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### Town of Middlebury Energy Committee / Energy Planning Subcommittee Meeting Minutes Wednesday, April 14, 2021

#### Present via Zoom:

**Energy Committee Members** - Diane Munroe, Richard Hopkins, Ross Conrad, Lisa Bernardin, Lindsey Fuentes-George, Howard Widelitz

**Non-members:** John Barstow, Jeff Howarth, Jennifer Murray, Barbara Saunders

Meeting started at 9:00 a.m.

#### Review of Agenda:

Howard reviewed the agenda and continued with a recap of the last Energy Plan meeting on March 31<sup>st</sup>. The decision in the last meeting was to proceed with the development of a Comprehensive Energy Plan to include the necessary elements of an Enhanced Energy Plan to obtain approval by the Addison County Planning Commission. The assumed benefit of an approved Enhanced Energy Plan is to provide towns with some influence with the location of solar arrays. As mentioned in the previous meeting, the level of influence is questionable. Also from the last meeting, there was discussion about other entities to partner in the development of the plan. We had discussed a few potential partners but thought we would take that up in this meeting. Along with that, there was discussion about the approval process with the Town Planning Commission and Selectboard having authority over the Comprehensive Plan with the Addison County Planning Commission approving the Enhanced Energy Plan component.

#### Objectives for this meeting:

The intent for this discussion is to meet with Jennifer Murray to communicate the outcome of the previous meeting with Energy Committee along with Jeff Howarth from the Conservation Commission and John Barstow in his role as the liaison between the town and college. The expectation is to come to an agreement in this meeting with who needs to participate in the process and how to proceed with developing the plan or essentially, the plan for the plan.

#### Open Discussion - How to Move Forward:

The first part of this discussion focused on which entities need to participate in the process. Entities proposed included the Town Planning Commission, Town Planner, Energy Committee, Conservation Commission, Public Works, Business Community Representative, ACTR or someone representing the transportation sector

Ross suggested once the participating groups are identified, let them decide who should represent them in this process. John suggested checking with Kathleen to see if there are other members of the town staff in addition to Public Works.

Jen provided her insights to this process based on her experience with the downtown master plan and other projects. She suggested winnowing down the participants list to a manageable group who would serve as a “steering committee” and then branch out to the broader list of participants using focus groups and other methods. She suggested we could start off with one larger meeting to collect thoughts on what to include and then have a steering committee create a framework for the plan and a public process for engaging the broader set of entities and the community.

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Diane raised a concern that CEAC (Climate Economy Action Center) is also engaging the public on a Climate Action Plan and if there is a way to coordinate so as not to confuse the public with multiple requests for feedback. Richard responded by saying CEAC is working on a plan for greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction and not just energy and that it applies to all 22 towns in the county, not just Middlebury. Their plan is to conduct one-on-one interviews with the various stakeholders, which is a larger list than what was discussed for the energy plan. CEAC plans to develop a set of strategies, collect input on these strategies from the stakeholders and then go back and develop a plan seeking a commitment from the various players. Ross suggested some kind of collaboration between the two endeavors, the CEAC Climate Action Plan and the Town Energy Plan given the overlap in objectives. Although one is focused on GHG reduction at the county level and the other on energy at the town level, there is value in sharing information between the two. John drew the distinction in that the Comprehensive Energy Plan has an element of governance to it whereas, the Climate Action Plan is driven by a volunteer organization. Howard suggested the CEAC board members involved with the town Comprehensive Energy Plan help identify the overlap once there is a greater understanding of where this is all going.

In trying to understand how all of this work fits together, Jen mentioned the desire Jeff expressed at the last meeting for the Enhanced Energy Plan component to this work to have teeth. Jeff described his objectives with these plans and how it is not just about energy but also to think about land restoration. This is being addressed by the Conservation Commission but part of it ties back into the Town Plan by providing some authority over land use and identifying more desirable locations for land to be devoted toward energy use.

The last segment to this discussion focused on the formation of a steering committee. Jen's thought was to limit steering committee members to just the Town Planning Commission, Energy Committee, Conservation Commission and a college representative. Her thought was by having the business community and some of the other representation mentioned earlier, there will be too much information being offered for their specific areas of concern. One additional member not mentioned earlier would be someone from the town, most likely from the Public Works Department and perhaps someone representing the transportation sector once that area is addressed. Both Bill Cunningham and Laura Asermily's name were mentioned to cover transportation.

Jen also proposed having either Andrew L'Roe from the Addison County Planning Commission or someone from the PUC provide an overview of an Enhanced Energy Plan and what needs to be included. There was agreement to that idea. When asked if Andrew should be part of the steering committee, Jeff said that he would be stepping down as Chair of the Conservation Commission and that Andrew would be taking over as Chair in which case, he would be involved at least from the Conservation Commission perspective.

With the time remaining in the meeting, Howard asked Barbara for her thoughts as the Chair of the Planning Commission. She questioned how we would go about engaging the public and bringing them into the conversation since this is an area of great interest to the town residents. She offered advice from her experience with the Town Master Plan saying a big part of their work was how to define the questions to ask and what we would hope to get out of that process. She said this takes good moderators to bring the best out of the group. If it is similar to the process for developing the Master Plan, it was helpful to bring disparate

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groups together in their own settings at times that were comfortable to them. She concurred with Jen that you don't want the steering committee to be too large.

John wanted to add one perspective to this process having to do with one area of interest from the college with which he was tasked around raising public awareness about the climate emergency and its relevance to them. There was agreement that communications is an important aspect to this plan and should be part of its intent.

There was discussion on what is the next step. One suggestion was to have Andrew step through the components of an Enhanced Energy Plan and then figuring out where it is not comprehensive enough. Ross said Andrew had the components of an Enhanced Energy Plan already written out and should not require an entire meeting to discuss it. Howard said he would check with Andrew to get his thoughts on whether it would be helpful to have a meeting to discuss these components.

The meeting concluded with figuring out the next steps. John is going to have discussions with the college to identify a representative for these discussions. Jen is going to speak with Kathleen about town representation. Howard will check with Andrew about setting up a subsequent meeting and will provide minutes and a summary from this discussion.

Meeting adjourned