

MINUTES
ST. ALBANS CLIMATE & ENERGY COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET
4 PM MONDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2023

Committee members present: Jim Stiles, Chair; Mary Harbaugh; Zach Scheffler; Michael Saunders; Susan Knightes

Committee members absent: Laura Isham; Rachel Ledoux, Student Liaison

City staff present: Paul Clapps, Minute Taker;

Members of the public present: None

1. Call to order: J. Stiles called the meeting to order at 4:04 pm.

2. Public comment: None

3. Approval of minutes: M. Harbaugh made edits to the minutes and sent them to the rest of the committee. Her intention was to capture as many pertinent details as possible.

- **M. Harbaugh motioned to approve amended minutes from November. Seconded by Z. Scheffler. The motion passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**

4. Report on communications and activities:

- Please Don't Idle project: M. Harbaugh noted that the Please Don't Idle message was posted to Front Porch Forum and sent to the Messenger as a letter to the editor. She said R. Ledoux intended to write an editorial for the BFA Mercury and post to Instagram. M Harbaugh received two FPF responses thanking her for the message.
- J. Stiles and M. Harbaugh described meeting with Chad Spooner (City Councilor). C. Spooner said the city should prepare for extreme heat and extreme ice and mentioned these as possible resources for the committee:
 - Medical Reserve Corps, a volunteer-based effort focused on Franklin and Grand Isle Counties, with contact Jacqueline Kelley (Isle La Motte).
 - United Way 211 program, which at one time established a registry of emergency needs submitted by residents.
 - Local Emergency Operation Plan from NW Regional Planning Commission.
 - Updates to the City's Hazard Mitigation Plan that may not be included in the document posted on the City's website.
 - An option to modify VT-Alert messages to include local content.
 - State Department of Health Climate & Health Program Manager Jared Ulmer.
 - Vermont Emergency Management.

The discussion with C. Spooner also touched on stormwater and sewage overflows in the Houghton Park neighborhood. A plan has been developed for an underground tank for floodwater storage, but its implementation is years in the future. In that meeting, C. Spooner also discussed locations for electric vehicle charging stations.

- M. Harbaugh spoke with Maple Run School Superintendent Bill Kimball about possible collaborative grant efforts. She will set up a meeting with him.
- J. Stiles moved on to Grants and Fundraising.
 - M. Harbaugh noted that the Vermont Council on Rural Development Climate Catalyst project awarded the grant for the committee collaboration with the Library, which will acquire two e-bikes for its non-traditional-items lending program.
 - M. Harbaugh said that the “public attraction” category of the Vermont Community EV Chargers grant program – the category the City might use for downtown, public property – requires a 5 percent match. She noted that the City Council has specified that no matching funds will be available from the City budget for grant projects. She will look into one possible source of match funds: a new federal program, the Inflation Reduction Act’s Energy Tax Credit, which provides municipalities direct payment in lieu of tax credits for qualifying energy projects. The committee might want to speak to someone with more expertise about the Energy Tax Credit and with Sarah Macy about setting up a fund to receive the balance of direct payments that could then be used toward required matches.
 - M. Harbaugh described a grant-funded project based on the Vermont Community Foundation's Environmental Justice Small Grant Program, which provides up to \$10,000 to serve a marginalized or underserved population in the context of climate change. The committee’s project would provide for a Tesla Power Wall or similar emergency backup battery for the HeadStart program at the Barlow building. **M. Harbaugh motioned to the committee’s endorsement of a grant application for the Vermont Community Foundation’s Environmental Justice Small Grant Program. Seconded by M. Saunders. The motion passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**
 - M. Harbaugh also mentioned the need to set up a protocol with S. Macy for spending funds awarded from the MERP Mini-Grant.

5. EV charging station planning/tour:

- Z. Scheffler updated the EV charging station project. Z. Scheffler and J. Stiles went around the city to consider public charging stations and developed this information:
 - Currently Existing
 - St. Albans City downtown garage, Enphase (Clipper Creek), 4 charge cables

- Hard'ack Hill near pool, Chargepoint, Commercial level 2 — CT4000, 2 charge cables

Under Development

- Center St at Federal (behind 45 Kingman St.)?

Proposed by Z. Scheffler and J. Stiles

- Vermont Superior Court, Franklin Unit (36 Lake St.)
- Bank St. at Church St (opposite Maiden Lane)

Potential Sites (under preliminary consideration)

- Barlow St. School (39 Barlow)
 - St. Albans City Police Station (142 S. Main St. - proximate to the street)
 - St. Albans City Post Office (153 N. Main St. - parking lot, 4 spaces nearest Main St.)
 - Fitness Zone (248 N. Main St. – parking lot)
 - Food City (101 Lake St. - parking lot)
- J. Stiles gave a breakdown of the different chargers and why a certain level would be placed in a given location. He added that a grant could provide up to \$160,000, but details have yet to be examined. Chargers should be sized, and priced.
 - **S. Knightes motioned to extend the existing EV charging committee to include M. Harbaugh and to prepare for the grant. Seconded by M. Saunders. There was a discussion on how much expertise will be required for this grant. The motion passed with all in favor.**

