

Northfield Energy Committee Meeting Minutes  
March 21, 2023. 6:00pm  
Town Hall

Present: Judy Wagner, Co-chair  
Jim VanNatta, Co-chair  
Andrew Vernon  
Spirit Joseph, provisional member  
Seth Hansell, Secretary

Visiting as presenters from FRCOG:

Allison Gage  
Audrey Boraski

- Minutes from Feb 7th reviewed, amended and approved unanimously.

FRCOG discussion:

Welcome to the folks from FRCOG who are here to help us talk about the data reporting process

Questions:

- Who does what?
- How is it done?
- Is there a way to streamline this process, given how taxing it is?

Secondary Question

- Issues involving anomalies in the data which are explainable, but come up each year.

From Allison:

- Largest issue seems to be the fuel used by town vehicles. What is needed is the actual number of gallons used.
- Also needs to be separated by department, not combined.

Andrew, who has predominantly been tasked with entering all the data:

- Isn't there a way to "upload" a spreadsheet rather than enter individual fuel fills which ends up requiring a lot of manual data entry.
  - Are there cards that can be attached to each vehicle so that when the vehicle gets filled, it would automatically go into a spreadsheet that would allow us to dive into the fuel usage by vehicle.
- Allison responds: yes, there is a way to upload a spreadsheet.

Spirit: Are these calendar years? Allison: No, fiscal. Data Reporting is Due 1st Friday in November.

Allison: Funding is a two year funding cycle from the DOER (Mass Dept of Energy Resources)

Andrew: How much do we actually want (or need) to track cost?

- Allison: FRCOG typically doesn't track cost, though it might be useful in making an argument for a particular project.

Allison: FRCOG will now be collecting data from Pioneer Valley Regional School.

- We will need to check on the status now that Warwick is no longer sending students to NES.
- Did we get NES switched over to the Town's account?
  - Yes, though last time some of the data was manually entered.

Allison: There is a two day lag between when data gets entered and when it shows up on the form, so it can be confusing when entering data since you don't see changes immediately and can lead to double entering data or failing to properly make changes.

Next Steps:

- Andrew will be setting up a meeting with Erin Degman, Hopefully in April.
- Spirit will join Andrew in helping with this data entry project.
- Allison could help with writing competitive grants and the meta grant but isn't really able to suggest projects or the direction we might want to go.
- Spirit asked about the frequency of application for the competitive grants by other towns
  - Allison responded: once every two or three years is fairly typical for towns but it varies a lot by town.
- Does green communities consider how much funding a town puts towards a project (matching funds, etc)
  - They typically want to see town buy-in, but understand that there may be no actual match, given the cost of some of these projects.

Quirks in the data, little things that don't make it clear:

- What is the waste water treatment vehicle?
  - They are using gasoline, but we are not sure what this is being used for and Allison assumed it was for a vehicle.
  - If it's not a vehicle, what are they using it for?
- We are adding electrical systems that are going to increase electrical use, but will be reducing fossil fuels.
  - They are hopefully going to be reporting both BTUs and Carbon emission.
- What about the use of wood burning as heating



- What is the maximum size of the grant?
  - There is a maximum size, but it changes depending on the year.
- Allison and Audrey, from FRCOG, are looking at finding case studies which could help other towns. In particular, they thought that the Elementary school project, done in combination with Warwick, would be a good one to look at. Can we help with that?
  - Schools are generally large energy consumers and are often done in coordination with multiple towns, so looking at this, including the cautions, would be something they want.
  - Judy would be more than willing to engage in a conversation with them but has some reservations about how completely successful the project was in terms of making this an advertisement for this kind of project.
  - Judy and Audrey will engage in this discussion in the near future.
  - Andrew will share the presentation which was put together to share with the public
  - Hopefully they can get a copy of the final report which was put together and will be able to look at that to get a good idea.

#### UMass Solar Action Plan Discussion / Update:

- Recap: UMass Clean Energy Extension is building a model that will be able to be used by whomever might find it useful. They looked to us as a town to practice on and we agreed. There was an assessment done, though we had some issues or questions about their work. Then they wanted us to take a comprehensive survey but we were concerned about the focus on large-scale (greater than 5 acres) installments. We did get them to make some changes to their survey in terms of a large statement about not involving any existing project.
- We are concerned about this survey possibly causing a negative reaction which might push people away from the idea of solar power. We are somewhat uncomfortable about the way the questions lead.
  - Particularly given the reaction some residents have already expressed to the current visible solar projects.
- The survey is now active on the town web page and about half of the town (600 homes) will be receiving a paper version of the survey in the mail.
- Hopefully a final report can be shared carefully rather than simply just publicly shared without any understanding which could come from other committees
  - Open Space
  - Planning
  - Joint summary of the results could be created and shared more widely.
- This could lead to a long-term solar plan for the town in terms of how much electricity we will need in the future.



#### Aggregation Discussion:

- Three year contract will end at the end of this year
- The bid process happens in April
- When the final bid comes in (on Mon, April 24th), the town will have 2 hours to accept the bid. Andrea has been tasked with doing this.
- The Aggregator is Colonial Power who was selected by us along with 13 other towns in the area
- There is a "test bid" being sent out on the 10th of April which will show what we should roughly expect to see.
- Northfield could opt out, if we think Eversource would be better.
- Spirit: What's the downside?
  - If people are already signed-up they will be automatically enrolled at whatever rate, and while they could opt out, they would need to do so.
- Colonial Power has asked the towns to fill out a questionnaire regarding what types of products we might be interested in.
  - Several different classes of power in terms of how green the source is.
  - There is a base level required by the state (which increases each year)
  - What we selected last time is no longer even an option given the state's requirements.
  - What was selected was
    - Mass State Requirements +5% as the baseline
    - Mass State Requirements +20%
    - Mass State Requirements +30% (which put it at 100% renewable)
    - Opting out meant Mass State requirements only

#### Public Meeting on April 14th at the Library

- This meeting will mostly be run by Claire Chang
- Focus is on Aggregation
- Judy would like to also talk about all of the new legislation coming
  - A lot of this still isn't known but the types and sources of credits and incentives available might be worth explaining
    - Tax credits
    - Direct rebates
    - From the State
    - From the Federal Govt
    - From Eversource
- Claire will likely have a great view and we are happy to lean on her for the bulk of the meeting and what information might be useful.

Next Committee Meeting scheduled for May 16th