

MINUTES
ST. ALBANS CLIMATE AND ENERGY COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET
4 PM MONDAY, APRIL 1, 2024

Note: Access via Zoom not available due to technical difficulties

Committee members present: Jim Stiles, Chair; Laura Isham, Vice-Chair; Mary Harbaugh; Michael Saunders

Committee members absent: Zach Scheffler (attempted to join via Zoom); Susan Knightes (alternate)

Note taker: Mary Harbaugh

Members of the public present: Jordan Weinstein. (J. Weinstein asked questions about several items.)

1. Call to order: L Isham began the meeting at 4:06 pm.

2. Public comment: J. Weinstein introduced himself and expressed specific interest in anti-waste initiatives. Committee members introduced themselves.

3. Approval of minutes: M. Harbaugh presented minutes for Feb. 26, 2024. **M. Harbaugh made a motion to approve. Seconded by M. Saunders. The motion passed with all in favor. No discussion.**

4. Report on communications and activities:

- **Home Show.** Z. Scheffler had been expected to present followup data about the Committee's booth at the event; he might email members. M Harbaugh said he is expected to arrange a public thank-you to Ace Hardware and Rail City Market for their donated items. M. Saunders noted that he has been entering about 300 raffle entrants' contact information into a database and will continue to coordinate with Z. Scheffler on the effort. The intention is to send raffle entrants information about opportunities to save money on various energy-using products and services.
- **Barlow battery project.** M. Harbaugh explained that the project has encountered some obstacles. Although basic installation is covered in the proposed lease agreement, additional electrical work is required. For the additional installation work, SunCommon's quote exceeds the grant amount by about \$1100. We may be able to cover that cost overrun in one of a few ways. A potentially greater obstacle is the discovery of a pre-existing electrical problem in need of repair before the installation, without which the project is unlikely pass inspection. An independent electrical company, Vermont Electric, has provided a quote of \$2800 for the repair. M. Harbaugh has contacted Sarah Macy about the problem. S. Macy is looking for City funds to cover the repair, but the outcome is uncertain. L. Isham stated that the project is in the City's hands.
- **Thermal Energy Network (TEN) project.** J. Stiles described plans for an informational lunch April 16 for industrial-park business owners interested in learning more about a potential geothermal/thermal network. Although this project is not within City boundaries, it develops local capacity for similar projects. M. Harbaugh noted that applications had opened for the federal expert-match grant which could be used for a feasibility study for a downtown/Bellevue geothermal/thermal network project. She will contact the mayor to inquire about the City's interest before delving into the grant research. M. Saunders noted that public attention was building at the Cathedral Square geothermal site.

- **Downtown alleyways project.** J. Stiles noted that one or more art-focused downtown alleyway pop-up events are being considered, after a positive response from the Downtown Board. This summer's pop-up event(s) are not within the Committee's purview, but one longer-term goal of the Alleyways project is to enclose one or more downtown alleys to reduce the amount of heating and cooling needed in adjoining buildings.
- **Dog-park tree planting.** J. Stiles has contacted the Franklin County Conservation District about the possibility of planting "food forest" trees, such as nut pines, in the area immediately east of the fenced yard, where neighbors have requested screening. The Conservation District staff will take the lead in arranging permissions, researching appropriate tree species, contacting potential partners, and writing grants.
- **GHG reduction priorities.** M. Harbaugh noted that Chip Sawyer received a request from the state's Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) for the City's top priorities for reducing greenhouse-gas emissions. The state will be applying for federal funds to help meet GHG-reduction targets associated with the Global Warming Solutions Act. ANR's draft summary of projects it hopes the federal grant will pay for already includes such familiar projects as weatherization and EV charging stations. C. Sawyer asked J. Stiles for list of top priorities within a couple of days. In response to C. Sawyer, J. Stiles explained that the Committee had not yet formally voted on such priorities, and he provided the following list, based on informal discussions and research:

