

Hamilton Environmental Impact Committee (HEIC)

Minutes of meeting, March 2, 2023

Location: Hamilton Town Hall
(in-person meeting, no remote links)

Members present in person: Jeanne Maurand (until 8:25), Don Perkins, Emmett Holt, Jack Simons

Invited visitors: Vicky Masone, Energy Manager for the town and also for Wenham and the H/W Regional Sch District

Time the meeting was convened and by whom: Meeting was convened by Chair Holt at 7:02 pm. This is the 4th meeting of the HEIC.

Documents / exhibits used: none

Issues discussed and votes taken:

- Preparation of minutes. Mr. Simons will continue to take minutes for the next few meetings.
- Approval of minutes. Ms. Maurand moved to approve minutes, Mr Perkins 2nd. Ms Masone noted two numerical errors in the draft minutes regarding town emissions. Ms Maurand moved to amend her original motion to accept the minutes as amended to correct the numerical errors, which was adopted unanimously. Ms Maurand noted for the record the quality of the minutes.
- Mr Holt asked if members have created state web accounts for Conflict of Interest Training per the Town Clerk's request. Mr Perkins and Ms Masone said they would do this; others have done so.
- Mr Holt noted the need to move our next meeting to accommodate use of the Memorial Room by the Conservation Commission. Mr Simons asked whether the upcoming meeting schedule could shift to by one week to allow HEIC members to attend Hamilton Wenham Regional School District (HWRSD) meetings as needed. The committee agreed without a vote to the following schedule of meetings, still Thursdays at 7 PM in the Memorial Room¹:
 - March 23, 2023
 - April 6
 - April 20
 - May 4
 - May 18
 - June 1
 - June 15
- Energy Manager (Ms Masone) updates for the Committee:
 - Regarding municipal purchase of electricity, and following up on a discussion from last meeting, Ms Masone said that replacing our current "brown" electricity (a mix of renewable energy and fossil fuels) with 100% "green" (renewable) would reduce our municipal emissions 50% from our 2009 baseline. This would be significant progress toward the town's goal; it would cost more than brown electricity, and the important question would be "how much more?" At our last meeting (Feb 16) we saw one currently available price for green electricity that would cost the town about \$4800 per year. Ms Masone has now gotten a price from another vendor, for a local renewable source, at 17.5 cents per kWh, as opposed to 14 cents per kWh for our current contract. The current baseline price for local non-renewable "brown energy" is around 13 cents

¹ Note that this schedule was revised at a subsequent meeting of HEIC

per kWh. As noted at last meeting, prices fluctuate over time. Ms Masone will set up a meeting with the Town Manager to discuss options for the town to buy greener electricity. Other blends of electricity sources are also possible. Local renewables may be preferable to renewables from distant sources since they may burden the grid less, and help to stimulate the local renewable infrastructure.

- Mr Holt noted that for residential customers there is also the option to buy shares in local solar farms.
- Mr Perkins expressed interest in knowing more about the ways solar energy is packaged and sold, specifically with regard to the town's photovoltaic (PV) arrays at the landfill on Chebacco Road. Ms Masone invited him to attend an upcoming meeting with DPW Director Tim Olson and Deputy Director Tim Olson and with his assistant, who may help with those questions.
- Regarding a preapplication call with the Commonwealth on the Municipal Vulnerability Grant (MVP), the meeting has been moved to a Zoom on March 7 at 11 AM. Ms Masone will send a link to Mr Holt and Mr Simons so they can join. Hamilton has never received an Action Grant for MVP, only a relatively small grant to produce an initial study (which is on the town website). The next step is a grant to develop a Climate Action and Resiliency Plan.
- Regarding conversion factors discussed at last meeting (converting various sources of emissions such as electric kWh, gallons of gas or diesel, therms of natural gas into a common measure of CO2 emitted), Ms Masone has compared Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and MassEnergyInsight (MEI) factors. Calculations behind the conversion factors are complicated but the percentage contribution by source is pretty similar regardless of the factors chosen.
- Hamilton Wenham Regional School District (HWRSD) has worked with Ms Masone to make efficiency improvements using Green Community grants. Despite these efficiencies the District's emissions have been increasing, which affects Hamilton's allocation of emissions since 2/3 of the District's emissions are attributed to the town. The committee expressed interest in how District emissions could be increasing despite the efficiencies.
- PV canopies over the parking area at the Middle School and High School are still under discussion. Planning appears to be waiting on National Grid re connectivity issues. A recent article in the New York Times described grid connectivity problems as a major roadblock for US solar development, but it is not clear to what extent that affects Massachusetts or Hamilton.
- Patton Park fast DC chargers (so called "level 3" chargers) for battery electric vehicles are not yet online. Not clear if the chargers will also work with vehicles using AC charging (levels 1 or 2).
- Ms Maurand reported on community outreach / engagement.
 - She has arranged for Ms Masone to meet the public at the Councils on Aging (COA) in both Hamilton and Wenham on March 16. The Committee was very happy that community members would get to meet Ms Masone, and find that the Energy Commissioner is a very friendly person who explains technical topics in plain language. This may also be a chance for us to recruit another member for HEIC.
 - As a parallel point, Mr Holt noted upcoming public presentations sponsored by the Hamilton Wenham Climate Action Team (HWCATs) at the Hamilton COA from 7 to 8:30 PM:
 - Solar 101, Tuesday 3/21
 - Heat Pumps 101, Tuesday 4/4
 - Ms Maurand will contact Assistant Town Manager regarding opportunities to publicize HEIC at Town Meeting (perhaps a table with flyers and opportunities to talk about issues). John O'Rourke from Good Energy may be available to talk with residents about Community Aggregation (offering the opportunity to purchase electricity from green suppliers and to lock in favorable rates).

