zero Committee, due to the budget failure and the ongoing debate with the Roxbury Village School.

Other Business

Geoff got an email from Alex Bravakis, looking to help the Civic Center become a solar facility. It will probably require 150kW capacity. Questions about whether stump dump would work as a location for an array, but it does not seem viable due to wetlands concerns. Existing city solar location cannot fit any more panels. Geoff wonders whether an Elks Club location might work, such as where the radio tower is. Karl suggests efficiency be considered before gauging solar capacity. Julia: incentives from IRA potentially available for this too.