

Boxborough Energy Committee February 2015 Minutes

Date/Location: Wednesday, February 11, 2015, Library

Attending: Members: Margo Webber, Francie Nolde, Abby Reip, Richard Garrison, Kesahva Srivastava

BOS Representative:

Guests: Jill Appel, Concord and Jim Snyder-Grant, Acton Green Community

Members Absent: Santiago Tapia-Perez, Rebecca Morrison, and Vince Amoroso, Larry Grossman

Next Meeting: Wednesday, March 11, 2015, Town Hall.

Minutes

General business

- January minutes were approved.
- Vince Amoroso was attending the rescheduled BOS meeting so was unable to attend.
- Francie, Richard and Larry will meet with LELD at the end of February to discuss the Net Metering issue and determine if LELD will offer Net metering to Boxborough residents and how much they will allow.
- The Energy Committee will host a Solar 101 program at the Library on Thursday April 16 from 7-8:30. Francie has arranged for Elizabeth Youngblood of CEC to present a solar overview and Sasha Deri to give a presentation on solar components and add-ons. Jen Benson and Jamie Eldridge will also be present. Jamie will talk about solar and energy legislation he's working on.
- Francie discussed all the outreach she has done. The Town Planner, Adam Duchesneau has sent a mass email with the Solar flyer to his Master Plan Update email addresses, asking those to respond to Francie if they'd like to be placed on the solar e-mail list. Adam also sent another mass email to Town Boards and Committees and will repeat this once or twice more before April 16th. Francie is working with the schools, has two sandwich boards to announce the meeting, and is working with Selina on installing a banner. A note will also go out with the March tax bills. Francie needs more volunteers and helpers to get the residents to know about the Solar 101 workshop. Abby agreed to help Francie with Action Unlimited (Solar Forum), Fifer's Day, and a dedicated website.

Main Discussion

The main discussion was about the Solar Initiative. Jill Appel of Sustainable Concord and Jim Snyder Grant of Green Acton were both Solar Coaches for their Town's respective Solarize program. Both Jill and Jim presented a summary of the process, experience and problems they experienced with their Solarize program. Below is a summary of what they presented.

Jim Snyder Grant on Acton Green Energy Process – Acton chose NE Clean Energy, had 34 houses and 3 Business participate in the program.

Acton is a green community and did the Solarize program according to green community timelines and procedures. Acton did an RFP and put the process out to bid. Acton was very thorough in their review of the bids and by the time they chose the contractor they wanted, the contractor had already committed to another Green Community Town. This happened twice and Acton ended up using NE Clean Energy as the contractor, their third choice. However, Harvard was satisfied. All green communities do the solarize program at the same time. Contractors are limited to how many programs they can commit to. The Town of Boxborough should put out an RFP for a solar contractor at a different time than when the green communities are going through the Solarize RFP process.

Jim said to get the Town on board to support the process. Residents often called the Town Staff with questions on the Solarize program. Since Town Staff were aware of, and supportive of, the process, they gave positive feedback and answers. The Town Staff are also involved in the procurement (Town Administrator), the permitting (Building Inspector on roof integrity) and the final inspection (electrical inspection), so it is important for the Town to approve of the program.

Marketing is a key part of getting good participation. Some installers participate in the Marketing and some do not. Jim recommended that while Boxborough is drafting the RFP, they include help with marketing from the contractor. Jim also indicated a good Solar Coach is very important because this is the person to drive the program. Acton's Solar Coach answered technical questions, but did not manage the program.

Once a contractor was chosen, Acton did a Solar 101 presentation so residents could learn about the program and meet the installer. Once residents indicated their interest, the installer had to verify the house was a good site (had sun or ability to have sun if trees cut down), had a good roof (oriented right and structurally sound) and determine the size of the system. When the contract is signed, the process of obtaining permits for electric, building, etc., and designing panel layout begins. There is lots of paperwork. Once all the paperwork is done, the installer will take two days to install the system. Total process is up to 120 days from sign up to installation.

Jill Appel spoke on the “Solar Challenge” in Concord – Concord chose Astrum Solar and had 166 people sign up.

The Town of Concord, through research on the Website, found 4 solar installers with reasonable prices. No RFP was sent out. Concord had an interview committee of five volunteers that came up with a list of questions for the 4 installers. After the interviews, the committee chose Astrum Solar. Jill was the Solar Coach and did the majority of the marketing through the school, a post card mailing, Concord Journal articles, flyers, and yard signs. Concord also worked with a High School Environmental teacher who had high school kids evaluate areas and roofs in Town. Residents with sunny roofs facing the sun were sent letters saying they had a good roof for the

Solar program and should consider participating. Many residents joined because of the letter. The end deadline was extended from July 31 to October 31 because of increasing interest and lack of people signing up during the summer.

Once residents began installing solar systems, Concord would install Lawn signs saying, "I'm going Solar, How about you?" This marketing approach brought the Solar Challenge program to other residents' attention. Finally, during some of the early PV installations, the committee had an open house party where residents could come watch the PV installation and ask the installer questions. Many residents were more comfortable with an installation after seeing a system being installed. Astrum also gave \$100 dollars to the community for every installation. This money was used to install a PV system on a municipal building.

Jill Appel's recommendations on RFP include;

- Ask for Green Community Solarize price. This is the lowest price possible so ask the installer for it.
- Choose installer that will work with SREC's and LELD.
- Choose installer that does not have low price with numerous hidden add-ons. All basic add-ons should be included in the basic price.
- Have inclusion for money toward the installation of a municipal PV system.
- Have incentives for early sign ups. For example, first ten people to sign up have \$250 off base price.