

**AVON CLEAN ENERGY COMMISSION
AVON ROOM BLDG. #1 TOWN HALL
MINUTES
April 18, 2018**

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman Bernard Zahren in the Avon Room, Building 1, Town Hall. Members present: Chairman Bernard Zahren, Don Phelan, William Shea, Christine Winter and Venkata Anupaju. Members absent: Richard Kretz and Jeffrey Macel. Advisory member absent: Jonathan Craig. Staff member present: Grace Tiezzi, Assistant to the Town Manager.

II. APPROVAL OF THE PRECEDING MEETING MINUTES – February 21, 2018

Mr. Zahren made several edits to the February 21, 2018 minutes.

Mr. Anupaju made a motion to approve the February 21, 2018 minutes as amended. Ms. Winter seconded the motion, which passed. Mr. Shea abstained.

III. COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE – None.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

Discussion: Multi-Town Initiative

Mr. Zahren stated that he and Ms. Tiezzi met with other surrounding towns in order to learn about what they are doing within their communities. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the multi-town initiative included representatives from Clean Energy Commissions from Avon, Bloomfield, Canton, Farmington, Simsbury and West Hartford. This was a two hour discussion regarding each town's current activities and how they could leverage their resources together to achieve the same goals as a group of collective commissions. She stated that each town is working on very different projects, including solar and energy benchmarking, all with different long and short term objectives. It was decided that each town would go back to their individual boards and commissions in order to discuss issues that may be worth pursuing. The towns will then come back together with topics they have come up with and possibly vote on something that can be pursued as a group. Ms. Tiezzi made it clear that Avon's participation in this group is not guaranteed until they see what the consensus of the group might be in terms of topics. She stated that this has been a valuable discussion already, and even if it does not work out with all of the other communities, Avon may be able to partner with one or two of those communities on a project that meet more specific goals. The next multi-town collaborative meeting will be held in Bloomfield in June. Ms. Tiezzi stated that money is and will be a sticking point in this venture. They will need to be creative in their ideas.

Mr. Zahren stated the Ms. Tiezzi recently sent out the revised charge of this Commission from the Town Council to the ACEC members for their review. He stated that this Commission's charge is almost exclusively focused on energy; to reduce energy use at the Avon level. This started out with facilities owned and operated by the Town and the Board of Education, but the revised charge discusses going out to the broader community as well, although it remains in the context of energy. He stated that one of the most unique things he heard at the meeting was that West Hartford's tipping charges for waste is based on tons and they recently discovered that if trash is out by the curb in a rain storm, it is much heavier from the soaking of the rain. West Hartford is trying to find a way to keep the trash from absorbing this moisture in order to save money on their tipping charges. Mr. Zahren stated that there is an anaerobic digestion facility operating in the area. West Hartford's trash hauler will take the organic material to be turned into gas which is used to run a generator to make renewable energy. This is a town initiative to supply fuel to a renewable generation system; the power that is generated goes back into the grid. This is an indirect way of generating more renewable energy.

Mr. Zahren stated that he feels there is room for this Commission to enhance their charge to say clean energy and sustainability. Although the general concept is there in numbers 4 and 5 of the charge, this Commission did achieve a 20% reduction of energy use by 2010. Mr. Phelan stated that, referring to Bloomfield's issue with moisture ridden trash, there is an education piece to this as well that could be incorporated.

Mr. Zahren stated that this Commission has discussed in the past about running a charrette. This allows residents to discuss and have input about a certain topic. Mr. Shea stated that Simsbury has had two successful charrettes; they were very well attended by the public. Although they are very expensive, it was worth going through the process. Mr. Shea stated that charrettes are about creating sustainable revenue. He suggested combining a project with a private vendor, who is common to all of the towns involved. Mixing private and public money usually makes for a more receptive group. Mr. Zahren also suggested having a 5-6 town open agenda presentation on several different topics that would be open for discussion with the public.

Ms. Tiezzi reviewed some of the other town's projects with the Commission members that were brought up in the meeting as well as those projects that are being researched. Mr. Zahren gave the Commission members an overview of Canton reviving their two dam projects to generate electricity. He stated that their permitting is in place and a private developer has discussed building the hydro-generating plant with private money and selling the power back to the Town of Canton at a discounted rate.

Mr. Shea questioned if any of the towns discussed water conservation. He believes a grant for this would be well received. Ms. Tiezzi stated that she does not remember any projects discussed on this topic. She did state that storm water management is currently a hot topic since every town in the State is working through the MS4 requirements to ensure everyone is diverting storm water properly and that it is being treated before going into the streams. She stated that town staff has been meeting for the last few months regarding this topic to figure out what needs to be done. Storm water is an interesting topic that is wide reaching. It is something that every town in this group and every town in the State is dealing with at the moment. She stated that this may be something that can be worked on collectively as a group. Ms. Winter questioned who in town is currently responsible for this issue. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the Public Works and Engineering Department are partnering to put this together, as well as working with a consultant. Mr. Phelan questioned if this topic comes under this Commission's charge. Ms. Tiezzi stated that she does feel that there would be some opportunities related to this topic for this Commission. She could, if there was interest, invite the consultant to come in to discuss the storm water permit with the Commission members at their June meeting.

