

## SUNDERLAND ENERGY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES, WEDNESDAY, JULY 12, 2023

Present: Jeff Dexter, Dixie Zens, Andrew McKeever, John Herrington, Dan Levering, Katharine Clemow

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jeff Dexter at 7:02 pm.

Andrew McKeever was appointed to take minutes.

Dan Levering was welcomed to his first meeting as a member of the energy committee.

The minutes of the previous meeting were amended to correct the spelling of Dan Levering's name when joined the group.

The minutes were adopted as amended, unanimously.

Jeff gave an update on the committee's application for a MERP, or Municipal Energy Resilience Program. This is a program under Vermont Act 172. MERP provides the following funding opportunities:

- Up to \$4,000 Community Capacity Building [Mini Grants](#)  
Free building [Energy Resilience Assessments](#).
- Up to \$500,000 Implementation Grants for weatherization, thermal efficiency, and supplementing/replacing fossil fuel heating systems with more efficient renewable or electric versions.

The \$4,000 Mini-Grant Application was approved. The \$\$ has not been formally received by the town yet. Jeff will check on this with Callie Fishburn, Bennington Country Regional Commission (BCRC) as she is the coordinator of the Act 172 process.

Discussion followed on whether to set up a separate account for this money or merge it with an existing town account. More info to come from Callie.

Andrew described his thoughts on the energy forum that would be the recipient of much of the \$4000 in MERP money. The format would be as follows:

4 panelists, with a moderator to discuss how to most effectively and efficiently push a transition from fossil-fuel energy sources to renewables. The suggested date for the forum was Thursday, Oct. 26.

Andrew recommended choosing the Manchester Community Library's Hunter Room for the forum, which is estimated to last about 90 minutes. It was less expensive than some of the other venues under consideration.

After discussion, the committee agreed.

While this will primarily be an effort by the Sunderland Energy Committee, the committee hopes to engage and solicit help from other local energy committees, such as publicity and possible "day of" assistance.

While the format has yet to be fully fleshed out, it will likely involve questions, answers, and conversation between the four panelists. The second half of the forum would be audience Q&A, supplemented by other moderator questions to the panel. Another component would be an effort to listen and understand different points of view and see where common ground can be found.

Andrew will confirm the two panelists who have indicated a willingness to take part: Neale Lunderville, CEO of Vermont Natural Gas, and Matt Coat, executive director of the Vermont Fuel Dealers Association.. Cat will contact her former college professor, Curt Staiger, to see if he is available. Andrew will reach out to State Senator Becca White to see if she is interested and available.

The committee will be using money from the MERP fund to pay for whatever hotel expenses (and hopefully use a Sunderland hotel), a pre-forum dinner, and \$100 honorariums. This is not anticipated to exceed the \$4000 in MERP funds.

Discussion continued re possible audits or other work to improve the energy efficiency of both buildings. Jeff discussed the town energy audit. Callie Fishburn (BCRC) had suggested trying to get a (more inclusive) Level 2 audit done on the town hall, which the BCRC would help with. This would help us should we apply for funding from Act 172 for solar panels, another heat pump set-up for the meeting room, etc. Jeff said Callie feels a new energy audit on the town garage was unnecessary beyond what is already in place: the April, 2022 full audit performed by Heat Squad.

Jeff then led a discussion about the towns of Strafford, Vt. And Bradford, Vt.'s Green Procurement Policy(GPP). Jeff is getting a template of the Policy and will insert Sunderland info and then distribute this to the Committee members for discussion and then submission to the Town Select Board. Jeff noted and the Committee agreed that input from Town Clerk Susan Whitney and Road Supervisor Marc Johnstone is also an important part of this process.

GPPs have been around since the mid-90's and are used by many hundreds of towns, counties, states and the federal government. Most private corporations, non-profits and other types of organizations have adopted them. Member Dan Levering gave the Committee good info about how Williams College has been successfully using such a policy for many years.

In our case, a GPP would allow the Town to rely on Energy Committee recommendations (after exhaustive research) for the purchase of small and large capital expenditures (e.g. equipment). (For more info, see the attached wording used at the beginning of both the Strafford and Bradford town governments' approved GPPs.)

Lastly, it was noted the town's Municipal Plan (adopted in 2018) includes many clean-energy goals that a GPP can easily help address so that our town can meet its goals.

There was no new business.

The next meeting of the committee is scheduled for Aug. 23 at 7 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 pm.

## **Overview**

The purpose of this policy is to commit the Town of Sunderland to a high level of fiscal, social, and environmental responsibility in the procurement of energy-related capital improvements, and to define the process for procuring these products. The Town of Sunderland will prioritize improvements, systems, vehicles and equipment, and other energy-related products that are energy-efficient and powered by, or are capable of being powered by, renewable energy sources, and will eliminate, wherever feasible, the use of fossil fuel.

## **Background**

The Town of Sunderland has several energy and climate goals, including:

(insert our climate and energy goals here.)

With each purchase of goods and services, the Town has the opportunity to not only further these goals, but also to lead by example for the rest of the community and demonstrate the value of environmentally sound purchasing decisions.

This Policy provides a framework to utilize when making purchasing decisions, helping to ensure that the purchases the Town makes are in line with the stated energy-goals of its Municipal Plan and any other objectives related to energy and climate change.

The Policy also outlines procedures that ensure the Town: utilizes the resources and incentives of the State's energy efficiency utility (i.e. Efficiency Vermont) and the Town's electric utility (i.e. GMP), selects products that best meet the Town's operational needs, and reduces ongoing operational costs.

This Policy utilizes input from the Sunderland Energy Committee (SEC) to review equipment proposals pertaining to necessary purchases for consistency with this Policy, and to monitor, review, and, if necessary, develop new procedures and practices related to this Policy. The SEC will report progress and findings to the Selectboard as appropriate, including any proposed alterations to the Policy. A report on the effectiveness of the Policy (e.g. helping us meet our Plan's energy goals, saving taxpayer dollars, etc) would also be made annually at Town Meeting.

Nothing in this policy shall be construed as requiring a department, vendor, or contractor to procure goods or services that do not perform adequately for their intended use or are not available at a reasonable price or in a reasonable period of time. Decisions regarding adequacy or suitability for use shall be at the discretion of the Select Board, in consultation with the (Sunderland Energy Committee).