

12/19/2011 - Westport Energy Committee Meeting Minutes

On 12/19/11, Chairman Antone Vieira called the meeting of the Energy Committee to order shortly after 6:00 PM. Attendees were Walter Barnes, Kathleen Cummings, Jack Deveau, Edward Goldberg, and Max Kohlenberg. Absent were James Bartlett and Karl Daxland. Mr. Bartlett attempted to participate by electronic transmission but this was unsuccessful. Also present was Westport Interim Town Administrator Jack Healey.

Ms. Cummings mentioned that the committee is awaiting Energy Management Associates (NStar/NEGas) energy audits.

Mr. Goldberg introduced Mr. Scott Durfee who spoke on the New Bedford City Solar Project which has installed solar units behind the meter (not directly to the grid) on School Department buildings for a total 2 MW of electricity. Initially the buildings are made more efficient to enhance the economics of the project. There are 7-8 buildings involved now but the process is being opened up to more buildings. Mr. Kohlenberg brought up the topic of efficiency. The buildings need rooftops where there is no shading and construction is five years old or newer. Economic projections are made out to twenty years. All panels are under a supply contract and there is no capital outlay by the City. He stated that details in solar are very important. All savings go directly to the general fund. Every Massachusetts city and town has a 10 MW licensed possibility. Sites are specific and the question of what is to be powered is first answered. In general, five acres of solar panels yields 1 MW of electricity. Capacity is not a concern just as long as the units get costs down. There has been a savings of \$500,000 on electricity costs per year. ConEd does the financing and the mayor and schools are supportive.

Neil Van Sloun of Sylvan Nursery presented the practical experience of a small nursery with wind turbine power and solar power. The nursery has three small-scale wind turbines. There have been lightning and cable problems and they have generated 50% of the electrical power that he was told they would. There is the problem of no wind. The Santos Brothers Farm Partnership, which has two small-scale wind turbines, gets the highest return of 70% and all the other turbines in Westport get less. Mr. Van Sloun researched further in 2010 and found that the blade fell off of one wind turbine in Nantucket. Then, in 2010, he installed two solar units, one 100 K to generate 116 KWH and one 85 K to generate over 90 KWH. He stated that the production from his solar facilities was greater than advertised. His cost was \$60,000 for each 10 K and he now has 250,000 KWH from solar. There is literally no maintenance and more government benefits. He summed up his experience by saying that in the 47 years in business, powering with wind turbines was a poor decision. He pointed out that Crosby Baker in Westport has solar panels as well as other businesses and communities. Mr. Van Sloun felt that the Westport's capped landfill would be ideal for solar panels.

Chairman Vieira related that the Town of Westport has released a Requests for Proposals Solar Farm Project on the Town's capped landfill on Hix Bridge Road. The Town hopes to receive revenue through leasing, taxes, and energy credits. Administrator Healey added that the capped landfill was approximately 13 acres without trees. He believed there might be \$200,000 annually in revenue to the Town and the developer would assume the risk and financing of the project. Administrator Healey stated that net metering has caps for utilities. For the Town of Westport it would be 2,000,000 KWH. There would be property taxes and land lease arrangements with a facility that would own and operate the solar facility. Tax incentives are presently in place. It was stated later that the site visit to the capped landfill for RFP respondents and others would be on 1/6/2012 at 1 PM.

Jack Arruda of EMI presented a proposed contract for a 1 MW solar project size with estimated energy production of 1,200,000 KWH per year for the Town of Westport located at EMI of Dartmouth. EMIDS' proposal, the EMI Power Purchase Agreement, the Net Metering Credit and the Net Metering Credit Sales Agreement were referenced. He mentioned the advantages of EMI include economy of scale and consolidation of the interconnect expense available to Westport and others in the load zone. After preliminary negotiations between Town Counsel and EMI, a percentage of the meter was to be assigned to Westport according to an attachment to the proposed contract. In contrast, the Town of Dartmouth contracted with EMIDS for a fixed Power Purchase Price of 0.099 (\$/KWH) or 9.9 cents per kilowatt hour.

Chairman Vieira said that on 12/27/11 the Board of Selectmen were looking for direction from the Energy Committee. Much discussion ensued. It was acknowledged that distribution costs would not be going down and probably would increase. After comparing the fixed fee approach to the percentage approach, Mr. Goldberg moved that the Energy Committee vote to recommend the fixed fee of 0.099 (\$/KWH) with the estimated annual savings to the Town of 10% in payment for energy production by EMIDS. Mr. Barnes seconded the motion. The Energy Committee voted the motion. Ms. Cummings stated that she supported the idea but would prefer the percentage approach. The fixed fee has more risk but offers a higher return. Mr. Kohlenberg was concerned about the economics if there is a loss of tax incentives. Administrator Healey responded that the contract allows the possibility of renegotiation in the future. Administrator Healey hinted that if and when power production went to 9.5 cents per kilowatt hour, the Town of Westport could renegotiate.

Administrator Healey said that a Westport Town Meeting must ratify this agreement and Chairman Vieira said the Westport Finance Committee will address this agreement too.

Mr. Deveau requested more emphasis on conservation of energy.

Mr. Goldberg pointed out that there would be no debt to the Town or liability with the solar proposals. Also, he proposed that the Town create an enterprise fund or reserve fund for future green energy projects. Chairman Vieira stated that an enterprise fund ideally should be an indication of all expenses and there were few profit centers in Town Government.

Chairman Vieira mentioned an upcoming Planning Board meeting on 1/11/12 in the Town Hall Annex Meeting Room, 6 PM, to which all members of the Energy Committee are invited to attend to discuss the Atlantic Design Engineers 12/5/11 comments to the Town of Westport Zoning Bylaws 2010, Article 17, the Commercial and Non-Commercial Wind Energy Facilities bylaw, copies of which were available to the committee members.

The Final Report from Atlantic Design Engineers was passed out. There was discussion on expansion of the Atlantic Design Engineers Feasibility Study on Large-Scale Wind Turbines at other potential sites such as the landfill and private land, eg. Adamsville Road and Cornell Road. It was mentioned that 2000 residents use the transfer station. Mr. Barnes suggested that unacceptable sites could be filtered out with carefully considered amendments to the Town's wind turbine bylaw and wanted the concerns of neighbors to be early and fairly aired, including circulation of questionnaires. Mr. Barnes inquired and was told by Chairman Vieira that Atlantic Engineering Consulting was fully paid.

Chairman Vieira acknowledged that Mr. William Battles of Village Plumbing, Westport has been named the Green Plumber of the Year for the Northern Region, a program partnered with EPA WaterSense.

The minutes for October 24, 2011, November 21, 2011, and November 29, 2011 were approved unanimously as written.

Jack Deveuve announced his retirement from the committee for personal reasons. Several members asked him to reconsider.

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday, January 30, 2012, at 6 PM at the Town Hall. The meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Walter Barnes