

Brandon Energy Committee Meeting
February 4, 2019

Committee Members Present: Michael Shank, Jack Schneider

Committee Members Absent: Lowell Rasmussen, Edna Sutton

Also in Attendance: Ian Hitchcock

1. Call to order

Michael Shank, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:05PM.

2. Agenda Approval

A motion was made by Jack Schneider to approve the agenda. **The motion passed.**

3. Approval of Minutes

January 7, 2019 Meeting:

A motion was made by Jack Schneider to approve the minutes of the January 7, 2019 Energy Committee meeting. **The motion passed.**

4. Presentation by VNRC Staff on Vermont Energy Committees' Agendas and Activities

Ian Hitchcock, Community Organizer for the VNRC (Vermont Natural Resources Council), provided a presentation to the Committee on Energy Committees in the State. Mr. Hitchcock requested Committee members' contact information to enable the VNRC to keep the Committee updated on events and information. The VNRC provides a central information clearing house for community events, legislation and resources to municipal Energy Committees in the State. It is also their intent to have more webinar presence to provide more options for people to obtain information. An annual conference is held each year and Mr. Hitchcock noted that Michael Shank was last year's keynote speaker. Mr. Hitchcock advised that Vermont has some of the strongest energy goals in the country, with a goal of 90% renewable by 2050. He noted some of the goals would be difficult to attain without assistance from the local areas. The VNRC is encouraging municipalities to develop Energy Committees to help the State reach its goal. Michael Shank advised the Town's Energy Committee is a subcommittee of the Brandon Planning Commission. Mr. Shank suggested the VNRC post a carousel of community photos on their website of what the various communities are doing for energy conservation.

Mr. Hitchcock noted that start-up Energy Committees should take an inventory of what they have in their Towns and research the municipal energy use to determine where there can be a savings. This can be a good starting point for positive and productive relationships with the towns. Mr. Shank asked if there are resources available to assist with doing audits. Mr. Hitchcock reported Efficiency Vermont does energy use audits and suggested reaching out to them. Mr. Hitchcock provided an example of an energy committee audit and the savings that were realized from this effort. He noted when an Energy Committee can demonstrate savings from upfront investments; it can provide good assistance to the town. Mr. Hitchcock questioned where Brandon was in the Act 174 process. Mr. Shank advised the Planning Commission would be acting on a draft Energy Plan that was presented. It will then be forwarded to the Select Board for their input and approval, followed by submission to the Rutland Regional Planning Commission for their approval.

Mr. Hitchcock noted that public education is important to the residents and provided suggestions such as film screenings and providing handouts in public places. Mr. Shank reported the Brandon Energy Committee has hosted events that have been well attended and will continue the public education process. Mr. Hitchcock advised the VNRC can connect the Energy Committee with other towns to obtain additional information on events to host. Public advocacy is another area that Energy Committees can be engaged in writing letters to the local newspapers and contacting their local legislators. The VNRC organizes days for people to come and speak with legislators and lawmakers in Montpelier. The VNRC keeps a pulse on what is going on in the legislation and provides information to the Energy Committees throughout the State. When there are key opportunities, they put the word out to Energy Committees to give input. They also try to keep lawmakers educated about key environmental issues. The VNRC does a weekly video on Friday at Noon during the legislative session that is live-streamed and posted on Facebook and their website.

Mr. Hitchcock advised there is a campaign that is run in the fall, Button Up Vermont, with Efficiency Vermont that is a public education campaign to provide information on how to weatherize homes. Last year, the program was expanded with the potential for contractors providing a professional walk-through to advise homeowners the steps necessary to upgrade. Mr. Hitchcock suggested the Committee place this event on their schedule for the fall. Mr. Hitchcock advised there are fair amounts of resources in the State, such as the heat saver loan through the VSECU and low-income weatherization programs, which are prioritized according income levels. On the advocacy side, there is an effort being made to double the funding to assure there are funds to meet the need. There is momentum behind this issue as the State has the second oldest stock in the country on average. Mr. Hitchcock stated the VNRC also encourages Energy Committees to take advantage of the energy code information and suggested outreach to realtors and local contractors to advise them of the savings that can be had when a building is being constructed. It was suggested to provide information to Bill Moore and Jeff Biasuzzi. Mr. Hitchcock reported with regard to energy efficiency efforts in transportation; there are funds available to help municipalities install electric vehicle stations. Mr. Shank reported the Town will be installing an EV station behind the Mobil Station, but it would be desirable to also have one in a more visible location. Mr. Hitchcock noted Energy Committees have also done pedestrian paths, bike lane installation and expansion of public transportation as improvements.

Mr. Hitchcock advised community solar is an option, but is more difficult due to net metering changes. Mr. Shank was advised that Sun Common is looking into community solar sites. Mr. Hitchcock stated when community solar is being developed; it is usually placed in areas such as rooftops and old landfills. Mr. Shank stated Brandon is working on a preferred site list for their Energy Plan. Mr. Hitchcock stated there is a Community Energy Dashboard that helps communities understand and analyze their local use, which is managed by the Energy Action Network.

In general, Mr. Hitchcock stated Energy Committees should find project champions, secure the support of local officials, build a sense of team among members, think big and start small, and emphasize the benefits of health, time and financial savings to the public. Mr. Shank advised the Town has exceeded the current State goal. Mr. Hitchcock provided the Committee further informational resources and a copy of the Town Energy and Climate Action Guide. Mr. Shank will share the information with the rest of the Energy Committee and thanked Mr. Hitchcock for providing the presentation.

5. Update on Workshop Ideas

Michael Shank advised one workshop idea he is exploring is with Grassroots Solar that would be tailored towards lower cost alternatives. A second workshop idea would be to invite a number of solar vendors to provide an information event for the public. Mr. Shank suggested the listing of preferred sites, and the preferred sites of other area towns could be made available at the event. This would provide the Town an opportunity to work with other municipalities in this effort.

6. Update on Energy Plan Process

Michael Shank will recommend to the Planning Commission to forward the proposed draft of the Energy Plan to the Select Board for their input.

7. Old/New Business

Mr. Shank reported there is a list of preferred solar sites totaling 200 acres in the draft Energy Plan. Barbara Noyes-Pulling of the RRPC will have them placed on a map to be included in the Energy Plan prior to submitting it to the Select Board.

8. Next Meeting

Thursday, March 7, 2019 @ 5PM in the Brandon Town Office

9. Adjournment

The Committee Chair adjourned the meeting at 6:00PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Bryant
Recording Secretary