

**MINUTES**  
**ST. ALBANS CLIMATE AND ENERGY COMMITTEE**  
**REGULAR MEETING**  
**ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET**  
**4 PM MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2024**

**Committee members present:** Jim Stiles, Chair; Mary Harbaugh; Michael Saunders; Laura Isham; Zach Scheffler

**Committee members absent:** Susan Knightes (alternate); Rachel Ledoux (Student Liaison)

**City officials/staff present:** Paul Olshan, minute taker; Mayor Tim Smith joined the meeting at 5:15 pm.

**Members of the public present:** Marlena Valenta, Northwest Regional Planning Commission

**1. Call to order:** J. Stiles began the meeting at 4:03 pm.

**2. Public comment:** None

**3. Approval of minutes:** M. Harbaugh presented amended minutes for Jan. 8, 2024. **M. Harbaugh motioned to approve the amended minutes for Jan. 8 24. Seconded by M. Saunders. The motion passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**

**5. Report on communications and activities:**

- **MERP assessments and Implementation Grant:** M. Valenta updated timing for MERP energy assessments for the Barlow building and firehouse, now expected to occur by the end of May, followed by a draft report open to City requests for additional scope or other changes. The final report should be submitted by fall. M. Harbaugh asked about the newest Energy Burden rating for the City, which is a factor in Implementation grant awards. The current rating does not include electrical usage and so skews the city's rating data. M. Valenta confirmed that MERP Implementation grants will use 2019 data.
- **Barlow building emergency batteries:** M. Harbaugh noted that the VT Community Foundations Environmental Justice Small Grant award was amended to \$7,000, to reflect an opportunity to lease two Tesla emergency backup wall batteries for the Barlow building (HeadStart program) instead of purchasing one, for the same battery lifespan. In addition, Green Mountain Power, the lessor, will maintain the batteries and deal with them at the end of their lifespan. She is waiting for an estimate from SunCommon for any electrical work needed beyond standard installation, which is included in the lease. M. Harbaugh described how the batteries can provide a 3-4 hour "grace period" in the event of a power outage, allowing the HeadStart staff time to arrange for families to pick up children. The lease feature will also allow Green Mountain Power some flexibility to manage demand and so partly address Act 174 requests for municipalities to do their part in meeting energy needs.
- **Geothermal ground-source heat-pumps:** J. Stiles described the ground-source heat-pump site visits to Burlington's Hula building and to Champlain College. Mayor Tim Smith, Debbie New of the Vermont Community Thermal Network Alliance, and resident Beebe Potter also attended. J. Stiles noted that ground-source heat-pumps can be installed in a series of networks connecting multiple buildings over time and that this approach could be applicable to St. Albans. He will meet with D. New about a potential project in industrial park. M. Harbaugh mentioned the

“Expert Match” grant which could be used for a feasibility study, perhaps starting with the Bellevue project that the City is undertaking.

- **Other grant updates:** J. Stiles noted that the West-Side tree planting project was not awarded the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Grant. M. Harbaugh said she had notified Sarah Macy that the EV Charger grant does not support the City Council’s interest in downtown sidewalk-adjacent electric-vehicle charging stations and so will not be pursued at this time by the Climate & Energy Committee. M. Valenta suggested having a facilitator who could help local parking lot and building owners find and get approved for grants to get more charging stations installed.
- **Opportunities to work with schools:** M. Harbaugh described a meeting with School Superintendent Bill Kimball. He expressed interest in EV charging stations at each of the district’s three schools. M. Harbaugh sent him information on Charge Vermont’s workplace grant and will follow up in several weeks. He also encouraged the committee to pursue grant funding for sail shades (also called solar shades) for the City School playground. **M. Saunders motioned to authorize M. Harbaugh to pursue the possibility of a grant-funded sail shade project for the City School or other school properties. Seconded by L. Isham. The motion passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**

