

**Minutes of the Town of Windham Energy Commission
Special Meeting
September 11, 2012**

In Attendance. Grace Adams, Jean de Smet, Chris Vials, Madeline Priest, Michelle Mallett, Dick Bloomer, Joe Gardner

Structure. Most of the meeting was a presentation from the Town Engineer (Joe Gardner), punctuated by questions from the Commission. A brief discussion of action steps followed, which we agreed to continue at our next meeting.

Highlights of Joe Gardner's Presentation. Gardner explained the various steps toward energy efficiency the Town has been able to take because of the work of the Energy Commission.

The Energy Commission had secured a grant from the Office of Policy Management (a CT state agency) in the amount of \$40,000 in order to do an audit of our public buildings' energy efficiency. This audit was performed in October 2010.

Gardner reported that they have been able to implement a surprising number of the auditor's recommendations. Highlights include:

- worked with DCS Energy to install solar panels on public buildings (Library, Safety Complex, 4 schools). He provided a table with the energy savings from these installations, which he estimated at \$14-18,000 per year. This is money that gets to stay in the school budget. Solar panels were provided by the company for free. We got free electricity, and they got to claim the tax credits.
- installed steam pipes, a new water heater, and made other improvements at the Kramer building. The Town paid for this, and without political push-back.
- using a \$15,000 grant, they installed occupancy sensors in the Town Hall and the Kramer building.
- using part of an \$104,000 Office of Policy Management Grant, they installed 11 motion sensors on vending machines in Town buildings, which saves about \$200 per vending machine per year
- using a CL&P "29% Grant" (in which 29% of the amount is granted, and the other 71% is loaned at a rate of 0% interest which must be paid back in 25 months), they installed energy efficient bulbs at [all municipal buildings, including the](#) Public Works Buildings and the Safety Complex. CL&P gets to declare this as "green energy."
- using the same \$104K grant mentioned above, they installed a system of radiant heaters in the Fire Department apparatus bay at the Safety Complex. Expected savings in energy is amounts to about \$4400 per year (automatic door closers also installed because previously, the doors would simply stay open after the trucks left). Cost of the improvements was \$56,000, out of which \$38,000 was paid by the grant.

- Town Council budgeted \$150,000 per year for 3 years for energy efficient improvements, and still has about \$150,000 left ~~to make energy efficiency improvements of those funds.~~ Also, CL&P currently has more money in their Energy Efficiency Fund than they can give away. Under current law, they have to set aside some of their profits into this fund, and are compelled to distribute it.

Future Projects/Info Going Forward (also from Gardner)

- at the McSweeney Senior Center, CL&P won't do an energy audit until the Town takes it over. We could save \$160/month with an upgrade, and could pay for it with a CL&P 30% grant.
- Gardner is working with RPM Sustainable Technologies (a local outfit started by a UConn professor) to take grease from our sewer plants and turn it into bio-diesel gas. This could create 30,000 gallons/year in fuel to run city vehicles.
- the Town currently has 56 different accounts with CL&P
- Gardner is also looking into a German technology that creates heat and electricity from food waste, which might be used at DeVivo's Willimantic Waste facility in town. He recently had a telephone conference with German representatives for feasibility. There could be a potential political problem on account of fumes.

Future Steps

- we discussed Zrec
- **Municipal Utilities.** We discussed some of the challenges of establishing our own Municipal Utility company in Windham, or even buying back poles, which included
 - (a) a state law, essentially designed by CL&P, that makes it ~~illogical~~ illegal to run your own power across a road
 - (b) CL&P is compelled by law to sell poles to a municipality that wants to buy them, but they can and do hassle buyers with red tape and fees
 - (c) when buying poles, a Town has to prove that it has the funds to maintain them
 - (d) a billing and maintenance department would need to be set up
 - (e) CL&P would resist however they can
 - (f) CL&P is our biggest taxpayer
 - (g) buying back poles would cost money up front; about \$19,000 per pole (and we have around 1500 poles in town); on the other hand, to put this

into perspective, according to JG we pay about \$400,000 a year on electric bills for street lights alone

- on the plus side, the law also allows a Town to put wires on existing poles; this cannot be denied by CL&P
- Manchester, Glastonbury and a number of other Towns are now running their own power on CL&P poles
- the first steps, Jean said, would be to get the Town Council to take up the measure, and then to do a referendum; we could also advocate a statement about municipal utilities to be included in the town's charter revision.
- another idea is to generate our own electricity through solar panels
- **Benchmarks.** Through points earned through the Neighbor to Neighbor Energy Challenge, we can hire someone to update Windham's information in the Energy Star Benchmarking program. This will allow the Commission to show how much we are saving thru the energy efficient measures taken to date, and project how much we can save annually. Madeline and Jean agreed wWe can use that~~need a~~ number to get funding into the town budget in February.
- **Co-op Country Fair.** Our Commission will be there on Sunday, Oct 7th to do HES sign-ups at a N2N booth; fair is from 11am-4pm.
- **Other HES Sign-ups.** We could also do this through parent teacher organizations, the Lion's Club, and the Elk's Club
- **CL&P Efficiency Fund Board Meeting.** This is the board charged with distributing the company's energy efficiency funds; there is a controversy over the fact that they don't distribute enough money, through the Low Income program, they deliberately create obstacles to access it, and there is a possible conflict of interest on the board. Madeline reported that a number of green and energy efficiency advocates will be showing up at this board meeting with hearty protests and a list of demands