

**TOWN OF WILLISTON
ENERGY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
September 27, 2023**

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

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Reed Parker, Vice Chair Kevin Thorley, Dar Gibson, Matt Wood, Eric Hillmuth and Maria Gingras.

ADMINISTRATION: Melinda Scott, Energy & Community Development Planner

ABSENT: Kevin Batson

OTHERS PRESENT: Spencer Dole and Dylan Giambatista (VGS)

1. Call to Order

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

2. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

3. VGS Presentation (Dylan Giambatista, VGS)

Dylan Giambatista of VGS gave a presentation about VGS and how it is serving its customers and addressing the new requirements of Act 18 (The Affordable Heat Act). He stated VGS is seeking feedback from the town and is open to hearing the Energy Committee's thoughts, questions and concerns.

Dylan noted the challenges in the workforce shortage and how VGS is working with other partners to address that challenge.

Kevin Thorley asked whether VGS can provide the town information about the uptake of their heat pump and heat pump hot water heater leasing and purchasing programs in Williston, and how the Energy Committee can help promote those programs.

Melinda Scott asked about VGS's program to weatherize mobile homes, and whether they are interested in promoting that program at mobile home communities in Williston such as Williston Woods. Reed noted that people living in mobile homes often report that they are cold. Could heat pump technology benefit them?

Melinda Scott mentioned neighborhoods that were built with electric resistance heat and whether VGS would promote converting to heat pumps in those neighborhoods, which are ideal because they already have adequate electric capacity.

Reed noted that there are cost barriers for low income households in making the upfront investment to energy efficient equipment. Dylan said that the Affordable Heat Act requires VGS to serve a certain percentage of low-income households with "installed

measures” and that they need to make it affordable for those households. Eric Hillmuth mentioned the leasing programs as one way of doing that. Dylan noted that access to low or no interest financing is critical. Maria noted that a lot of the rebates are targeted to moderate income households. Low income households have a hard time accessing financing due to credit issues.

Dylan said that State Treasurer Mike Peichak will be holding a listening session for Energy Stakeholders to discuss financing mechanisms. He will provide a date for that.

Kevin Thorley asked what VGS is doing to work with developers to install heat pumps in new developments. Dylan said they are working on offering products in a bundled fashion, and they have great interest in this and would like to find large-scale deployment opportunities.

Dylan spoke about the potential of geothermal heating and cooling.

Reed mentioned the proposed developments in Williston and said it would be good to approach those developers before they begin construction. Dylan said heat pumps are incentivized under the Affordable Heat Act so VGS is working on ways to promote and deploy them. Kevin Thorley asked how the town can work with them to strongly encourage developers to choose electrification over fossil fuels.

Reed stated that a developer is retrofitting a few large apartments to accommodate solar and that it would have been better to have installed solar in the first place.

4. Approve Draft September 13, 2023 Meeting Minutes

The Committee reviewed the draft September 13, 2023 meeting minutes. Maria Gingras made a motion to approve the minutes as written. Reed Parker seconded the motion. The motion was carried with a 5-0 vote.

5. Energy Considerations for Community Center Scoping Study

Reed Parker gave an introduction to the topic. Melinda Scott added that the Community Center Scoping Committee would like the Energy Committee’s input on a proposed future Community Center. She listed the questions they would like the Energy Committee to consider (Energy Committee’s responses are embedded):

1. Preference for reusing the existing DAML building or building a new energy efficient building.

Energy Committee has a strong preference for reusing an existing building as more environmentally friendly. Kevin Thorley added that energy efficiency can be achieved by retrofitting an existing building and it’s better from an environmental standpoint to do that than to break new ground.

2. Similar preference for locating the Community/Rec Center in a new or existing (unknown) structure.

Same response as #1 – strong preference for reusing and retrofitting an existing building over constructing a new building.

3. Are there specific sustainability goals or benchmark programs the Town will be looking to achieve (LEED Silver/Gold/Platinum, Net-Zero, Living Building Challenge)?

The Energy Committee did not have a strong opinion on this. Maria Gingras stated the town should focus on measures that demonstrate energy efficiency to the public in an accessible way. Dar Gibson mentioned the idea of using a space like the Christmas Tree Shop in Maple Tree Place, that it would be a way to anchor the MTP.

4. Does the Committee have a preference for locating a Community Center in the Village or the Growth Center?

Kevin Thorley said it's important to consider vehicle miles traveled in the location of a Community Center, thus putting it in the Growth Center would be preferred. Eric Hillmuth said maybe adding a wing to the library and establishing a Community Center in the Growth Center. Maria Gingras said locating a Community Center near the school might make some sense because the schools already attract a lot of people, families with kids. Maria said the location doesn't really matter as long as it's accessible by multiple modes of transportation. Kevin mentioned a hybrid solution of keeping DAML and creating a new community center in Taft Corners with a library annex. He noted many people who live in the Growth Center can't access the library.

Melinda stated the consultant Black River Design will attend the next meeting to provide more information and details about the study, and answer questions from the Energy Committee.

6. ARPA Funds Recommendations (final)

The Committee reviewed the ARPA Funds memo and recommended a few additional changes, namely adding a bullet under #1 to conduct an evaluation of the town's sidewalk and path network to assess connectivity and identify critical gaps and prioritize them. Maria also would like to add "raised crosswalks" to the bullet recommending reflective flashing beacons.

7. Other Business

Reed stated he will miss the October 11 meeting, and asked Kevin Thorley to assume the duties of Chair. Kevin Thorley stated he can.

Energy Fair Review – Reed stated for a recap, see the September Living Green article.

Living Green Articles – Reed Parker asked whether anyone was interested in writing the October Living Green article. Reed noted that the deadline to submit the article is earlier than usual, by October 21.

8. Adjournment

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