## 6. Upcoming events:

- **Climate Planning Day** Mar. 2 (snow date Mar. 3) public meeting about Climate and Energy Action Plan. M. Harbaugh noted that the weekend is part of school spring break, so a smaller turnout than first thought is anticipated, and the event will be held in Council Chambers rather than the City Hall auditorium. To accommodate more people’s schedules, she is avoiding a lengthy presentation in favor of encouraging people to come and go, viewing displays and writing comments on cards. The afternoon event is planned to start and end with an open-house, with more fixed-schedule speakers mid-afternoon.
- **Home Show** on Mar. 16 and 17. Z. Scheffler updated the committee on the Home Show project, which will focus on offering attendees information about reducing energy use and saving money. He described materials, activities, and scheduling, and asked committee members to consider three-hour sessions for attending the booth. The committee discussed raffle prizes, including grocery gift cards and small Energy Star fans. M. Valenta offered contacts that might donate electrical power tools for yard work. A booth reservation has been purchased and is ready to go.
- **Garden/soil health event**, end of April or early May. J. Stiles gave an update. He’s planning on giving biochar to anyone who attends.
- **Outreach to students.** As R. Ledoux has been too busy to help develop this event, the committee will not pursue it for this spring. M. Valenta said she could reach out to BFA where she regularly does educational events for more outreach opportunities.
- **Maple Festival.** The committee postponed discussion of this possible event until S. Knightes can participate.
- **Town Meeting Day** tabling event. J. Stiles said no table space is available inside City Hall on Town Meeting Day, but the committee could choose to place brochures and posters with another City-department table. The committee might be able to set up outside if it’s warm out. He will consider the weather forecast when the date is closer.

**7. Window Dressers.** M. Valenta described the Window Dressers project, in which a non-profit works with local volunteers and residents to build interior window inserts for insulation, including free inserts for low-income participants. Typically, residents sign up for the program during the summer, then

volunteers measure windows, and the build-inserts days occur in November. J. Stiles said the committee would consider the project in more detail at a future meeting.

**8. Climate and Energy Plan.** M. Harbaugh asked how the committee would like to read the proposed plan. She's going to send out sections as they come together with the idea that responses would be welcome but that some members might prefer to wait and read the draft report in its entirety.

**9. Consider appointing a Vice Chair.** J. Stiles described the purpose of a vice chair and asked who would like to serve. L. Isham offered. **M. Harbaugh motioned to elect L. Isham as Vice Chair, and, in the absence of the chair or vice chair, that any member could convene and arrange to post a meeting, and that leadership responsibilities for that meeting be determined at that meeting. Seconded by M. Saunders. The motion passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**

**10. Public bulletin board:** Z. Scheffler noted that an e-newsletter designed for residents should be fine in the context of the Open Meeting Law, as long as the committee doesn't use it to discuss issues among themselves. A public archive would also allow the public access to information. Z. Scheffler proposed collecting the contact information of folks who might be interested in the information. M. Harbaugh asked whether the committee could find an option for getting work done via email, an option that is accessible to the public to satisfy the Open Meeting Law, but designed to facilitate committee work on projects. This will be revisited at the next meeting

#### **11. Other business:**

- Mayor Tim Smith joined the meeting at 5:15 pm. T. Smith asked the committee to develop project ideas for an April 29 (rain or shine) **Mylan Technologies Community Service Day**, in which 250 employees are expected to be available. So far, potential projects include cleaning up Stevens Brook, Hard'Ack, and other areas. This effort is still in preliminary stages, but he would like input from the committee for additional projects. Project ideas, including supervision and tools, should be developed and submitted to the mayor by late March or early April.
- T. Smith also described an effort by Tom Hark, formerly a key founder of the Vermont Conservation Corps. Now he's starting up the **Civilian Conservation Corps of America**, which aims to train young people for climate-related jobs and careers. The project will seek federal funds from the American Climate Corps initiative. Students as young as 16 could claim a school credit for participating over the summer. J. Stiles will contact T. Hark to learn more about opportunities associated with the effort.

#### **12. Calendar and Schedules:**

- M. Harbaugh mentioned that scheduling committee-member coverage for upcoming events can be difficult, so the sooner things are scheduled, the better.
- The committee discussed moving up the next meeting or scheduling a special meeting, to address last-minute issues for upcoming events. **M. Harbaugh motioned that the next meeting be moved up to 4 pm, Saturday, Feb. 24, and that the committee not meet on Monday, Mar. 4. Seconded by Z. Scheffler. The motion passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**

**13. Reminders and conclusion.** None. M. Valenta left the meeting at 5:34 pm.

**14. Adjourn.** M. Harbaugh motioned to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Z. Scheffler. The motion passed with all in favor, no additional discussion.