- 1) **Geothermal/Thermal Network(s)** – both **feasibility studies** and **implementation** – for downtown and other possible locations, including schools. In addition to the huge direct benefits of clean heating and cooling, these approaches reduce the need for solar farms, wind turbines, imported electricity, and the challenges associated with them.
- 2) **Transportation Innovations**, developed with the help of **computer modeling and consultant support** for city-wide systemic efficiency, including possible microtransit/smart jitneys, and, in the longer term, a possible super-efficient ultralight rail system. Developing strategies for systemic efficiency should seek to reduce demand for all types of vehicular transportation (aka "mega-miles"). Innovative transportation strategies will also integrate with planning for neighborhood resilience hubs.
- 3) **Building Innovations**, with a focus on **optimized rooftops** – approaches that produce high R-value roof assemblies and make use of underutilized space – including possible tax incentives for reflective roofs, solar roofs, integrated solar/micro-wind roofs, green roofs, greenhouse roofs, and covered alleyway enclosures. A related building-focused priority is increased use of **batteries and other electrical storage options**, to better manage peak demand and reduce the need for increased power-transmission capacity.
- 4) **Natural solutions**, including **shade-tree planting** – for cooling as well as sequestration of GHGs – and **biochar-enhanced healthy soil** projects. Production of biochar reduces GHG emissions from decaying organic matter. Similarly, healthy soil can draw down CO₂ from the atmosphere (and offset emissions) while providing a variety of other benefits.

M. Harbaugh noted that these categories and priorities echo key features of the developing Plan and some elements of the survey. She added that transportation innovations could take into account different needs associated with the weather in different seasons. M. Harbaugh also said a fifth priority, not focused on GHG emissions but on adaptation, would be Planning for Extreme Weather. J. Stiles described micro-wind rooftop optimization and noted that a company in Bakersfield presents a good example of a greenhouse roof.

5. Upcoming events:

- **Speaker Scott Whittier of the National Weather Service**, at a Library-partnered event narrowly focused on weather and perhaps summer-heat preparedness, now scheduled for 6:30 pm, May 1, at the library. M. Harbaugh described efforts to re-think the previously scheduled Climate Planning Day, which had attracted scant interest. The alternate plan narrows the scope of the initial event and relocates it to a cozier setting. A later public-comment opportunity on Draft Plan highlights can be held during a regular Committee meeting. M. Harbaugh also asked the Committee to consider additional efforts for public outreach relating to preparedness for summer heat, and she proposed that this topic be added to the agenda for the next meeting.
- **Soil Health Event.** J. Stiles said he had completed the purchase of biochar for the April 27 Community Gardens event. He will email Committee members with additional details as they are firmed up.

6. WindowDressers. J. Stiles noted that Marlana Valenta of the Northwest Regional Planning Commission had requested a Committee vote. Due to the Zoom problem, M. Valenta was unable to respond to the Committee's questions during this meeting. In a previous email, she explained that she sought an official partnership between NRPC and the Committee for a WindowDressers build, as it would allow her to schedule with the City to use a municipal space, apply for a Grassroots Fund Grow Grant, and get help with the window-measuring process and Build Week. M. Valenta hopes some Committee members and others will volunteer. M. Harbaugh expressed reservations about safety and liability issues with volunteers entering people's homes, although she noted that the program has been successful for many years across the state. M. Harbaugh also said the program was an excellent opportunity for some residents – but not all residents – to improve insulation and draft-sealing, thereby saving money and making homes more comfortable. She said she hopes the project will target people who will get the most benefit and be upfront about issues that may be important for residents deciding whether to participate. **J. Stiles made a motion to authorize M. Valenta to act on behalf of the Committee to pursue a WindowDressers project for St. Albans City. M. Saunders seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.** M Harbaugh asked J. Stiles to contact S. Macy to inform her of the vote, as she is responsible for reviewing the Committee's grant applications and requests for other City resources.

7. Public newsletter/bulletin board: J. Weinstein offered suggestions for using social media. Action was tabled until Z. Scheffler can participate.

8. Calendar and schedules: The next meeting is May 6.

9. Other business: M. Harbaugh said she had begun research into sail shades for the City School playground, as previously discussed with School Supt. Bill Kimball. Preliminary estimates are that such as project might cost between \$3000 and \$15,000, although that could increase because of the city's distance from vendors. She also will follow up with B. Kimball about his interest in applying for an EV charger grant for the district's schools.

10. Reminders and conclusion. None.

11. Adjourn. M. Harbaugh moved that the meeting be adjourned at 5:16 pm. M. Saunders seconded. The motion passed unanimously with all in favor.