

Northfield Energy Committee Meeting Minutes (Working Document)

March 16, 2024. 6:00pm

Dickinson Memorial Library

Present: Judy Wagner, Co-chair
Jim VanNatta, Co-chair
Spirit Joseph
Seth Hansell, Secretary

Presenting: Mike Zhe, Blue Wave
Gabriel Hayes, Blue Wave

Also Present: John Buxton, private citizen
Tony Stabley, private citizen
Jesse Robinson, private citizen

Meeting Open 6:00

I. Move, 2nd and approve to modify the agenda to allow Blue Wave to present at the start of the meeting

II. Presentation from Blue Wave

Community Solar Offtake was impetus to reachout by Bluewave to the committee

1. Blue Wave is a Certified B-Corp
2. Agrivoltaic development (Adaptive (crops and cattle) vs. Ag-Ready (for large scale crops and equipment))
3. Potential to reduce evaporation and improve soil environment in some locations
4. Fixed vs. Single axis rotational possibilities
5. Community Solar
 - a. A project delivers energy to the grid which generates dollar credits.
 - b. The utility distributes the project's credits to utility accounts.
 - c. AOBC (Alternative On Bill Credits) will show up on the electric bill as a credit
6. Typically
 - a. 50% is an anchor customer - Town Accounts or other large customer (hospital, university, etc)
 - b. Remaining 50% is then split among other entities (no more than 25kW)
7. Option 1
 - a. BWC Otter Run, LLC
 - i. 700 kW
 - ii. Generate approx \$101k in annual energy credits
 - iii. Makes sense if town spends about \$110k per year (greater than the \$101k)

- iv. Estimate savings of \$10 - 12k per year
 - 1. What's the difference?
 - 2. (Likened to buying a \$100 gift card for \$90)

8. Option 2

- a. Ashuela Brook, LLC
 - i. 50% town of Northfield (1,250 kW)
 - ii. Will generate \$181,000 (if town spends approx \$200k per year)
 - iii. Estimates savings \$18-22k per year

9. How does the financial part work?

- a. BlueWave finances the project, becomes owner, manager, etc.
- b. Under the SMART program
- c. Project receives incentives from the SMART program

10. Community Solar Benefits

- a. Individual Users sign up and receive solar credits on utility bills
- b. Managed by "a partner" in terms of technology and tracking of credits

11. Length of benefit?

- a. SMART incentives would expire in some amount of time. Not sure if that was a 10 year or a 20 year timeframe
- b. Town potential opt-out timeframe after a commitment would need to be addressed. Much greater commitment for an anchor, not as big for a community member

12. BlueWave has been interested in this, but hasn't looked for customers since the timeframe of project completion is now better known.

III. Questions:

- 1. If Northfield could do their own array, and then generate their own electricity, could the credits be swapped from one building or town asset to another?
 - a. To some extent, as electricity needs are reduced
- 2. Credits are calculated over the course of year, not monthly
- 3. What is the timeframe for this town commitment?
 - a. By the end of the calendar year
 - b. They could generate something for us to look at by next month
 - c. They would want an executed agreement before their next major steps
 - d. Select board would need to sign off on anything as this is only an advisory committee.
- 4. Kinds of agriculture?
 - a. Anything that can be harvested without a huge machine
 - b. Currently at one site there is a rotation of peppers, pumpkins and hay. Lamb is currently a luxury meat, but it was suggested that this may become less so as the land-use cost price changes (with the introduction of solar)
 - c. Can't do industrial scale (i.e. as in great plains)
- 5. How do the panels dovetail with irrigation?
 - a. Some do, limitedly, but not major center-pivot spray
- 6. What underground structures can interfere with farming?

- a. Limited and there is a decommissioning commitment by BlueWave
- b. Bonds can go bust, so there is some minor long-term concern should BlueWave fold and the town is left with the work.

IV. Going forward:

- 1. Energy Committee is interested in continuing to talk with BlueWave, possibly visiting suggested sites.
- 2. BlueWave will need something like a spreadsheet with the electrical use data from the town
- 3. BlueWave has reached out to ag Commission, but will talk with OpenSpace while they wait for our data and will then prepare something more specific for us to digest.

V. Review of previous minutes

- 1. January Minutes approved unanimously
- 2. February Minutes amended and approved unanimously

VI. Green Communities Grant

- 1. Contracting
 - a. For the Library we expect it to be small enough that we wouldn't need to go out to bid, but might need several quotes.
 - b. Time is pressing onward.
 - c. We can use the state approved expediter for the school which will help and reduce time, but we are not yet aware if this will work given the time.
 - d. We will need to go directly to eversource and push CET about getting a statement about whether this will work.
 - e. Been in touch with FRCOG who will need to know if we can or can't get the expediter.
 - f. Preference would be to work with the expediter if we can use one we are familiar with, but having trouble.
 - g. Hope to sort this out by next week.
- 2. Other
 - a. Have reached out to Scott McKusak about being a project manager for both library and school project, but need the town administrator to officially hire.

VII. Solar Sitting Discussion

- 1. Should we make a recommendation to Town about whether they should be taking any steps to prepare for additional solar groups to come wanting permitting
- 2. Would need to pull together a joint discussion with the Planning Committee, OpenSpace Committee, Conservation Commission, Ag Commission,
- 3. Seems to be only a little interest at the moment for trying to pull these groups together.
- 4. We did generate a summary of the UMass energy extension report with some of our thoughts, both things we agreed with and things we didn't

- a. Town future projections with full transition to electricity are included but questions about the validity of those calculations were raised.
5. Not sure we can spearhead the discussion with other committees, but will share our thoughts with those committees on the UMass report
6. UMass also wants some additional follow-up which we are not prepared to have with them.

VIII. Battery Storage - Town By-laws.

1. State will become a prime actor with towns having less say-so than they might want
2. We could take a look at this.
3. Packet suggests that several towns have favored a pairing with battery / solar array
4. Does Northfield even have by-laws currently? If so, what are they?

IX. March Aggregation meeting / Public outreach

1. March 28th at the library at 6:00
2. Judy and Jim will be present
3. Library has been receiving questions recently (after postcards went out)
 - a. We will share benefits, how to get in, how to opt out, etc.
4. Will need to post to town
5. Library will send out flyers and advertise
6. Town web-site has been updated with appropriate links for additional information

X. Discussion on Finding New Members

XI. Additional Topics

1. Spirit will look at MEI data to see what we can share with BlueWave but the town has additional data which will show something about the rate structure and we will need that pulled.
2. Slide presentation by BlueWave will be shared with Andrew

Next Meeting Scheduled for April 16 at Town Hall

Adjourn 7:47pm

Approved 4/16/24