

MONTAGUE ENERGY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES December 17, 2024

Present: Tim Van Egmond, Sally Pick, Ariel Elan, Jason Burbank, Pam Hanold, Ray Sebold, David Dempsey, Chris Nolan-Zeller

Designate facilitator and scribe: Tim, David

Updates and Discussion with Chris Nolan-Zeller, Town Asst. Administrator

The installation of a photo voltaic (PV) system on the roof of the Department of Public Works garage has been included in the planning for the FY 2027 capital plan. There is still work that needs to be done before we can move forward, but Chris has spoken with representatives from Eversource and they agree that there are no large obstacles to attaching the system to the Eversource grid. There may need to be an upgrade of the transformer at the garage, but that is a relatively minor issue.

The PV system for the Town Hall annex is beginning. It was reduced slightly due to connectivity issues, but the contracts have been let and the permitting process is underway.

Chris Nolan-Zeller spoke of two new interactive programs from Eversource. Grid-Twin is a more detailed version of the Grid Capacity Map, which is updated as new grid work is done. Another piece of software that will be available in the fall of 2025 will include more detailed information for specific sites on the map that will help with planning connectivity.

Ariel suggested that Chris contact Greg Garrison, who is on the Capital Planning Committee and is associated with Northeast Solar, if he has questions about PV issues.

Approve minutes from Nov. 26, 2024 MEC meeting: The minutes were approved with a few amendments.

State & federal level energy-related policies & legislation updates.

Chris Nolan-Zeller reported that there is \$4.5 million in requests in the pipeline through a variety of federal and state programs. The Biden administration is working to get as much funding allocated to the states as possible before the change in administrations to protect it from “claw-backs.” Sally worries that some programs, such as the funding for green energy reimbursements for municipalities and non-profits may be vulnerable. Individuals and corporations get the subsidies as tax credits, but municipalities and non-profits need other funding for their subsidies.

Discussion of Town exploring possibility of becoming a Climate Leader Community

As per Chris Mason’s slides there are six requirements for moving from being a Green Community to a Climate Leader Community. We have already met the first two (being a Green Community and having an Energy Committee). The next four are:

- 1) Committing to decarbonization by 2050, 2) Creating a Road Map for Decarbonization,
- 3) Adopting a ZEV-first vehicle policy, 4) Adopting the Specialized Stretch Code.

Chris highlighted the Energy Efficiency Community Block Grant (EECBG), which is just getting underway as a great starting point for developing the decarbonization road map. The town has added the Turners Falls Senior Center to the study (with separate funding). The ZEV-first vehicle policy is clearly doable. The main sticking point is opposition to the Opt-In Stretch Code because of its perceived higher costs. Chris spoke with the town's building inspector, Bill Ketchen, who fears that higher costs will exasperate an already difficult housing availability situation and will price out lower income people. Sally pointed out that there was information from various sources to contradict the expectation that the code would increase costs more than 1%. Mr. Ketchen has offered to come to a meeting and discuss the situation. We decided to do more research before we invited him. Chris will speak with administrators in nearby towns/cities that have adopted the code to see what the effect has been and Sally will speak with a "green contractor" and a friend on the Ashfield Energy Committee. Pam pointed out that the same arguments were used in opposition to the current stretch code. Ray suggested that we speak with Bob Obear since he is actively building in the town and has been associated with various town committees over the years.

Sally has asked Chris to put a link to the Energy Saver Home Loan Program (ESHLP) prominently on the town's website. The ESHLP is meant to guide lower and medium income citizens through a process of borrowing money from the Green Bank to install new solar equipment and other improvements such that the savings are greater than the loan costs. This is different from the Mass Save program in many critical ways, but is not well known. We discussed how to spread the word about his opportunity. David will contact Center for Eco Technology (CET), which is one of the advisory groups supporting the program to see how they are marketing the program and if they can help publicize it in our area.

Legislative and technical issues, special projects.

Passage of the Climate Bill in the Mass Legislature has caused concerns about loss of local control over siting of large PV fields and large scale battery storage facilities. Jo Comerford did get language in the bill to not adversely impact agriculture. There is also funding to support legal challenges by communities of less than 7500.

Community Planning For Solar with U. Mass. Clean Energy Ext.

- **Exploring next steps**

See DPW Garage discussion above

Sally wants to revisit the plan and decide what we should focus on next.

Schools and Energy.

David had an email from Heath Cummings on December 3 saying that the first visit by the consultants was scheduled for December 4th, but because Heath was on leave, not other information was available,

Energy Related Town Facility Updates. TABLED

- Information on net zero & energy efficient techniques, including embodied carbon.

- **Building Decarbonization Roadmap for nine Town facilities, funded by the Energy Efficiency & Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) from DOER. See discussion above**

- **MA Building Electrification Accelerator (BEA) offer to help Montague explore town building electrification: ideas of buildings to explore with them. TABLED**

Recruiting more Energy Committee members. Tim is working on some potential candidates

Helping Town Prioritize Energy-Saving Projects for Upcoming State & Federal Grants. TABLED

Energy Saver Home Loan Program (ESHLP) and promotion of program. See discussion above

Adding missing approved minutes to the Town web site. Tim will search the archives.

Other topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of meeting.

Members were encouraged to attend the FRCOG Energy Committee meetings for new ideas of what other towns are doing.

Announcements (no discussion). None