
**TOWN OF WILLISTON
ENERGY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
January 11, 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, Kevin Batson and Maria Gingras.

ADMINISTRATION: Melinda Scott, Energy & Community Development Planner

ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: None.

1. Call to Order

Chair Reed Parker called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

2. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

3. Approve Draft December 28, 2022 Meeting Minutes

The Committee reviewed the draft December 28, 2022 meeting minutes. Matt Wood noted a typographical error in the second to last paragraph on page 2. Melinda will correct it. Dar Gibson made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Matt Wood seconded the motion. The motion was carried with a 6-0 vote.

4. EV Ambassadors Next Steps

The Committee reviewed the draft guidelines for Ambassadors and gave verbal approval of the guidelines as amended. Melinda will send a copy of the guidelines to Erin for her review and approval. The town can obtain legal review if it is deemed necessary.

Maria Gingras asked whether the linked resources are intended for the Ambassadors or intended for distribution to potential EV purchasers. Melinda stated that they are intended for Ambassadors and include such resources as talking points, information sheets, presentations to give at your workplace. Kevin Thorley suggested that the Committee provide a packet of information to send to any potential EV buyer who contacts them (through the energy@willistonvt.org email). Reed Parker suggested including the Drive Electric rebate sheet.

Maria asked what the timeline for launching the program was. Matt noted that Presidents Day is when car dealerships typically have big sales, and Kevin Thorley said same with Superbowl day. The Committee agreed that the program should be launched as soon as possible. Melinda will seek the Assistant Manager's okay to launch the program.

5. Draft Website Review (continued)

The Committee discussed the website and changes that were made since the last meeting. Melinda added a News section on the righthand side of the Home Page, as well as large icons near the top of the page that link to topic areas. The Committee gave approval to launch the website to a few partners such as Sustainable Williston, Conservation Commission, Planning Commission and planning staff, to get additional feedback.

6. Climate Catalyst Innovation Project – progress to date

Melinda led a discussion about the Climate Catalyst Innovation Project and the progress that has been made to date. Melinda prefaced her presentation by saying that after developing a prioritization model for direct outreach to high energy-burdened households, she is not sure that direct outreach is the most effective method. Efficiency Vermont has stated they believe the most effective outreach they do is through existing local service providers like Food Shelves, Libraries, Schools. They work with these service providers to disseminate information. Melinda said this is similar to the work done by the Charlotte Energy Committee.

Kevin Thorley said that he spoke with someone at the VECAN conference from Vital Communities organization, who said that “meeting people where they’re at” – partnering with the Food Shelf has been the most effective ways of outreach for them. Kevin said the Energy Committee should partner with the Food Shelf and other local organizations. Reed said the Food Shelf services 8 other towns, so if the Committee wants to service just Williston, there would need to be a way of targeting those Williston residents. Reed said he could approach the Food Shelf Board to ask whether they would be interested in this and for how long.

Melinda suggested include DIY materials similar to what Charlotte does, and the library could be a good place to distribute materials as well. Melinda suggested also loaning out tools like a Kill-a-Watt through the library. Kevin Thorley said the library already loans out a Kill-a-Watt, and he suggested also getting a thermal camera to loan out. Reed Parker mentioned the Energy Savings kits that EVT gives out. Melinda said Vermont Gas has a similar kit and she can ask if they would supply the Energy Committee with some and the kits could be supplemented, if necessary, with other materials from a local hardware store. Melinda mentioned that the town may be getting an additional \$4,000 for outreach and education, so there is money to tap into for buying DIY materials to give out.

Melinda provided a presentation on the modeling she did for prioritizing outreach. She stated that the Energy Committee will need to think about what is the most effective way to leverage the grant funding to do outreach to low and moderate income households.

Maria asked if there is a way to leverage the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant to fill the financing gap after rebates and tax credits. Melinda said that might be possible but another way to close the gap would be to utilize the WRAPS program or through low interest Energy Loans, or through a revolving loan fund. Maria said leveraging those grant funds might be the key that makes the outreach worthwhile,

because it would enable people to actually figure out how to implement a project in a financially feasible way.

Kevin Thorley said a lot of people don't have the time to look up all the information on how to access funding or programs. Maybe there is an opportunity for the Energy Committee to take a stronger role in helping people figure out how to get projects done, perhaps by hiring an intern or other outside help.

Reed discussed the issue of renters versus homeowners. Kevin said there should be opportunities for one-on-one assistance, rather than just handing someone a piece of paper. Melinda stated the Energy Committee should also acknowledge all the one-on-one interaction the Energy Committee has been doing at all the pop-up events held last summer.

Kevin T. proposed hosting an event at the library, call in a professional to demonstrate and teach people how to do DIY projects. Melinda said there could be mockup walls to demonstrate how to use the materials.

Kevin T. asked about reaching out to landlords – would that be an avenue to explore? Melinda mentioned that the income qualified weatherization assistance applies to people who rent as well as homeowners. The landlords could get the weatherization work done for free.

Kevin T. said the weatherization services would not likely happen for several months whereas the DIY clinic could happen right away while people are waiting for the weatherization services. It could be a stop gap method. The Energy Committee could act as an energy ambassador, shepherding people in need to the programs that could help but do it in an engaging way by providing one-on-one assistance and free materials.

Kevin T. recommended holding such an event during the winter because it is pertinent. Melinda said it could be challenging to get a contractor to participate in this event because they are so busy right now, but on the other hand we may not need a contractor as these types of retrofits are fairly simple.

Maria suggested organizing a door-to-door volunteer campaign to help people complete DIY projects in their homes. Perhaps this could be organized for next year. Kevin B said EVT gives \$100 for DIY projects. Kevin T said this could be a good way to engage Sustainable Williston.

Melinda presented the modeling methods she used. She looked at 3 factors initially to create a scoring regime. 1) Energy Burden (a proxy for it, taking into consideration the heating fuel source, dwelling size, dwelling age and dwelling assessed value), 2) Emissions Intensity based on fuel source, 3) Home Value, as a proxy for owner income level. After a score was calculated incorporating the factors above, an Opportunity Score was added where 1) there were clusters of high scoring homes, 2) a home is heated with electric baseboard, and 3) where homes have solar arrays (to defray the cost of electricity).

Melinda showed the map of dwellings and their scores. Then she went over the analysis of what the model captured in terms of housing types, heating sources, housing age, and assessed value. So, the model works pretty well to prioritize dwellings appropriately, though it is not perfect.

Kevin T. said it's important to try to do the outreach on weatherization programs and incentives prior to next winter so that people can take advantage of these opportunities sooner rather than later. Reed said the Energy Committee can begin to take steps now to develop a comprehensive outreach program that includes the DIY elements as well as steering people towards the established programs and incentives. The outreach will take time.

Matt asked if the information about heating systems in the Listers data is accurate. Melinda says it definitely needs to be verified/ground truthed.

7. **Other Business**

Next Living Green article – The Committee discussed the topic of the next Living Green article. Home Energy Efficiency was mentioned as being timely to write about. Reed mentioned another idea. He has been working with a robotics team (fourth and fifth graders) and they wanted to write an article about why people should be composting their food scraps. The Committee decided to write about the first topic and save the second topic for a later issue. Reed will start a draft and share it around.

Matt mentioned that an article about the DPW garage solar array in February would be timely to provide information for town meeting and the ballot item.

8. **Adjournment**

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