6. Discussion of public events for late winter and/or spring:

- M. Harbaugh had no updates on the March 2 public meeting about Climate and Energy plan.
- Z. Scheffler gave an update on the Home Show. Rob Coleman had communicated the final rate of \$650 for a booth at the Home Show. Z. Scheffler proposed to secure the booth so that the committee could start printing materials and preparing. M. Harbaugh specified that this information should be sent to Sarah Macy, and inquiries made with S. Macy if a check needs to be written out. A process needs to be set up for accessing funding awarded from the MERP Mini-Grant. M. Harbaugh will initiate this conversation with Sarah Macy. The committee also discussed the dates of the Home Show and who would help with this and other events.
- J. Stiles talked about the soil health event. He is working on a spring event at the Community Garden for gardeners about soil health and its relation to climate-related topics. J. Stiles proposed giving out samples of biochar (special charcoal for gardening that promotes carbon sequestration) at this event. Each unit goes for \$40, but J. Stiles will look into purchasing a bulk order for this event. This would raise awareness for climate-smart gardening processes, and would likely take place in May.
- J. Stiles mentioned the Outreach to Students project. He hopes to pin down a date with R. Ledoux. He is considering a giveaway for the January event.

- **Z. Scheffler motioned to propose \$150 for Outreach to Students materials. Seconded by M. Saunders. The motion passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**
- **M. Harbaugh motioned to authorize \$650 for the Home Show booth event. Seconded by Z. Scheffler. The motion passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**
- The committee discussed doing table at Maple Festival, April 26-28, but members were uncertain about the time commitment. M. Harbaugh proposed moving this to the January agenda.
- The committee considered doing a hallway table at City Hall on Town Meeting Day, Tuesday, March 5. J. Stiles mentioned that this would be a good idea for local outreach and wondered what permission would be required. M. Saunders was curious about how many people visit City Hall on Town Meeting Day and what time people usually go. M. Harbaugh asked the committee to consider who could staff the table and brought up having an unattended table with brochures. The committee liked the idea but deferred a decision to the next meeting. The committee briefly discussed where to store these materials.

7. Climate and Energy Plan:

- J. Stiles has drafted some content of the Climate & Energy Plan. M. Harbaugh will add information and edit the draft. The Plan will need to be reviewed by the entire committee, coordinated with the City Plan, and checked for any needed additional details to serve its purpose for grants and other materials in the future.
- M. Harbaugh described the public survey that will help inform the Plan. She mentioned software platform choices and asked for comments on the draft questions she had assembled with contributions from committee members. M. Saunders brought up keeping the reading level of the survey to a 6th grade level to make it easier for responding.
- **Z. Scheffler motioned to approve the survey project, but the reading level needed to be easier to understand and shorter. M. Harbaugh was authorized to edit the survey to reflect these concerns, choose a platform, and to post the survey online at various locations. Seconded by M. Saunders. The vote passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**

8. Project Tracking and internal communication:

- Z. Scheffler updated the committee on file-sharing tools and other methods for internal communication. He recommends not using file sharing services, since they can conflict with the Open Meeting Law. One-on-one, non-serial discussions can work when the topic is discussed at the next public meeting. Also, Z. Scheffler mentioned that the committee should be dissuaded from collectively communicating

via social media about climate and energy issues, because it could be a violation of the Open Meeting Law.

9. Public bulletin board posting area:

- J. Stiles proposed that the committee look into the possibility of an ongoing, online public “meeting,” in which committee discussions could occur “in public” outside of regular, physical monthly meetings. M. Harbaugh suggested this approach could be a legal precedent and that the opinion of the state Attorney General be sought. J. Stiles and Z. Scheffler may look into this.

10. Year-end or periodic reports to Mayor, City Council, and City Manager:

- M. Harbaugh proposed an end-of-year report for the Mayor, City Council, and City Manager reviewing key committee accomplishments and noting upcoming spring events. The committee discussed whether to simply report or to include recommendations. M. Harbaugh said the Plan would comprise the committee’s recommendations.
- **Z. Scheffler motioned to ask M. Harbaugh to write and send a one-page report to the Mayor, City Council, and City Manager. Seconded by M. Harbaugh. The motion passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**

11. Calendar and Schedules: J. Stiles proposed the next meeting be January 8th.

- **S. Knightes motioned to move the meeting to January 8th. Seconded by M. Saunders. The motion passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**

12. Other Business

- M. Harbaugh mentioned the federal NREL/DOE Clean Energy to Communities grant (C2C), which offers an “expert match” opportunity that could be used to fund a feasibility study for geothermal/ground-source heat pumps. She will look into this after the March Town Meeting vote.

13. Reminders and conclusion

14. Adjourn

- **Z. Scheffler motioned to adjourn. Seconded by M. Harbaugh. The motion passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**