- Returning to an earlier question about how electricity is packaged and sold (e.g. for the town's array at Chebacco Road), Ms Masone noted that towns and other tax-exempt entities could not benefit, in the past, from Investment Tax Credits by building solar installations. As a result, installations were typically built by private entities, as is the case on Chebacco Road. The state's rules have now changed, so nonprofits and municipalities can now receive direct incentive payments for building solar facilities. This may offer an opportunity for the community to educate local nonprofits as well as new opportunities for the town.
- Mr Simons reported on items from last meeting:
 - He emailed the Town manager regarding the National Grid study on vehicle fleet transitions for Hamilton, but did not get a reply. He will follow up with Town Manager and copy Mr Perkins for further follow up.
 - Mr Simons as representative of the Committee to the HWRSD has been studying District materials online and on H/W community television, to understand issues facing the District and actions and commitments the District has already made to reduce emissions. Based on his lengthy experience working with public schools he noted the importance of working collaboratively and for the long term, understanding the many demands that school boards and administrators face from every quarter. He noted that HWRSD has worked with Ms Masone in improving energy efficiency and is faced with many facilities issues that will require community input and support, as well as support from the Mass School Building Authority. Funding proposals will be scored on multiple MSBA criteria including energy efficiency. We can assist the District in understanding those criteria and being ready to advocate for appropriate design at the appropriate time. Current issues at the top of the District's agenda are new playing fields and a new elementary school.
 - Mr Simons also noted the District's commitment to environmental responsibility as expressed in its 2023-2028 Facilities Roadmap (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1byLdMNsSrA5aXhKpyILmYM_4lzU3xlo_/view), which states, "Climate change is the defining issue of our times, and we as a District at are a defining moment. The District must make changes to reduce the carbon footprint of our facilities." The roadmap then lists three areas of focus:
 - **WASTE MANAGEMENT**
 - The District should adopt the "cradle to grave" process for all purchases and construction projects. While the towns of Hamilton and Wenham have made great progress with recycling and composting, the District must do more.
 - **RENEWABLE ENERGY**
 - The District should explore installation of a solar array to offset utility costs while reducing the carbon footprint of our facilities. If the District elected to look into a Power Purchase Agreement, it could potentially lock in reduced rates for up to 25 years.
 - **ENERGY MANAGEMENT & PERFORMANCE CONTRACTING**
 - Through energy performance contracting, the District has an opportunity to install infrastructure upgrades, reduce energy consumption, and have energy saving pay for the cost of the projects. [Under an energy performance contract, a third party pays for capital improvements and then recoups the costs from the school district from future energy savings.]
 - Mr Simons suggested these commitments from the District were a great starting point for the Committee to collaborate with the district. He proposed learning more about the District's emissions profile through conversations with Ms Masone, and getting to know relevant context and roles through regular attendance and friendly public comment and questions at School Board meetings.

- Mr Perkins: individual area of responsibility
 - Mr Perkins confirmed his interest in developing an “energy inventory” of municipal assets to prioritize and track the town’s Net-Zero progress from the 2009 Green Communities baseline.
- Mr Holt
 - Mr Holt has reached out to Bill Wilson who is steering the current Master Planning Process, but not yet had a response. Ms Masone notes that the Master Plan should incorporate the MVP. Ms Masone is in the process of contacting Planning Director Patrick Reffit re the Master Plan.
 - Mr Holt and Ms Maurand attended CATs meeting yesterday where the fuel storage depot was discussed. Committee is concerned about proposal to make a big capital expenditure to establish a fossil fuel storage facility in town, which apparently is to replace a collaborative arrangement with Wenham. We’d like to understand more about the proposed plan and alternatives including possible arrangements with other neighboring towns. HWCATs are apparently exploring the breakdown in the operating relationship between the towns allowing Hamilton to fuel in Wenham.
 - Mr Holt has explored possibility of “browse pages” on the town website. Ms Masone as Energy Commissioner already has a web page and will talk with Laurie Wilson, Asst Town Mgr, about posting more current content. Mr Holt stated that HEIC already has a page (<https://www.hamiltonma.gov/government/environmental-impact-committee/>) for us to populate. Currently it includes only the Charter, agendas and minutes, and names of members.
 - Mr Holt has forwarded to the Committee an email regarding green burials. He requests we read it and reply to him individually with comments.
- Next meeting: Thursday, March 23, 7 PM at Town Hall.
- Adjournment:
 - Motion to adjourn submitted and seconded by: Mr. Perkins, 2nd Mr Simons, approved unanimously.
 - Meeting adjourned by Mr Holt: 8:43 pm

Prepared by:
J. Simons, clerk

Respectfully submitted as approved at the March 23, 2023 meeting by Jack Simons, clerk