

Hamilton Environmental Impact Committee (HEIC)

Minutes of meeting, March 23, 2023

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

Members present in person: Jeanne Maurand (until 8:00), Don Perkins, Emmett Holt, Jack Simons

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

Time the meeting was convened and by whom: Meeting was convened by Chair Holt at 7:35 pm. This is the 5th meeting of the HEIC.

Documents / exhibits used: none

Issues discussed and votes taken:

Ms Maurand and Mr Perkins 2nded a motion to approve the minutes from the meeting of 3/3/2023. Ms Masone corrected statements about options for electric purchase by the town. Members Maurand and Perkins amended the motion to include the corrections. The motion was unanimously adopted.

Ms. Masone reported on successful presentations she made to Men's Groups at the Committees on Aging of both towns on March 16. The Wenham presentation was attended by 6 to 8 people and topics included energy audits, and energy efficiency improvements. The Hamilton presentation engaged around 15 people who expressed a high level of interest on topics including the town solar installations and the Community Choice Aggregation program, with many good questions including those involving emissions accounting. Ms Maurand noted how these meetings point to the value of getting Ms Masone in front of the public, due to her ability to make seemingly complex issues more understandable and approachable. The committee discussed other possible opportunities including meetings sponsored by League of Women Voters, Hamilton Mothers' Group, and Rotary.

Mr Holt reported on attending a "Solar 101" presentation by Hamilton-Wenham Climate Action Team, including explanation of three residential options for shifting to solar energy: installing rooftop solar, buying into a local solar farm, or choosing a green electric source through Community Choice Aggregation. The presentation by a solar installer could have been perceived as a sales pitch and is a useful warning to us against HEIC being seen as allied with any commercial interest.

Mr Holt additionally reported that residential electricity now provided by National Grid is already 49% green. Also, that the town has decided to purchase a battery-electric vehicle (BEV), a Ford F150 Lightning, for the DPW Director. Mr Simons noted that getting the DPW Director familiar with an electric vehicle was a great step since DPW vehicle fleet transition will eventually be an important step in reducing emissions. Although many medium and heavy vehicles are not yet available with green power, he noted from a visit to Oakland CA that all the public buses there appear to be hybrid, BEV, or hydrogen fuel-cell powered.

Continuing on reports of public events, Ms Maurand noted an upcoming Waste Walk and Tour at Brick Ends Farm, from 9:30 to 11 on April 20, 2023. Brick Ends Farm is the destination of compost collected by Casella in Hamilton. A recent Boston Globe article noted Hamilton as the first town in the Commonwealth to have mandatory composting as a condition of trash pickup.

Ms Maurand also reported that the Town Moderator has given permission for HEIC to place flyers on a table at Town Meeting on April 1. This will be an opportunity to alert the community to the work of HEIC and to recruit another member.

Mr Holt, noting that HEIC has a report approaching to the Select Board (SB), commented on the value that Ms Masone brings to the town and to its environmental impact efforts. He asked Ms Masone if there are additional resources she could use. Ms Masone said HEIC could help in identifying what we want to accomplish with an upcoming Municipal Vulnerability Program (MVP) grant request to the state, tying in the 2022 Mass Climate Assessment organized by region. Committee discussed the question of how MVP intersects with the HEIC's charge focusing on CO2 reductions. Ms Masone noted the following goals she thinks we might have: (1) writing a roadmap to Net Zero, (2) developing community outreach strategies, and (3) building regional approach (we are committed already to submit a joint proposal with Wenham and the H/W Regional Sch District (HWRSD). Ms Masone referred HEIC members to the grant application on the Commonwealth website for more information.

Ms Masone also noted an upcoming federal EPA grant under the Climate Pollution Reductions Grants Program funded at \$5 billion under the Inflation Reduction Act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. \$250 million will be for planning grants and ~\$4.6 billion for action grants. Hamilton is one of a group of 158 communities (including Boston, Cambridge and Newton) that would need to apply together; Ms Masone hopes the Metropolitan Area Planning Council would act as lead agency in writing the application. One benefit would be the regional approach.

Ms Masone also reported that while the town currently has a Green Communities Grant, we may be eligible for a new grant round in fall of 2023 focusing on energy efficiency.

Ms Masone also reported that the charging stations at Patton Park are supposed to be operational on March 27.

Continuing with the question of additional resources for the Energy Manager, Ms Masone stated that she is currently employed 7 hours per week across the 2 towns and the HWRSD. In response to questions from the committee, Ms Masone said she could perhaps increase to 10 hours, and could use a helper who would not need to have a lot of content area knowledge. She will get back to the committee on how much outside help she could use.

The committee then discussed the town's solar project at the landfill on Chebacco Road, the fact that the land is leased to a private company which owns the solar photovoltaic (PV) array and receives payment from the owner of the array. The town does not receive credit for green energy produced; instead the owner of the array can sell those solar credits. The green energy produced by the array does not necessarily get used by the town, which buys from National Grid, which purchases power from a variety of sources. The accounting of energy use, energy credits, and costs is complicated and committee members expressed frustration with the complexity. Ms Masone said she spends a lot of her time on these accounting issues which prevents her focusing on other tasks. Mr Perkins said the market system of carbon credits is laden with fraud and not credible and that we should count the productivity of the landfill PVs toward our reduction of emissions, since we were undeniably generating green electricity. Mr Simons agreed there are documented instance of fraud in the carbon market but that we still apparently can't count the landfill PVs toward our emissions reductions.

Ms Masone reported that the landfill PVs have generated a monetary credit for the town of around \$75k and there was discussion of whether this could be applied to the DPW, which has a deficit and is on a different meter.

Ms Masone said she has spoken to the Town Manager about purchasing 100% green energy and that she will get back to him about what it would cost, since this would be the key question.

Mr Holt will work with Mr Perkins and Ms Masone on high-level metrics on our current carbon emissions compared to the baseline FY of 2009, in preparation for HEIC presentation to the SB. Mr Holt contact our SB representative Caroline Beaulieu to request time on the SB agenda for May 15, 2023

The HEIC meeting schedule in the minutes from March 2 is no longer valid. The next meeting of the HEIC will be April 20, 2023.

Prepared by:
J. Simons, clerk

Respectfully submitted as approved at the April 20, 2023 meeting by Jack Simons, clerk