Ms. Winter stated that she attended a presentation on 100% sustainable in Simsbury approximately a year and a half ago. She stated that there was a great deal of information regarding the energy use patterns in that town, which would be the basis for modifications to reduce their energy footprint going forward. This was not a costly endeavor since they had interns from UCONN doing a lot of the legwork. She stated that the biggest use of energy in town was transportation. The study also looked at viable applications for solar in town. Ms. Winter stated that she would like to explore the idea of Avon engaging in a similar study. Mr. Shea stated that this would be a worthy exercise, although he believes they should first find out what worked well and what did not work well for Simsbury prior to bringing the idea to the other towns. Ms. Tiezzi stated that energy benchmarking has already been done in Avon through a grant, which helped create their Energy Management Plan. Ms. Winter suggested using the benchmarking that has already been done on the town buildings and adding to that in terms of reaching out to the town as a whole.

If the goal is to reduce Avon's carbon footprint by 20% by 2020, Ms. Winters stated that more research is necessary to guide the Town's next steps. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the new Raymore and Flannigan furniture store in town submitted an application to the Planning and Zoning Commission to increase their footprint. In exchange, they told this business that they would need to put in some kind of energy efficiency measures. The application was approved, although she is unsure what specific measures were decided upon. She stated that the theme of sustainability is woven throughout the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Ms. Zahren stated that prior to the next meeting this Commission should inquire about how the other towns interpret their participation in the CT Clean Communities Program, since this is specifically in their charge. He questioned if the pledge was to reduce energy use by 20% or if there was something additional that needed to be done. Ms. Tiezzi stated that this goal was already achieved. Mr. Zahren stated that although they achieved the goal, he is in disagreement with how it was reached. He explained that this was achieved by purchasing renewable energy credits (RECs), in effect saying Avon can take credit for renewable energy that was purchased from a wind farm in Pennsylvania. This is nothing other than greenwashing. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the Town has not purchased RECs since she has been employed with the Town.

Mr. Phelan stated that another topic to bring to the other towns could be the benefits of bicycling. He stated that Simsbury has done a lot regarding this issue, including becoming accredited as a bike friendly community. This may be a no cost way to promote bicycling. He feels that this is something Avon can be proud of while reducing energy usage. Mr. Zahren stated although bicycling is mostly recreational, if people were to ride to work, this would be a reduction of fossil fuel. He stated that there is now connectivity on the Rails to Trails all the way down the river through Farmington and all of the valley towns. Also, the intent of the Town Center is to have it walkable and user friendly. Mr. Shea agreed that this would be a great topic to discuss with the other towns.

Mr. Anupoju stated that he also likes the topics of bicycling as well as looking into the storm water requirements. Also, this Commission needs to continue to better educate kids and adults on these important topics.

There was a short discussion regarding this Commission having a Vice-Chairman to run meetings if the Chairman could not attend. Ms. Tiezzi will bring the member's concerns to the Town Manager and will report back to them.

Ms. Winter volunteered to go to the June multi-town initiative meeting with Ms. Tiezzi.

Legislative Updates

Mr. Zahren stated that there has been no movement on the microgrid in terms of reopening it, although the Legislature passed, out of the subcommittee, an amendment to the solar regulations. This will allow virtual net metering, but they are also proposing, not just for commercial but potentially for homeowners, to not allow net metering on a cumulative basis. The utility is trying to say this can only be done on a month to month basis instead of a yearly timeframe. He stated that this would be a big negative for solar. He is unsure if this will pass prior to the Legislature adjourning. Ms. Winter stated that all towns need to work at the Legislative level; more needs to be done. Mr. Zahren stated that the Town Manager has written several letters to their State Representatives on behalf of this Commission; the most recent letter was written last fall. Ms. Winter proposed having a permanent item on the agenda regarding legislative advocacy.

Mr. Zahren stated that part of their charge is to educate residents. They could start by educating the community as part of an outreach program to urge people to follow the Legislation and write their own letters and participate in advocacy in that way. Mr. Phelan stated that a letter of this kind could be written by several of the towns together in the multi-town initiative. Ms. Tiezzi stated that this has been done before within the Farmington Valley Collaborative advocating for the return of education aid. This could possibly be done again if it is a topic that is in the interest of multiple towns that has to do with energy or sustainability. Any type of letter from this Commission would need to go before the Town Council for their review.

V. NEW BUSINESS – None.

VI. DO ANY BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THIS MEETING – None.

VII. ADJOURN

Mr. Shea made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 p.m. Mr. Phelan seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted:
Chairman Bernard Zahren

Attest: Alison Sturgeon, Clerk