

Craftsbury Conservation Commission
Approved Minutes – November 23, 2015

Present: Farley Brown, June Cook, Susie Houston (Sel Bd), Carol Maroni, Diane Morgan, Elinor Osborn, Leah Szafranski, Steve Wright

Guests: Jim Flint, Amelia Fritz

Minutes: Minutes of November 23, 2015, were approved.

Act 56 Presentation: Carol gave an in-depth presentation of ACT 56 which replaces SPEED, previous legislation governing Vermont's Energy and Carbon footprint. ACT 56, (RES – Renewable Energy Standard) established 3 categories: Tiers I, II, and III.

Copy of Carol's notes:

Tier I: It converts existing total renewables targets into a total renewable energy requirement that rises from 55 percent of a utility's sales in 2017 to 75 percent in 2032. A utility may meet this requirement by owning renewable energy or renewable energy credits (RECs) from any plant, as long as the plant's energy is capable of delivery to New England.

Tier II: It creates a distributed renewable generation category that rises from one percent of a utility's sales in 2017 to 10 percent in 2032. A utility may meet this category through renewable energy or RECs from plants that come into service after June 30, 2015 and are five MW or less and directly connected to the Vermont utility grid or are net metering systems for which the utility retires the RECs. This category counts toward the total renewable energy category.

Tier III: It creates a separate energy transformation category that rises from two percent in 2017 to 12 percent in 2032, except that small municipal utilities will not have to meet this category until 2019. A utility may meet this category through additional distributed renewable generation or energy transformation projects.

Energy transformation projects must have commenced on or after January 1, 2015 and deliver energy goods or services other than electric generation and must result in a net reduction in fossil fuel consumption by a utility's customers and the attributable greenhouse gases. The act states that energy transformation projects may include home weatherization or other thermal energy efficiency measures, air source or geothermal heat pumps, and other measures.

Added note: The act also includes provisions relating to the ownership and retirement of RECs for net metering systems and to the adoption of setbacks and screening requirements for solar electric generation plants.

Carol distributed a map showing where VEC – Vermont Electric Coop—encourages new distributed generation development. The map shows neutral areas and non-preferred areas. Craftsbury, (served from the Irasburg substation), Albany, Irasburg, Lowell, Westfield, Troy, and Jay are in a Not-Preferred area, while a portion of Craftsbury, served from the Eden substation still has some capacity and is in the preferred area.

General feeling is this Vermont law requires extensive development of Vermont's landscape. Reference was made to Robert Roper's (Stowe) comment that 1/3 (200 miles) of Vermont's ridgelines and 30,000 acres of solar panels would be required to meet renewable energy buildouts.

VEC has 34,000 customers. To meet RES, VEC needs 480,000 MWs. To meet the goal in 2017 requires 40 acres, and 20 acres each year thereafter through 2032, based on current usage. The Dept. of Public Service estimates 6 acres of solar per MW. VEC feels 10 acres required because of setbacks. Placement of solar is not only on open fields but also can include clearing of forests.

Towns, similar to Craftsbury, with open land and no zoning or protections makes it a vulnerable community for development of renewable energy projects with solar fields by developers. Additionally, with the development of taller industrial wind turbines, smaller hills are being considered for industrial wind, such as, Kidder hill in Irasburg.

Carol feels that the requirements of ACT 56 driving the placement of renewable energy sources poses the largest risk to the community.

Issue Raised: Carol noted that the incentives drive the building of renewable energy in places where the transmission capacity is restrained, and, therefore, requires one renewable source to be shut down for another to run. The goal needs to be increasing the amount of renewables on the grid, not just increasing the number of renewable projects being built.

Concern: Paying extra due diligence to protect our landscape.

Farley reported on concerns about zoning raised at the Planning Commission. Other ways to go about protections, i.e., siting standards, via ordinance. There are ordinances for ATV's, Class 4 roads, Flood Plains, Current Use.

Goal: Use different tools to get more on the books with lesser means, via policy, ordinances, etc.

Jim Flint: Jim gave an update on the donation of a South Craftsbury Rd. property donated to Wonder&Wisdom by Wells Fargo. The WF's program removes deteriorated properties from neighborhoods. The property has no heat, plumbing; floors are torn out.

He outlined the potential multiple uses of the property after the existing house is demolished and a 2-acre greenspace is created. The property is adjacent to ski trails and could serve as a nice trailhead with paths to town property. Ideas range from trails, outdoor learning laboratory, natural playground for children, kiosk with announcements, amphitheater, community park. Project has many possibilities for engaging the community.

The project ties in with landscape preservation and open space goals. The estimate of \$26,000 for demolition could be reduced to \$20,000 with potential salvage. WellFargo will pay \$10,000 towards demolition; a neighbor has pledged \$1,000.

Community Project Visit: Farley reported on the land protection committee. The Planning Commission is updating land-use maps and river corridors. The commission created a map in 2010 and Outdoor Center has a map on line of wildlife habitats. Planning commission has maps of conserved areas (land easements) and of land in current use.

Conservation Commission Fund: Discussion centered on process to establish a conservation reserve fund, whether it should be established by the commission or select board, and potential fundings.

June moved the commission establish a conservation fund with funding resources to be investigated. Carol seconded the motion. Voted unanimously.

Irasburg: Steve will send information to update members on what is happening in Irasburg re proposal for wind turbines to be installed on Kidder Hill. Letters of support from area communities have been sent to Irasburg select board in its opposition to the wind turbines.

TO BE DONE:

(1) Write conservation commission report for Town Report

(2) Resolve question of how Conservation Commission Reserve Fund should be established

(3) Write article to submit to select board for annual town meeting warning

(3) Create a structure for a fund and funding mechanisms

The commission will hold its next meeting on Monday, January 4, 2017, at 7 p.m. in the Town Hall.

Submitted by:

June Pichel Cook