

MINUTES
ST. ALBANS CLIMATE AND ENERGY COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET
4 PM SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2024

Committee members present: Jim Stiles, Chair; Mary Harbaugh; Michael Saunders (via Zoom); Zach Scheffler (via Zoom)

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

Note taker: Mary Harbaugh

Members of the public present: Beebe Potter

1. Call to order: J. Stiles began the meeting at 4:15 pm. He will contact L. Isham and S. Knightes to confirm that the committee will not meet Feb. 26.

2. Pass gavel. Skipped in the absence of L. Isham.

3. Public comment: None

4. Approval of minutes: M. Harbaugh presented amended minutes for Feb. 5, 2024. **Z. Scheffler made a motion to approve. Seconded by M. Saunders. The motion passed with all in favor. No discussion.**

5. Report on communications and activities:

- **Downtown alleyways** J. Stiles described an idea for enclosing downtown alleys for energy efficiency and to provide options for events and enhanced pedestrian experience. He has met with developer Jim Cameron, Mayor Tim Smith, and Planning Director Chip Sawyer about the idea.
- **Downtown alleyways summer pop-up event** J. Stiles added that the initial discussion produced the idea of a summer pop-up event in one of the alleys, to test the concept. J. Stiles subsequently spoke with downtown coffee bar owner and artist Karen Scheffler about a pop-up event; he will continue to develop the idea.
- **Geothermal/ground-source heat-pumps** J. Stiles has spoken with Ricky Klein, who owns and operates The Meadery in the industrial park, about hosting a meeting among industrial park business owners to explore the idea of pursuing a networked ground-source heat-pump project. M. Saunders and J. Stiles mentioned work progressing at the Fonda site, where Cathedral Square is installing a non-networked geothermal/ground-source heat-pump for its new building.

6. Upcoming events:

- **Climate Planning Day** public meeting about Climate and Energy Action Plan. M. Harbaugh noted minimal response to a Front Porch Forum post asking residents to indicate if they would be attending. She will postpone the event in the hope of better attendance in April. Committee members mentioned other April events to plan around.
- **Home Show** 9 am-5 pm, Saturday, Mar. 16 and 9 am-3 pm, Sunday, Mar.17, at Collins-Perley. Z. Scheffler described schedules and details. He and M. Saunders will borrow comfortable chairs for committee members staffing the booth and are arranging for a “Save Energy, Save Money” brochure with information from Efficiency Vermont. The subcommittee is also arranging for clipboards to note booth visitors’ comments and making raffle plans for Food City gift

certificates, possibly small fans, and possibly one or more donated electric yard tools. The subcommittee is also arranging for displays, nametags, candy, and free copies of Green Energy Times. The staffing schedule so far provides for at least one person at the booth for the duration of the event. Z. Scheffler asked committee members to consider volunteering for additional time Saturday afternoon and for break-down at the end of the day on Sunday. J. Stiles offered to help at the end of the day on Sunday. M. Harbaugh mentioned the option of distributing WindowDressers information and perhaps taking sign-ups. She also suggested that subcommittee members might check to see if Efficiency Vermont would have its own booth at the event; if so some teaming-up effort might be possible. If not, the organization might provide additional printed material to distribute. M. Saunders noted that, if a new date has been set for Climate Planning Day, that event could be promoted at the Home Show.

- **Garden/soil health event**, end of April or early May. J. Stiles described plans for biochar giveaways at the event. He has identified a promising source and asked the committee to approve a \$600 expenditure from the MERP Mini-Grant for two yards of biochar. He has contacted Sarah Macy to arrange for storage of the biochar. M. Harbaugh mentioned an Agency of Natural Resources Zoom session about using biochar in the “Stockholm Solution” approach to street-tree planting; perhaps any extra biochar could be used in trial project that way. **M. Harbaugh made a motion to approve the \$600 request; M. Saunders seconded. Motion approved.**
- **Town Meeting Day** J. Stiles will staff a table outside for a few hours, if it is a nice day.

7. Window Dressers. J. Stiles noted that Marlana Valenta of the Northwest Regional Planning Commission had requested a committee vote. He said he would like clarification of what is asked of the committee. M. Harbaugh asked if Marlana could provide information about how WindowDressers approached privacy and safety concerns when volunteers are entering people’s homes. J. Stiles will get in touch with M. Valenta.

8. Climate and Energy Plan. M. Harbaugh is simplifying and restructuring the plan outline, with some reference to the energy-and-climate action plans of Randolph, Middlebury, and Rochester.

9. Public newsletter/bulletin board: Z. Scheffler described a simple informational newsletter, not for back-and-forth committee work, with an archive. He will check in with the City’s IT person about platform ideas and constraints.

10. Calendar and schedules: The next meeting is April 1.

11. Other business: M. Harbaugh said she had forgotten to mention at the last meeting that School Supt. Bill Kimball had some interest in EV chargers for all the Maple Run school parking lots, and that she had sent him information about the EV grant (workplace category). She will follow up with him. She also mentioned that she had previously sent S. Macy information about an expert-match federal grant for a geothermal feasibility study for the Bellevue site and had suggested at that time that some follow-up would be timely after the Town Meeting vote regarding the Bellevue site. M. Harbaugh will also check in with S. Macy regarding the City’s interest in pursuing that grant.

13. Reminders and conclusion. None.

14. Adjourn. Z. At 5:12 pm, Scheffler made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by M. Saunders. The motion passed with all in favor.