

11/24/14 Westport Energy Committee Meeting Minutes

The Monday 11/24/14 meeting of the Energy Committee in the Selectmen's Conference Room was called to order by Chairman Tony Connors at 7:03 P.M. Other members present were Leo Brooks, Max Kohlenberg, Ed Goldberg, Karl Daxland, John Ciccotelli and Walter Barnes. Absent was Michael Sullivan.

The minutes from the 7/21/14 meeting were approved as written.

Chairman Connors reported on the status of the Borrego contract with the town. Their solar farm in Carver involving Westport is now operational and the first bill for net metering credits is imminent. The Borrego solar farm involving Westport in Freetown is ready to go except that NStar has not completed the interconnection. This is supposed to be done during the winter months. The town has committed to an annual purchase of 2.5 megawatts from the two sites. It was pointed out in the ensuing discussion that the town may not be able to use all of this power. For one, the Middle School will be closed. However, the total usage by the town for the first 12 months will not be known for a year. In any case, the town can bank any unused credits for future use or they can be sold to a non-profit outside of town.

Chairman Connors then led a discussion regarding the electric vehicle program. An estimated \$7500 of the cost is to be covered by a state grant. There may be a \$500 discount for the Nissan Leaf from the dealer. The exact location of the charging station at the town hall location will need to be determined along with the necessary site work. The state requires a 2 headed station. Chairman Connors will be in contact with the Town Administrator/Board of Selectmen regarding further decisions on this program.

The next item on the agenda was LED streetlights. The Committee agreed that switching over to LED lights made a lot of sense in terms of cost savings and more efficient lighting. However, the switch would overall be cheaper if the town owned the present lights as the utility companies would help in the purchase of LED streetlights, but Tim King told Mr. Connors earlier that the streetlights are presently owned by the utility companies. Further discussion with the Town Administrator/Board of Selectmen regarding electric streetlights is planned.

Leo Brooks informed the Committee that National Grid and NStar announced a proposed rate increase for electricity for users in Massachusetts for 2015 of 37% and 29% respectively. This is on the supply part of the bill and subject to the approval of the State Department of Utilities. The electric power rates in this state are already amongst the highest in the nation. Mr. Brooks advised the Committee to request the Board of Selectmen to ask Senator Rodriques and Congressman Schmid to weigh in on this issue and contest the rate increases. Also, the Committee and Board of Selectman should be aware that there is a Massachusetts general law under the Mass Alliance for Municipal Electrical Choice that allows towns to form their own utilities with state approval. Furthermore, there are alternate suppliers that offer competitive rates. Consortiums of towns may enable procurement of electricity from one or more of the cheapest sources available. Freetown has entered into such an arrangement. A change in how electric power is provided in Westport may have to go to Town Meeting. Chairman Connors said he would convey the information just discussed to the Town Administrator/Board of Selectmen for their consideration. The Committee was in unanimous approval of alerting the town of all the options Mr. Brooks had mentioned.

Mr. Ed Goldberg suggested one way the town might control and lower the costs of natural gas and oil would be by using hedging. This would consist of buying futures, using a financial broker, as a hedge against price changes. Before considering such, the town would have to know their fuel supply needs. In any case, he believed the town should be aware of this technique and Mr. Connors said he would pass the information along at his next meeting with town officials.

Mr. Walter Barnes inquired about the status of the Solar Challenge for Westport. Chairman Connors responded that the Board of Selectmen did not support the town signing up for the Solar Challenge at this time. However, the Community Foundation, the sponsor of the Solar Challenge, did hold unofficial events for solar education in town.

Mr. Leo Brooks agreed to work with Chairman Connors to set up the next Committee meeting for early in 2015.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Walter Barnes