

**TOWN OF WILLISTON
ENERGY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
January 10, 2024**

***Meeting held in the Town Annex Conference room and by teleconference (Zoom).**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Reed Parker, Vice Chair Kevin Thorley, Maria Gingras, Matt Wood and Kevin Batson.
ADMINISTRATION: Melinda Scott, Energy & Community Development Planner
ABSENT: Eric Hillmuth, Dar Gibson
OTHERS PRESENT: Alex Levin, Vermont Energy Education Program

1. Call to Order

Chair Reed Parker called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Public Comment

Chapin Kaynor stated he wanted to speak about the concept of solar canopies as part of the proposed own Hall parking lot renovations. He provided some background information as to his viewpoint on solar canopies. He thinks the town cannot meet its requirements for solar generation without solar canopies. He thinks there is nothing to be done for this budget season, but if for some reason the bond for the parking lot doesn't pass, he would recommend revisiting the issue. He thinks solar canopies need to be part of the future to meet the town's energy goals.

Kevin Thorley said he had participated in the regional energy plan update and they had modeled how much land in Williston would be needed for solar generation, and he thinks the Energy Committee should review the results from that working group.

Chapin also recommends battery backup to replace gas-powered generators. He wonders whether Green Mountain Power (GMP) would be interested in partnering with the town on solar canopies and battery backup. Reed Parker said GMP is willing to meet with municipalities to talk about energy resiliency and perhaps the Energy Committee should reach out to them.

3. Approve Draft December 27, 2023 Meeting Minutes

The Committee reviewed the draft December 27, 2023 meeting minutes. Kevin Batson made a motion to approve the minutes as written. Kevin Thorley seconded the motion. The motion was carried with a 5-0 vote.

4. VEEP Workshops

Alex Levin introduced himself and provided information about the workshops. Workshops are geared towards adults who don't know much about keeping their homes warm in winter. They are not geared towards those who already have a lot of knowledge about energy efficiency, like the Energy Committee.

The DAML Library has arranged a workshop to be presented on Wednesday, February 7. The topic is Home Heat Transfer. The Committee agreed to cosponsor the event potentially in partnership with Sustainable Williston. The Committee discussed outreach for the event. Kevin Thorley suggested reaching out to the Home Energy Survey respondents to publicize the event. Melinda asked about doing a mailing about the event to all the households surveyed, and others agreed.

Matt Wood asked about presenting a workshop at Williston Woods on Home Heat Transfer or on another topic. Kevin Batson noted that at Williston Woods there are mobile homes, so could the workshop be tailored to that type of housing? Melinda mentioned doing the Electrification workshop instead and Alex stated that it could be a hybrid workshop. Kevin Thorley suggested inviting people we know from Williston Woods to attend the event at the library and give suggestions as to how they thought the content should be modified. Reed Parker suggested inviting VGS to a workshop at Williston Woods, as they have a program targeted at weatherizing mobile homes. Melinda said this would be a good opportunity to distribute Energy Saving Kits and materials.

Melinda said on February 7 cannot attend the workshop due to another commitment. She asked if anyone else was available to help that night, Matt Wood said he is available. Kevin Thorley said he could ask members of Sustainable Williston if anyone is available to help.

5. **Comprehensive Plan Review**

Melinda stated that soon the Energy Committee will be starting the update of the Enhanced Energy Plan. As an introduction to that, Melinda thought it might be helpful to have a broader discussion of livability, resilience and equity, using Taft Corners as a focal point of that discussion. She noted that planning is an exercise for the long-term, that goals may take decades to implement, so that is a principle to keep in mind as the Committee looks at the next Energy Plan.

Kevin Batson pointed out the incongruity of the Vision Plan to the existing situation with very wide state highways, which do not support walking and biking. He also pointed out that urban streetscapes with tall buildings don't necessarily work in Williston. Tall buildings shade the streets too much and block the view of the mountains, which seems out of character with the rest of Williston. The town should be very careful with where tall buildings are allowed. Melinda pointed out that the Form Based Code has strictly defined standards, with different building height allowances depending on the location.

