

Minutes of the Northfield Energy Committee 2-18-19

Attending: Susan O'Connor, Alex Strycky, Andrew Vernon, Judy Wagner, Jim Toth, Clerk of the Works

Location: Dickinson Library

The meeting was called to order at 6:17 p.m.

Minutes: The minutes were reviewed and it was moved (Andrew) and seconded (Judy) that they be approved with the several small changes noted.

Membership: Alex will be sworn in by Dan Campbell as soon as possible so he may vote.

Annual Report: Susan was commended for her draft report due March 1, 2019. A few small suggestions were made to clarify the joint goals but separate grants for Warwick and Northfield for the school improvements and to identify potential savings more clearly on a chart. It was moved (Judy) and seconded (Andrew) to approve the report for submission once the agreed upon changes are made.

Meeting with Northfield Buildings and Grounds Committee: The Energy Committee has been trying for some time to meet with the town's Building and Grounds Committee in the interest of clear coordination on efforts such as school upgrades. It is crucial to being sure we can maximize the impact of our investments and makes sure we don't inadvertently preclude a useful option. However, no members of the committee arrived. We will try to re-schedule as soon as possible.

Update on PVRs Building and Grounds Committee Presentation and Possible Solar Effort: Susan and Jim Toth attended a meeting of the PVRs Building and Grounds subcommittee to present our efforts to date at PVRs and be sure members of that committee understand what work is happening and why. Susan and Jim were given 5 minutes to provide an overview. Susan also stated our concern about the possible PPA (Power purchase agreement) under discussion by the School Committee (it was brought to our attention by our Energy Committee partners in Warwick and the Chair of the School Committee). We are concerned about locking the district into a 20 year contract at more than current energy consumption at rates with a 2.5% increase each year. Also the solar panels would be leased rather than owned by the District. Representatives from the CA group that the Superintendent has been talking with were present and pressed to get permission to apply to SMART program prior to a signed contract to get on the list for the Tier 2 state rebates. We offered to do additional research to identify options that might be financially more favorable to the District, but we have not yet heard back about whether this is allowed under the interim agreement signed by the Superintendent (which agrees not to seek competing bids during the decision period). We will do our best to help the School Committee and Superintendent gather helpful information. There are some questions to clear up about the relationship between the Town Energy Committees and the PVRs District—we need advice. We realize we should have met with the School Committee sooner and will work to keep them well informed.

Death of Former Member: Susan noted the totally unexpected death of Peter Talmadge, former Northfield resident and energy committee member. Peter has even recently offered his considerable expertise to our committee and will be sorely missed.

Report from Clerk of the Works: Jim Toth, our Clerk for the School Green Communities work, gave a report on work to date. PVRs is done with weatherization and ECI (Energy Consultants Inc.) has been paid from the Northfield grant. There is more work to be done at PVRs through the Warwick grant, and Jim is meeting Tuesday with the contractor for the motors and drives work. ECI and Air Barrier Solutions (Sub contractor) completed their weatherization work at Northfield Elementary (various windows and doors). De-stratification fans are still to be done. The attic weatherization work was planned to get underway during this February break by ZeroDraft. During the course of monitoring the window and door work, Jim noted that he identified some additional issues with doors on the western side of the building, the front of the South Building and the doors to the kitchen. These need long term attention. Judy asked that Jim provide a written report to Susan that can be shared with all appropriate contacts in town to make sure these items are worked on.

ZeroDraft, the contractor that won the bid for the attic insulation work, provided a plan last week to make a major change to the materials used in the attics. Jim and committee members quickly researched options and connected the contractor to a supplier for the product we had specified. Due to the need for curing of this material (spray fiberglass) ZeroDraft was directed to begin with other insulation efforts until the committee could meet to review options. Work has been partially completed in the south attic and Jim was able to work with them to slightly shift their plan to be more efficient and take less time. He did discover that there are several places where there are missing school ceiling/attic floor components that need to be addressed with sheetrock. In the south building they have air sealed the perimeter and will do cellulose and trap door modification. Building staff moved out boxes and other items that were in the attic before work began. In the center attic there was discussion of whether to use netted cellulose finished with rigid foam boards, or use 2 part closed cell foam. There is no air movement between this area and classrooms or occupied space below. However, committee members expressed concern over using foam.

The remaining issue is whether to use spray fiberglass product or other foam products above the drop ceilings and below the floors. Given the availability of the product, the information we have about its effectiveness and our concerns about student and staff health, the group agreed that Monoglass should be used.

It was moved (Susan) and seconded (Andrew) that ZeroDraft be directed to use Monoglass in the north building and wait until summer break to provide adequate curing time with minimal occupancy; and to use the netted cellulose and rigid foam boards in the middle building. The motion was approved unanimously and will be communicated to ZeroDraft by Jim Toth Tuesday.

Lessons learned: The group also had a discussion about lessons we have learned so far and we agreed it would be good not only to share our observations about additional items that need attention at NES, but that we should work with the state and town governments to find funds to complete these items as soon as possible. We will communicate with the FRCOG that two of the most helpful things they could do would be to provide lessons learned from their partner communities on some of these projects; and that they consider providing technical assistance that includes the analysis and design components of projects that currently are not readily available through town budgets or current grants. We have also found the Clerk of the Works model to be tremendously useful and the FRCOG could also provide such support.

Partner Progress: Jim also shared some info on some of the technical issues that Warwick has encountered with its plans for its elementary school. There seems to be a lack of clarity from the building inspector and others on just what rules govern some of the insulation efforts.

Public Outreach: Discussion then turned to our efforts to begin reaching out to schools and townsfolk about our work. Andrew and Judy will meet to develop a presentation for the March 7 school event which will showcase a local student presenting data about our project and its energy savings. Thanks to Jim for quickly providing this student (with help from Andrew) the info and photos that will be used. We also had a brief discussion about how to help parents (and teachers) talk to anxious students about climate change and Susan has made contact with folks in Northampton who may have some good resources to share. Judy suggested the idea of later in the year having a panel with youth on jobs related to climate change and a short list of very specific things that families can do to help.

We agreed that our next meeting will be more fully focused on our outreach efforts—should be fun!

Next Meetings: Susan proposed a set of dates to get us back on track for our usual third Tuesday meetings:

March 19th, April 16th, May 21st, and June 18th at 6:00 at Town Hall. We confirmed the March 19th meeting, and will wait to see if the April date works for everyone, given it is school vacation week.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Judy Wagner in Annie's absence.

*as approved Susan O'Conne
by Energy Committee*