

AVON CLEAN ENERGY COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
April 20, 2022

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Chairperson Firestone via GoToMeeting. Members present: Bernie Zahren, Christine Winter, Kim Stevenson, Carrie Firestone, Michael Dawson and Michael Guerrero. Member absent: Melissa Firestone. Staff member present: Grace Tiezzi, Assistant Town Manager.

II. APPROVAL OF THE PRECEDING MINUTES – March 16, 2022

Chairperson Firestone made a motion to approve the March 16, 2022 minutes as written. Mr. Dawson seconded the motion.

Ms. Winter made an edit to the minutes. Because the recording of the March meeting will need to be relistened to in order to make the edit, the minutes were tabled until the May meeting.

Ms. Tiezzi suggested that minutes should be a reflection of what was discussed during the meeting, rather than a narrative of what each member said. Ms. Tiezzi recommended that the Commission review the minutes of other boards and commissions on the Town website and discuss the structure of the minutes at a future meeting.

III. COMMUNICATION FROM AUDIENCE – None

IV. COMMUNICATION FROM COMMISSION

Chairperson Firestone stated that Bernie Pelletier and Mark Scully from People’s Action for Clean Energy (PACE) will attend their May meeting. They are working on their analysis of Avon, which they started a while ago. They will also present what PACE is doing. She stated that PACE has the “Path to 100”, which is a handbook for transitioning CT communities to 100% clean, renewable energy. She suggested the Commission members look at this prior to the next meeting. Chairperson Firestone stated that PACE’s presentation will help the Commission set up their long-term strategy. She has also invited Craig Peters from Capital Clean Cities to talk about transportation. This organization will assess the transportation in Town and gives suggestions and recommendations on how they, as a Town, can do better.

Regarding PACE’s “Path to 100” website, Ms. Stevenson stated there are three different ways to address reducing greenhouse gases. The major greenhouse gases are carbon dioxide and methane gases. On this website, it says that they focus on reducing load so that they are using less energy from carbon producing sources; they use renewable energy that does not use oil or gas. She stated that the third component would be taking carbon out of the atmosphere, which is called carbon sequestration. She stated that this portion is missing from PACE’s equation. She suggested that the Commission think about this if their overall goal, as an organization, is about reducing greenhouse gasses and the impact of climate change. Chairperson Firestone agreed. She stated this is why, ultimately, it may make sense for the Commission to change or amend their Charge to be more comprehensive; clean energy is much broader.

V. OLD BUSINESS

Connecticut Green Bank Solar Marketplace Assistance Program – Status Update

Ms. Tiezzi stated that at its April 7th meeting, the Town Council approved the execution of the PPAs for Roaring Brook School and Avon High School. The Town and Board staff are currently coordinating with the Green Bank staff to execute the PPAs and to determine a timeline for next steps which will include structural assessments, design and permitting activities. She stated that she has an email from the attorney stating that the PPAs have been signed by all parties involved for the solar.

Mr. Dawson questioned what the reasons were for not moving forward with the middle school. Ms. Tiezzi stated that there were concerns regarding the state of the middle school and that perhaps there may be a desire to do some renovation work that could possibly violate the agreement. She stated that this was the chief reason for not moving forward. Mr. Dawson stated that the parking lot of the middle school seems to be a great place for carports, unless a possible renovation would include the parking lot area. Ms. Stevenson stated knowing the economics of a carport, it is very hard to do with such a small project like the middle school because of the steel structure that needs to get built to put the solar panels onto. The economics are more difficult; it is unlikely to work for the middle school. Chairperson Firestone questioned if the technology is changing to make something like this more economically beneficial. Ms. Stevenson stated that the most significant way that technology is advancing is around the panels themselves. They are much more efficient.

Mr. Dawson stated that when he approached the idea of carports through a local private company, they came up with both scenarios of a power purchase agreement and front of the meter. They had said they could do a PPA and come up with approximately 600 kilowatts per year, saving the Town about \$500,000 over a 25-year period. He questioned what the down side would be for putting out another RFP for carports. Chairperson Firestone stated that this Commission should be doing exactly what Mr. Dawson is talking about; trying to figure out every potential opportunity for clean energy and what the cost is and how to put out proposals. She feels that this will be part of the Commission's long-term strategy, which will require more time and deliberation on issues like these.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that the Town has a number of master plans that are utilized by different departments. She can see this Commission doing an energy master plan to study the Town, where a consultant would come in to study the Town and make a set of recommendations that states what would need to be done in order to get certain things accomplished. This would be a roadmap to possibly put out RFPs for such things like renewables or different types of home programs for residents, etc.

