

Montague Energy Committee (MEC) Minutes 1/28/2025

Facilitator (Tim) and scribe (Sally)

Present: Sally Pick, Tim Van Egmond, Ariel Elan, Ray Sebold, Jason Burbank, Pam Hanold.

Guest: Chris Nolan-Zeller (Montague Assistant Administrator), Kent Hicks (East Branch Studio), Tamsin Flanders (FRCOG), Thomas Taaffe (Brick House), Layla Hayzen.

Discussion of Town exploring possibility of becoming a Climate Leader Community

- **Discussion with Kent Hicks about Specialized Opt-In Stretch Code**
 - His company has been building to residential Passive House specifications in more recently years and previously to net zero. All Passive House homes meet Specialized Opt-In Stretch Code.
 - Basics to meet code fairly easy.
 - Materials now off-the-shelf.
 - Air tightness easy with membranes, tapes, and mechanical ventilation standard (even with base Stretch Code) and are critical.
 - For more complex buildings, Kent's company may do several blower door tests along the way to find air leaks and seal them to ensure house is airtight.
 - Focused on good air quality with ventilation.
 - Goal to save clients as much money as possible both in upfront and operational costs.
 - All of his houses have solar with as small an array as possible.
 - Homes he builds that are 1,200-1,400 SF are heated with one mini split, so solar can be small.
 - Wall and ceiling insulation is cellulose.
 - Double-stud walls.
 - Have also used repurposed foam insulation (available and a money and carbon savings)
 - Building to Specialized Code is an investment in quality.
 - Embodied carbon calculator is available online.
 - Build rectangular homes to make easier to standardize and keep costs down.
 - No ducts needed with one mini split—lowers HVAC installation costs.

- Do not install combustion-based appliances; use all electric and powered by solar.
- People very comfortable; no call-backs for problems with heating being insufficient.
- Kent is happy to share some building specs he uses and some cost comparisons to standard Stretch Code.
- Ray asked: What about cost of solar, solar-ready (if have mixed fuel, AKA some fossil fuel) house that meets Specialized Stretch Code? Kent doesn't build mixed-fuel houses.
- Operational costs will likely quickly make up possible additional upfront costs.
- Willing to talk with building inspector.
- **Discussion with Chris Nolan-Zeller, Town Asst. Administrator about becoming a CLC**
 - Spoke with Paul McLatchy, Ashfield Town Administrator re discussing Specialized Stretch Code adoption in their town
 - Energy committee led process.
 - Select board raised initial concerns, but issue went to Town Meeting.
 - Concerns re upfront added costs raised but lower operational costs won out at Town Meeting.
 - Reminded people new code only applies to building new homes.
 - Younger people at TM expressed wanting to build to Opt-In code even if Specialized Stretch Code not adopted.
 - Important to think carefully about how MEC presents Specialized Stretch Code.

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

- Power Options working on developing first energy improvement studies.
- Carnegie Library was accepted for a \$100,000 for design to expand or build new library.
 - Option of moving building still on the table.

Approve minutes from December 17, 2024 MEC meeting: Tabled

State & federal level energy-related policies & legislation updates

- Legislative and technical issues, special projects.
 - Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Core Team consideration of winsert project (Tamsin Flanders, FRCOG)
 - MVP focused more on housing and food resilience.
 - MVP 2.0 choosing one project to do with others.
 - Exploring a pilot community build winsert project:
 - Would hire 1-2 coordinators to create publicity, track requests, go home-to-home to measure and cut out winsert pieces.
 - Volunteers: people getting winserts, others.
 - Couple days of community build workshops.
 - Easy to provide winserts to low-income renters, owners (most housing vulnerable), as they are held in place without any hardware.
 - Potential for community building.
 - Would result in reduction in home energy costs, increasing comfort.
 - Concern raised by MEC about ability of residents to install and remove winserts if have physical limitations; discussed ideas for making more accessible.
 - Very soon, MVP will ask for feedback from Town residents on idea.
 - Would MEC help promote program, videoing workshops, other roles?
 - Several MEC members said that they would help.
 - Intergenerational opportunities?
 - Brick House would look to engage youth.
 - Outreach planned to Tech School.
 - Senior Center is involved in MVP team.

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

- Review Plan, see if there's anything else to put in motion.
 - Will hold off on discussing solar plans until status of federal incentives are clearer.
- Solar powered water pumps possibility.
 - Include in next Green Communities grant?
 - Ray: Pumps draw high amps. May not be best use of PV.

Schools and Energy: Tabled.

Energy Related Town Facility Updates: Tabled.

- Building Decarbonization Roadmap for nine Town facilities, funded by the Energy Efficiency & Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) from DOER: see above.
- MA Building Electrification Accelerator (BEA) offer to help Montague explore town building electrification: ideas of buildings to explore with them.
- Information on net zero & energy efficient techniques, including embodied carbon.

Writing MEC annual report for Town (due Th, March 6)

- Tim will draft report and send it out to members, who can reply ONLY to Tim with edits, comments.

Recruiting more Energy Committee members:

- Layla Hayzen attended meeting and may attend more.

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

- **Green Communities grant idea:**
 - Weatherize and add heat pump to Unity Park office (may already be included in EECBG grant evaluation)?

Energy Saver Home Loan Program (ESHLP) and promotion of program. Tabled.

Adding missing approved minutes to the Town web site.

- Missing January, February, March, June, October 2024 minutes.
- Tim will have Chris post Jan. & Feb. minutes on MEC webpages.

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

- National Elders Climate Action Zoom 7pm tonight.
- Climate Teach-In for Greenfield, Turners Falls residents, businesses re climate risks.
- Bill McKibben's talk at Amherst College is on YouTube.
- 2 recent articles in Boston Globe saying heat pumps work well in cold climates, despite what some say.

Plan agenda for next meeting**Action Steps:**

- Tim sending out agenda, sending Jan. & Feb. 2024 minutes to Chris Nolan for posting on MEC webpage, emailing David about missing March 2024 minutes.
- Sally will forward to MEC specs, costs of houses meeting Specialized Stretch Code from Kent Hicks.