Melinda said that Kevin brings up an important point about the State highways, that as long as they remain under state control, the town is constrained by that and has very limited options for the streetscape. However, the plan for grid streets will enable the town to shape a lot of streets the desired way, oriented towards people first.

The Committee discussed the height restrictions allowed under the Form Based Code. Melinda explained that the newly enacted HOME act preempts the local regulations by requiring an extra story and 40% density bonus for developments that include 20% or more affordable housing.

Matt expressed concern with all the new grid streets and how that could exacerbate traffic at Taft Corners, and Melinda stated the grid streets would help disperse traffic. Reed mentioned Zephyr Rd and how people use that as a connector between Rte 2 and 2A and drive very fast despite the 25mph speed limit and all the speed bumps. Kevin Thorley asked what options the town has to install traffic calming measures on existing streets, and Melinda said the town can do that on town-owned roads. Melinda stated there is a conflict between streets designed to slow and calm traffic, and streets designed for high speeds.

Reed noted the size of the Growth Center is small relative to the size of the town. He said it is very convenient to get places when you live in the midst of it. Kevin Thorley said that the Growth Center allows the town to remain predominately rural. Matt noted that development is still happening in other parts of town. Melinda said that while the town has the goal of concentrating most development in the Growth Center but still has defined the sewer service area in the Residential Zoning District as a place where development will happen. The ARZD, however, does not have sewer service so development there is much more difficult and expensive. Plus, in the ARZD there is the requirement for properties 10.5 acres and greater to permanently protect 75% of the parcel as open space.

Melinda said that another part of the Taft Corners Vision Plan is to set aside parks and open space for people who live in Taft Corners to enjoy. Besides the requirements to set aside open space in ARZD developments, the town has the Environmental Reserve Fund to conserve land.

The Committee discussed walkability in Taft Corners and how businesses are required to have entrances facing the street but that these entrances are mostly closed off. Melinda reiterated that change takes a long time, so that something that seems incongruous today may be totally normal 50 years from now. Matt noted that people are already starting to walk around Taft Corners more regularly.

Kevin T asked how does this tie back to resilience, and Melinda said where people live, how the streets are designed, affect the town's resilience in the long run. The Plan for Taft Corners will make the town more resilient. Kevin asked what role the Energy Committee should play in this. He mentioned the vision for a transit center as one example. How can the Energy Committee help the town do its part in building the necessary infrastructure? Melinda said the Energy Committee should continue to advocate for the town to implement goals that it has committed to doing.

Kevin T mentioned GMP's plan to underground utility lines. Is there a role for the Energy Committee to advocate for this in Williston? Maybe the Committee should reach out and start these conversations with GMP.

Kevin T said he attended the Selectboard meeting to discuss the Capital Budget. He said he is disappointed in the lack of accountability with respect to electric vehicle adoption. Melinda said that the Planning Commission transmitted a memo explaining their position that the town needs to lean into the future and invest in opportunities to further the goals of the Town Plan. Kevin said studies show that people are more likely to adopt new technologies if they see others doing it, so demonstration projects are important.

Kevin B asked if the Energy Committee should reach out to GMP to see if they would be willing to partner with the town on certain resilience projects like solar canopies and battery backup. Melinda recommended holding off on that for now, until the town gets the MERP resilience assessments done, which will show opportunities to implement resilience projects like these.

6. Other Business

- Next Living Green article is due on January 20, so if anyone wants to volunteer, to let him know.
- Milton Husky Facility is doing a demonstration of how they are reducing use of plastic in their manufacturing facility on Monday, January 15. They sent Reed an invitation in response to his article on plastic recycling. Is anyone available to attend? If so, get back to Reed.

7. Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.