Development of Vision, Goal Setting & Possible Revision of Charge – Status Update

Ms. Tiezzi stated that Chairperson Firestone has invited Mark Scully and Bernie Pelletier of the People's Action for Clean Energy (PACE) to the May meeting to participate in a discussion about potential resources, opportunities, programs and projects. The Commission has previously discussed that PACE may be able to provide some context and assistance in developing a mission, goals and a work plan.

American Rescue Plan Act Funding – Status Update

Ms. Tiezzi stated that the Town Council continues to move along making decisions on the ARPA funding. She stated that on April 7th, they identified a few projects that they would like to see come forward for

appropriations at their May meeting. The ARPA page on the Town's website has been updated with this information. They are trying to keep the page current as well as archiving old postings. Also, the proposed project list continues to include a place holder for a Town Energy Plan that Chairperson Firestone and Dan are working on to develop a scope for.

Impact of Global Events on Local Energy Markets – Status Update

Chairperson Firestone has been working with the Avon Free Public Library staff to develop a series of community forums focused on the situation in Eastern Europe and their impact on local energy markets.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

Farmington Valley Green Festival Planning Session / Communications Strategy

Chairperson Firestone stated that only 29% of homes in Avon have done energy audits, which could save people thousands of dollars. She believes it would benefit the Commission to start focusing on a targeted campaign to help the community better understand that there are a lot of rebates available and there are opportunities to get their house audited. Also, to educate the community as to how to plan proactively with their cars and appliances. She stated that although these things are not monumental, this would be a great place to start.

Chairperson Firestone stated that the plan for the property across the street from the high school that the Town recently purchased is to cover it with healthy soil and use it as a community pollinator pathway. They would encourage the community to poach plants to plant at home. She feels that this is something they can get the high school kids involved with as well.

Chairperson Firestone stated that they discussed having some sort of centrally located campaign to challenge the Town to become more clean and green. She asked the Commission members to think about launching a campaign, naming it, along with a checklist of things the community members can do over the next few months. The first item on the checklist could be signing up for a home energy audit and possibly launching the campaign at the festival. The Commission members agreed this was a great idea.

Mr. Guerrero suggested having a physical or digital passport or checklist. Ms. Winter agreed with a document to help keep track of progress and goal setting, although she feels that there should be something that is visible for the entire Town to see. Something that could be centrally located and visible, possibly at the community center. Chairperson Firestone stated that there are materials available to them that can be used to build something, possibly a sandwich board. They could possibly place it at the intersection near Luke's Donuts or in front of the library. She stated the sandwich board could have their website on it that would bring people to their page with all of the details and information on it. Mr. Dawson stated that QR codes could be used as well.

Ms. Stevenson suggested that, as one of their action items on the checklist, they could have households determine their carbon footprint and take certain actions in order to understand how they could reduce their carbon footprint. She suggested possibly having awards for households that reach certain standards. Chairperson Firestone stated that there are already programs out there that they can look at for ideas. Mr. Guerrero stated that once they decide on a certain website they want to use, they can put the link to it on their own website. Ms. Tiezzi stated that she can create a dedicated page on the Avon

Clean Energy Commission's webpage with a simple link. Chairperson Firestone stated that they could use a combination of links, the website and QR codes.

Ms. Tiezzi suggested thinking about having a mascot as well. Ms. Winter stated that it should have some environmental meaning. Mr. Guerrero stated that using something already familiar to the community might be best. Mr. Zahren suggested having an endangered species of some sort as their mascot. He will do some research on this.

Chairperson Firestone stated that she was thinking about a ten-week campaign with ten items, picking one item each week to include more information and more visuals. She questioned if the Commission could put one email out per week for ten weeks. Each week could be a different theme which would come with a more comprehensive list. Ms. Tiezzi stated that it would be possible to send out the emails that frequently.

Ms. Stevenson stated that some of the actions will take more than ten weeks. Chairperson Firestone stated that they could make them simple things, such as just scheduling the energy audit, although during that week they can educate people with more detail about that task. This would be more educational with actionable goals. Ms. Winter suggested having the campaign run for 20 weeks with an email every other week, which would give people more time. She suggested having the campaign run between the summer solstice and winter solstice. Ms. Stevenson stated that there seems to be an education phase and an action phase to this with possible check-ins and celebrations when people achieve certain things.

Chairman Firestone stated that the Commission members are trying to make a lasting change as well as changing the culture, which they can be working on at the same time as they are working on their comprehensive plan. She questioned if they should kick off the festival by simply encouraging people to sign up for home energy audits, ending with a celebration. Mr. Guerrero agreed to start with just the home energy audit at the festival with a follow up email. This way the Commission can pause and reassess before starting something new.

