

Draft Hartford Energy Commission minutes

February 27, 2025

Present in person: Jesse Pollard, Lynn Bohi, Cathy Geiger, Richard Otis (5:14) : Eli Hect, Anna Gunther, David Briggs. Peggy Adams, Tad Montgomery; Dana Clawson, staff

Present virtually: Esme Cole, Laura Simon; Lee Michaelides, Jen Durgin, Jonnathan Dowds, from REV, Adam Grounds, Matthew Timoueu, Sherry Bouchart(5:45).

Public Comment: guests introduced themselves

Jesse called the meeting to order at 5:10pm.

Minutes: Cathy moved and Laura seconded that the January minutes pass as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

REV and net metering: A bill passed last year to lower the number of cars and propane plants. Net metering was removed. This year S. 57 is a new path for community solar. Net metering will be used just for rooftop and “backyard” panels. The PUC thinks utility customers subsidize net metering, and this hurts utility companies because there are fixed costs which non-net metered customers pay and that the amount paid to those with net metering is more than they pay. The amount paid for net metering has decreased since 2017. The public Service Department and Governor want to re-structure community solar and change the renewable energy standard. H 289 makes no changes to net metering. The PUC can change the structure of net metering and they want to investigate a new process. Jonathan wondered if the legislature can say the PUC can only change specific items. He urged Vermonters to talk to their legislators.

Q: Does Jonathan think people with net metering will choose to go off grid? A: Maybe. He has no idea how many it would be

Comment: Standard offer – the PUC put out an RFP for solar projects up to 2.2 megawatts. Wind turbines may apply for this also. Some must go to community owned projects.

Comment: NH has a law that the local economy must benefit from solar.

Coordinator’s report:

- Dana is still working on what funds Hartford had been scheduled to receive will be arriving.
- Department of Energy (DOE) sent a cease and desist letter about energy related projects.
- The eight level 2 NEVI chargers funds have been frozen. However VTrans has funding and is likely to cover the cost for four level 2 charging stations.
- DOE funds had been coming to pay for an architect to perform an in-depth study of WABA. These funds are now frozen Parks and Rec will use reserve funds and pay for this.
- EV expo: September 6 is the most likely date.
- RBES training is Wednesday, March 5 from 9-12 in Town Hall for builders.
- Earth Week tours on April 26 and 27 featuring energy related improvements people have made is sponsored by Lebanon. Would Hartford like to sponsor by helping with publicity? The item was positively voted. There is no financial cost to HEC.

- Subcommittees for HEC priorities will be formed. There should be 3 or fewer members, who will report back at HEC meetings about their ideas and projects.

.David Briggs, owner of Hotel Coolidge, outlined his ideas for the future of the hotel.

- The Town needs housing and spaces for businesses
- There may be a district heat utility owned by the Town. The legislature passed enabling legislation that allows this to happen.
- Last week a report came in from an entity looking into how much heat will be needed and how many bore holes at what depth and how many buildings it could serve. There are four buildings in play. Two will use current building code and two will stay in 1980's code. Energy use will decrease by 75%. It is a \$6 million system which does not include any other upgrades.
- The Hotel has been a limited partnership since 1985. Gates-Briggs is in a family trust. It is time for other people to take over. He could put it on the market or pre-develop it. He would like to gather people, advocate for his concept, preserve mixed use, and have a cultural center. He would like to preserve the Opera House.
- The Coolidge can not be rehabbed. He would like to replace it with 5 floors of apartments and use lower floor for businesses with underground parking for 80 cars if one level garage or 40 more if two stories. Another part of the project would create low income housing with a nursing facility. Adam Dowds is working closely with Dave.
- In summary, market rate and low income housing, event center, and commercial space. He possibly will sell the building to the Town.
- He has talked to the State Treasurer about financing for the project.
- He asked Esme to talk to State Buildings and Grounds about leasing the railroad wye for bore holes. If the bore holes are 250 feet deep it needs 200 holes and if 500 feet deep, it would take 100 holes. If the holes are drilled on an angle, it takes less land.
- The Town needs to work with Dave and the developer as an energy project.
- Is there someone or some entity to take over as the utility?
- He needs to know the cost of development and how it would effect the tax rate. It should effect CAP, transportation, TIF district, and energy costs.
- A regulated utility can pay off long and short term
- Other towns could use this as a model to follow.
- Simple payback is 13 years
- Next step: robust thermal look.
- Adam Dowds made some comments
- He has a real estate background
- He was impressed with HEC activity so far
- He likes to create special places- ones that enhance the arts and culture of the area
- It may well solve the financial needs of the Town and will support local businesses
- There are many geothermal reports on the internet

The meeting adjourned at 6:40pm

Respectfully submitted, Lynn Bohi, Clerk