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Town of Middlebury Energy Committee Meeting Minutes Wednesday, May 19th, 2021

Present: Howard Wideltz, Diane Munroe, Lindsey Fuentes-George, Lisa Bernardin, Liv Herdman, Richard Hopkins, Ross Conrad, Steve Maier
Via Zoom: Bill Cunningham

Guests: Van Barth, Matthew Kiernan, Dan Rafferty

Meeting started at 9:00 a.m.

Review and Approval of Previous Minutes:

Ross clarified a sentence about the biodiesel tank. The meeting minutes were approved as amended.

Climate Effects of Expanding Amtrak Rail System in Vermont:

Matthew, a student at MUHS, is completing a project on the impacts of the new rail service going through Middlebury and wanted to ask the MEC how we feel about it. Lisa started off the conversation by saying that it is very convenient and that she used Amtrak several times in the past with her daughters. Van added that it provides access for students who live in the Northeast and do not have cars. Students can get straight from Middlebury to Penn Station in New York. This saves a roundtrip car drive for parents who would otherwise have to pick their kids up. Steve noted that it is limited for commuters since it only runs once a day and does not have an ideal schedule. He did agree with Van that it is good for travelers. Howard and Lisa both said that inconvenient hours make the Burlington buses unhelpful and the train should have a better schedule.

Richard said that benefit really depends on ridership. If there is not enough ridership then the costs will not be worth it. He would like to see a train running on the opposite schedule so that there is service both ways. The rail infrastructure is already in place and this would therefore not cost much. Bill added that this new rail line reduces first and last mile issues for riders. Howard said that the Amtrak trains run on diesel but Ross said they could be run on biodiesel. He suggested that the MEC estimate how much diesel is used by the train. Ross responded and said that the efficiency of the fuel also depends on how many people are riding the train.

Dan said it would be nice if there were a fare structure that would price short trips at \$5 or \$6 which would make it feasible for local commuters. Bill noted that there is no fare for Tri-Valley Transit buses due to Covid relief funding. Until that funding ends, there will be free buses available. Bill said that Tri-Valley is not worried about competition with the new train service and is just working to improve overall connectivity.

Richard brought up that Addison County has tens of thousands of cars using the roads everyday. There would need to be close to a thousand riders a day before there would even be a noticeable dent in Addison County transportation emissions. Richard is hoping for at least 3-5 train cycles per day. Ross said that the train may not have a large impact on local travel but could prevent longer, more carbon intensive road trips. Ross said that the Amtrak system needs significant assistance from Washington. Liv mentioned that in Europe, there are disincentives to driving such as tolls that makes driving more expensive than taking the train.

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Bill said that European cities are great at making city-centers less dependent on cars and easier for public transit. Richard said that the town was subjected to two years of disruption to build this rail expansion, something that should be considered in the evaluation of the benefits of the Amtrak expansion. He also brought up that the rail line is primarily used for hauling fuel oil and gasoline, which contributes towards emissions.

Howard asked Matthew if there are any clarifying questions and let Matthew know that he is always welcome to ask the MEC more questions.

Committee Positions:

Howard laid out the available positions on the committee and listed who is currently filling them. Most current position holders expressed interest in staying in these roles. Diane said she would fill in as Secretary if someone split the position with her. Steve nominated the slate, Richard seconded and all approved. The positions for the next year are as follows:

Chair- Howard

Vice Chair- Steve

Treasurer- Lindsey

Secretary- Diane and Liv

Review of Current Projects and Status

Howard first brought up the ongoing efforts to produce a comprehensive energy plan for the town. There is currently an ad-hoc group working on it and a steering committee of different stakeholders will be formed. The plan should align with the goals of the MEC.

Howard then turned to renewable energy projects and thanked Richard for his work on this. The town has 347kW of net metering available and there are several projects that could use these kilowatts. The first is a possible anaerobic digester for the Wastewater Treatment Plant. Richard brought up that there are two additional digester projects: the digester benefiting the college in Salisbury and a possible digester for the industrial operations on Exchange Street. The Exchange Street project could impact the amount of waste that goes to the WWTP. Ross said it is important to know the possible outputs of the WWTP in order to plan out how to use the kilowatts. He is hoping to get estimates from Tom Murray of VGS as well as a formal engineering evaluation. Howard agreed that there needs to be another meeting with Tom soon.

