Minutes for the Pelham Energy Committee (DRAFT)

Date: Jan 16, 2018

Time: Meeting opened at 7:40pm; adjourned at 8:55pm

Location: Ramsdell Room, Pelham Community Building

Members Present: Stan Swiercz, Alisa Pearson, John Larsen, Peter Hepler

Note taker: Peter Hepler

1. Minutes from Jan 2 meeting were first briefly amended and then approved.
2. Ongoing EC member search: no one has been identified
3. Green Committee progress: LED relamp only current project.
4. Slate Article: Alisa reports that our part of the Slate Article is completed, and the final product looks good.
5. Solar Hot Water Challenge: Stan commented that for this to move forward, we need either someone from the EC, or an interested outside person to work on this project. He further noted that the Mass CEC wants all orders placed before the end of April 2018.
6. Solar PV: Stan commented that from his prospective the funding issue has us stuck. One possible thought had been to have individuals from Pelham buy into the project. However, at the moment the favorable tax rebates (the 30% tax rebate) and SRECs (solar renewable energy credits) are no longer available, which obviously dampens people’s desire to invest. The investment tax credit is not useful for most tax payers. Alisa wondered about the Town floating a bond, say for 20 years. John suggested that we simply forget about the tax breaks, because these are more or less history. A recurring issue for all of this concerns knowledge about what would be the nature of our nascent solar PV project? How big would it be? How much energy/electricity would it produce? How much would it cost? The question repeatedly arises, which was again articulated by Stan and Alisa, about getting someone to provide us with the much needed analysis and estimates. Stan also commented that he had talked about this with Coop Power, but nothing was forthcoming. Alisa suggested we get in touch with Solar Energy Designs.
7. HVAC for heating and cooling: Ric Adamcek allows that we can nurse along our existing, but aging, heating system for another 2 years. Along this line it should be noted that there is a annual 25K pot of money that can be used to cover repairs on this system. We now need professional assessments about how best, and with what system, to replace our existing heating system. Again, the need for professional advice is clear. Stan has relayed his communication with a professor at UMass who can have a team of students provide such an assessment. Alisa wonders about hiring a professional engineer, which Stan agrees would likely do a better job than the students, but also cost lots more. There seems to be the general consensus that we should be thinking about a completely electrified system. Thus we should not entertain acquiring a wood chip/pellet boiler. This then focuses our attention either on an “air-based” heat pump or a “ground-based” heat pump. It has been repeatedly noted that “air-based” heat pumps would be unable to handle the truly cold spells such as we have just had, while the “ground-based” heat pumps are rather expensive. In relation to this last comment, John reported a new company he had become aware of that has developed a much improved/cheaper and quicker method for drilling the wells needed for the “ground-based” systems. These improvements apparently markedly reduce the installation costs. Alisa also promises to gain information about the newly installed “ground-based” heat pump for community buildings in Tuners Falls. Stan also suggests that we plan a brain-storming session on the HVAC issue.
8. MVP – Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness: Alisa asks about our vulnerabilities and how we can respond? It was noted just with this last warm spell and rain storm some different roads in Pelham, including Quarry Road, were washed out leaving residents stranded. These have been caused by weather related events, and given climate change, they can be expected to increase in frequency, and also in magnitude, as the years progress. There is a move afoot to hold a town workshop to specifically address our vulnerability, and to seek solutions. Karen Ribeiro, of the Pelham Select Board, is involved with this matter. Stan reported that we have had an Architecture firm (Dodson and Flinker) and PVPC (Pioneer Valley Planning Commission) apply to lead the workshop, with PVPC being recommended to the Select Board.
9. CCE – Community Choice Energy: Stan reported that there has been progress in creating an alliance between Amherst, Northampton and Pelham. Northampton will vote on Thursday, Jan 18, 2018, which, if successful, will be a step forward in forming a task force to examine the possibility of forming this three community consortium focused on energy. Stan also reported that Paul Fenn is proving to be effective in initiating and forming a CCE incubator under the auspices of the Clean Energy Extension at UMASS.
10. Meeting adjourned at 8:55pm.