



Regional Energy Committee

MINUTES

Friday November 19, 2021 at 4 PM

Zoom Meeting

Present: Rob Costantino, Nancy Faesy, Bill Christian, Bruce Lierman, Wayn Goodman, Ellen Maloney, Jim Hand, Jeannie Jenkins; Staff: Jim Sullivan and Callie Fishburn

1. **Welcome & Introductions:** Discussed the role of the regional energy committee relative to town energy committees; noted value of regional committee in helping to coordinate activities, provide guidance for BCRC staff initiatives, review renewable energy projects, and provide input/testimony on state energy plans and related rules and programs.

2. **Regional Solar Projects Update**
 - a. **Waite Cemetery Rd Project in Shaftsbury** - This committee had reviewed and offered suggestions when first submitted. Those recommendations have been incorporated into the plans. There have been no issues raised by the Town of Shaftsbury. Project should be a good addition to the region's renewable energy portfolio. No further input at this time.
 - b. **Chelsea Solar Project on Willow Rd in Bennington** – Resubmitted by developer pending approval of project at new site in Bennington. The relocated project would be on a preferred site identified in the town's energy plan and is supported by the town. The Willow Road project is not supported by the town, although it was determined to be not inconsistent with the Regional Energy Plan (other than being at variance with a town's determination). It is likely that the Willow Road project will be abandoned when the new project is approved – something to watch; BCRC will engage if it moves forward.

3. **Discussion of solar siting issues in Vermont** – The committee discussed recent PUC decisions as well as proposals by the Agency of Natural Resources to add more restrictions on the siting of net-metered solar projects. Particular concerns were raised over PUC findings related to aesthetic impacts that appear to overrule municipal determinations and contravene the Act 174 planning process. Also, an ANR effort to change PUC rules to make it more difficult to site a solar project that involves tree clearing. It was noted that ANR doesn't pursue such restrictions for other types of projects that involve much more tree clearing, thus inappropriately "demonizing" solar energy development. Also noted that if in-state renewable energy generation is excessively restricted, more electricity will have to be imported – likely from Hydro Quebec, which results in far more

forest clearing (happens that the trees are in Quebec and Labrador). The committee will follow developments on these issues and offer input to the PUC as appropriate.

4. Update and Discussion about BCRC's Enhanced Energy Program - Sullivan noted that some additional funding has been provided to RPCs to add capacity to energy-related work. Callie Fishburn has been hired as a full-time employee at the BCRC with about half of her time devoted to energy projects. Fishburn described work she has been doing since starting in September: reaching out to municipal energy committees and planning commissions to identify possible implementation projects, supporting NeighborWorks' Heat Squad building weatherization program in the region, helping coordinate the impressive Northshire and Southshire Window Dressers projects (close to 450 window inserts built for local homes!), and connecting with other RPC energy staff around the state. Ideas for BCRC's energy program going forward: energy committee roundtables and collaborative projects, evaluating municipal government energy demand and helping find ways to use renewable energy to meet those energy requirements, coordinating with towns and GMP regarding targeting improvements to the electricity distribution network to support deployment of renewable energy generation projects in preferred locations, helping energy committees and planning commissions integrate energy planning with land use and transportation planning.
5. Discussion of Potential New Members and Regional Energy Committee Meetings - Decided that it would make sense to meet on a bi-monthly basis, but call extra meetings as needed (staff will work with the committee to identify a preferred day/time). Also, any suggestions for new committee members can be forwarded to Sullivan and he will follow-up.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:05 PM.