The next possibility involves using the net metering for solar power. Howard said that several MEC members recently met with Ben Marks from Acorn Energy Co-op who said it would be possible for the Town of Middlebury to purchase 50kW worth of solar panels on their new Bristol solar project. Additionally, the town could sign on to a Green Lantern net metering project and receive the credits that way.

The MEC met with Dave Cole at the previous month's meeting to discuss installing solar power on the roof of the Memorial Sports Center. Richard asked about the name listed on the electric meter. Ross said that at the meeting Dave gave the impression that it is listed as Friends of Middlebury Hockey and not the Town. This would allow for solar net metering without eating into the Town's net metering balance. Howard said that getting solar power for the sports center would help lower costs and make hockey more equitable.

Next, Howard turned to transportation and mentioned that the MEC has been looking at alternative vehicles and equipment for the Town. Electric options are limited for larger

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vehicles yet there has been progress on electric trucks. Ross has been pushing for biodiesel for the Town's vehicles. The tank should be ready and filled by now. Bill noted that vehicle manufacturers are shifting away from biodiesel and towards electric. Tri-valley is building more solar panels in preparation for electric buses. Bill is waiting on the final designs for electric buses and within 5-7 years will have replaced much of Tri-Valley's fleet. Dan brought up that heavy equipment can operate on natural gas, which if coming from a digester, could be a good thing. Dan said that this is not perfect but it does not need recharge time, which is good for snow plows and the technology already exists. Howard also noted that police cruisers are switching to hybrid which would result in a 40% fuel reduction.

Howard said that at 2pm today, the 19th, Dan Dupras will be going through with a heating evaluation of the police station HVAC system. Dan Dupras will determine if heat pumps are feasible for the building. Additionally, the MEC has recommended the heat pump only option for the Ilsley Public Library since the heat pump technology has improved and no longer requires a boiler for backup. The MEC has approximately \$30,000 available and will receive \$10,000 per year. Howard said that the MEC has paid for a smart thermostat at the Teen Center but could also pay for weatherization there. The MEC could also save up and purchase a small solar array.

Howard said that Lisa has been reaching out to the local schools to discuss energy education. Lisa referenced the Vermont Energy Education Program that has been established in several schools and she would like to see that for Middlebury. She spoke with people she knows at the local schools and there is interest. Lisa also said that Addison Central School District is continuing with LED installations.

Howard invited Steve and Richard to discuss the Climate Economy Action Center's projects. Steve gave a brief history of CEAC and highlighted Richard's county-wide greenhouse gas inventory. Over 40% of the county's emissions come from agriculture. CEAC and ACORN created a guide called LiveGreenVT which shows climate friendly businesses and that site has received more traction. Richard said that he compiled town totals for Bristol, Ferrisburgh, Middlebury and Vergennes. He said that Addison County has no county level governance and CEAC is hoping to step in and organize a county-wide effort. CEAC hired PaleBlueDot to help with the planning process and had introductory meetings with community stakeholders. Agriculture and transportation are the main targets for reduction in this plan. The first step is to interview 75-80 key people throughout the county. CEAC is hoping to engage low and moderate income individuals in addition to the owners of carbon intensive businesses. Richard is hoping that this will produce commitments and not just recommendations.

Other Updates

Liv recently bumped into Andrew L'Roe and he said he is putting together materials for an energy plan. Howard said Andrew will be on the steering committee.

Ross received a notification that Acorn Energy is removing the 10% ownership limit for a single entity for their Bristol project. Middlebury could now purchase more than 50kW.

With Van graduating from the college, he is stepping down from the committee with this being his last meeting. The committee was grateful for his participation over the last four years and thanked him for his ongoing contribution to the committee. Diane also mentioned that Van was a recipient of the John M. McCardell Jr. Public Service Award for his contribution to the committee over the last four years.

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Richard motioned to adjourn, Lisa seconded and the meeting unanimously adjourned at 10:31 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Van Barth