Chairperson Firestone stated that they will have an Avon Clean Energy Commission table at the festival. They can come up with a name and create a logo and a "welcome to our campaign" banner. Meanwhile, they can refine their list of ten things. Ms. Winter questioned if there was a way to actually get people signed up for the audit at the festival. Chairperson Firestone believes there is a way to sign people up on the spot. Ms. Tiezzi suggested, in terms of building a mailing list, to encourage people to sign up for Town e-blasts at the festival as well, which would help them in the future.

Mr. Dawson stated that they should also advertise the festival in the Valley Press, which is widely distributed. Regarding the mascot, he suggested asking Anagha's Club or even widening it to all high school students, who could give their ideas instead of the Commission coming up with something. Chairperson Firestone stated they could also ask people to name their mascot at the festival. Ms. Tiezzi suggested having an art competition at the festival and have the kids draw and name a mascot. Chairperson Firestone stated that this would also be a great activity for the festival. The Commission members agreed.

Ms. Stevenson stated that she has come up with a list of seven things in terms of the home energy audit; this item would be mainly for people who own their own home. She stated that they need to think of ways to engage people that do not own their own homes as well. Ms. Winter stated that there are

other things that people who do not own can concentrate on, such as their driving habits, food choices, trying to cut down on paper products in their homes, etc.

Mr. Guerrero stated that there are a lot of actions on the Earth Day website, which the Commission might want to use as a blueprint. Ms. Tiezzi suggested picking categories; one for homeowners, renters and children; having different actions that are appropriate for different people.

Mr. Guerrero referred to the website, ecochallenge.org. He stated that this website is built for what this Commission is talking about. He suggested exploring this option if they wanted to do something on an ongoing basis. He volunteered to look into this more.

Chairperson Firestone stated that they have discussed a lot of topics of interest tonight. She stated that it would make sense for them to come up with a name for the challenge and start at the festival with getting people signed up for the energy audit and the Town's email list. They should also write down their ideas, so they as a group, can decide what should come next. Ms. Winter suggested syncing the checklist/passport idea with the library forums and other upcoming campaigns. Chairperson Firestone agreed with possibly having a talk associated with that topic and then maybe adding an activity to it as well. Ms. Winter stated that this could be very exciting if they can fit all of these pieces together with something that works with their priorities, goals and objectives.

In terms of naming the campaign, the Commission discussed Bedford, New York, whose campaign is called Bedford 2030. They are a community that has one of the best renewable sustainable programs in the country, if not the world. They have a non-profit and volunteers that contribute. They run a lot of programs on a lot of different topics. Mr. Zahren suggested having a name with a date attached to it for goal setting. Ms. Winter stated that she likes the idea of having the word, "challenge" in the campaign name since they are facing a challenge as well as issuing a challenge. Mr. Dawson stated that he agreed. He suggested naming the campaign, "Avon Green Valley Challenge". The Commission members also liked, "Green Valley Challenge". Chairperson Firestone suggested that the Commission members brainstorm over the next several days to see if they can narrow down the name of the initiative via email. At the same time, they can also come up with their ten items. They can then figure out how to position those items knowing that they will be trying to get emails addresses as well as people signed up for the home energy audits at the festival. They will also have a "kid friendly" activity to draw a picture and name their new mascot. Ms. Stevenson stated that she would also like to have an alternative from the energy audit for people who do not own their homes. She suggested that alternative be the carbon footprint. Ms. Winter suggested Chairperson Firestone reach out to teacher Mr. Marilla since he has his ECE class do an assessment of their home's carbon footprint. The Commission might want to approach him to ask for help with doing this on a Town-wide basis.

Ms. Stevenson suggested inviting a representative from Eversource, Energize Connecticut, to the festival to promote the audit and possibly give handouts. The Commission members agreed.

Chairperson Firestone stated that the following will also be at the festival; approximately 5 different types of electric vehicles for people to look at and sit in; BikewalkCT with information about biking in Connecticut and Avon, PACE; the pollinator pathway people; the Sierra Club; the League of Conservation Voters; possibly people wearing thrifted outfits to show how fashionable it can be; Blue Earth Compost; Wild and Scenic to talk about the river; the Climate Action Club; as well as a few "kid friendly" booths. She stated that they still need suggestions for zero waste food.

Chairperson Firestone questioned if the Avon Clean Energy Commission had a banner of some kind. Ms. Tiezzi stated that they do not, although there is a big printer in the Engineering Department that can possibly make one. She will look into this once they decide on a name for their initiative.

Mr. Dawson and Ms. Stevenson both volunteered to help at the festival.

VII. ADJOURN

Respectfully submitted:
Chairperson Carrie Firestone

Attest: Alison Sturgeon, Clerk