

AVON CLEAN ENERGY COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
February 16, 2022

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m. by Chairperson Firestone via GoToMeeting. Members present: Carrie Firestone, Christine Winter, Kim Stevenson, Michael Dawson and Michael Guerrero. Members absent: Bernie Zahren and Melissa Firestone. Staff member present: Grace Tiezzi, Assistant Town Manager.

II. APPROVAL OF THE PRECEDING MINUTES – December 15, 2021 and February 2, 2022

Ms. Tiezzi stated that she spoke with the Town Attorney regarding approving the December minutes. There are two options, neither of which the Commission members can fulfill tonight given that the members present at the December meeting are not present tonight. The first option is to have the two members, who are still on this Commission and who were present at the December meeting, attest that the minutes are an accurate representation of what occurred. The Commission as a whole could then vote on the minutes. The second option is to have the new Commission members abstain and Mr. Zahren and Ms. Firestone, who attended the December meeting, vote to approve them, although that is not possible tonight because they are not here. She stated the only way to make a motion tonight would be to table the December minutes until the next meeting.

Chairperson Firestone made a motion to table the December 15, 2021 minutes until the next meeting. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

Chairperson Firestone made a motion to approve the February 2, 2022 minutes. Mr. Guerrero seconded the motion.

Mr. Dawson and Ms. Winter each made changes to the February minutes. Since changes will need to be made by going back and relistening to a portion of the meeting, the February minutes will be reviewed and possibly approved at the next meeting.

Chairperson Firestone amended her motion to table the February 2, 2022 minutes until the next meeting. Mr. Dawson seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

III. COMMUNICATION FROM AUDIENCE – None.

IV. COMMUNICATION FROM COMMISSION

Chairperson Firestone stated that she would like to discuss the possibility of having a Facebook page for the Avon Clean Energy Commission, which she would volunteer to run. The page would help people in the community better understand what they do as a Commission. It would also give tips about energy efficiency and basic public service issues in terms of clean energy. She feels that this will help engagement more people from the community. Mr. Guerrero felt that this was a good idea and a good way to reach out to people. It is also easy to support and manage.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that she will speak with the Town Manager about this. There is currently one Facebook page in Town, which is for the Police Department. Prior to publishing anything with the Town's name on it, she would need to make sure it is done correctly. She asked that Chairperson Firestone and Mr. Guerrero hold off on this.

V. OLD BUSINESS

Connecticut Green Bank Solar Marketplace Assistance Program – Status Update

Ms. Stevenson recused herself from this discussion and left the virtual meeting.

Chairperson Firestone stated that there were some questions and clarification needed regarding the subsequent meeting with the Board of Education Finance Committee. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the Finance Committee received the same presentation from the Green Bank as this Commission did. The consensus of the Committee was to not make any decisions or recommendations but to vet a number of issues, which they would bring to the full board on March 15th. It would then go to the Town Council on April 7th.

Chairperson Firestone stated that she felt time pressure during their special meeting; she was under the impression that the Board of Education needed this done quickly. It seems that the Board of Education is now saying that there is a bit more time. Subsequently, the Finance Committee members made it seem that this was new to them and that they were waiting for the Clean Energy Commission to give them a recommendation. She stated that this felt like a disconnect in terms of communication as well as some miscommunication in terms of the process. She is left feeling like she needs some clarification. Ms. Tiezzi stated that they were originally hoping to have this before the Town Council by March 3rd. There are a lot of factors regarding the time line. The Town is participating in a cohort and they have already secured their energy incentives, which also have a timeline on them. They are also working on a construction timeline, that if this project is to go forward in this current iteration, it needs to be ready for construction in the fall. In the spring of last year, this project was presented to the Clean Energy Commission, who recommended it to the Town Council to move forward. At that point, the Town Council had a presentation from the Green Bank and recommended proceeding with the due diligence process and executing a letter of intent. At that time, the information was provided to the Superintendent to provide to the Board of Education. Ms. Tiezzi stated that it is important to note that these projects take a long time to come to fruition. It may seem like it came out of nowhere, but it was in front of the boards in the beginning, then moving at the staff level with updates to the Clean Energy Commission and Town Council, and then back to the boards for a decision. She stated that the Town was hoping to have approvals in place by March. The Green Bank is working with the Town in pushing out these approvals with the understanding that there is underlying business that the Board of Education needs to take care of that is more pressing with the understanding that this is still a decision that needs to be made.

Chairperson Firestone stated that regarding the timeline in the presentation, she remembers it being August or early September, although she is now hearing December. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the Green Bank gave the same presentation to the Board of Education Finance Committee that this Commission received. It was not until after the Finance Committee's presentation that there were other things happening in the background that were not energy related and there needed to be a pivot. It is not that different information was presented to the two boards, but that circumstances changed.

Ms. Winter stated that she was at the Board of Education Finance Committee meeting and she came away from it with more discomfort about the process. She felt that the impression that was given to the Committee was that the Clean Energy Commission had been working hard on this process for a year. She stated that this Commission has only had two meetings on this topic, the second being with a largely reconstituted group who was hearing all of this for the first time. They were also being asked to make a decision within the context of that meeting. She did express discomfort at their special meeting and asked if they could have some time after the presentation to, as a Commission, talk amongst themselves and to digest all of the information from the presentation and to develop their thoughts and ask questions and comments of each other before voting. She felt rushed and it was the opposite at the Finance Committee's presentation. She is unsure what changed between the two presentations. She stated that the start date was also changed from presentation to presentation, from a fall start date to December.

Ms. Winter questioned why this was not being voted on by the Town's Board of Finance and only by the Board of Education Finance Committee. She was told that it was because these are school buildings and the project has to do with the school so it would be a vote for the Board of Education Finance Committee. Although this is true, Ms. Winter stated that although the Board of Education pays the utility bills, they do not own the buildings. She feels it would be appropriate for the Town's Board of Finance to be involved in this decision as well since they have more of a finance background than some of the members on this Commission. Ms. Winter stated that although the presentations sounded the same, when speaking about possible future renovations to the middle school in the middle of the 20-year contract, Mr. Dykes told the Board of Education Finance Committee that there would be penalty for breaking the contract. She stated that the presenters emphasized to the Clean Energy Commission that they would work with the Town and the penalty part, she felt, was downplayed. Also, they never said what the penalty would be. She feels that this is important information to have in writing in order to see what the risk is. Regarding the educational piece of this project, Ms. Winter stated that the Green Bank's answer during the presentation was vague. Although there is an educational piece, there is no dedicated staff and no materials; although there is a public site, it is not very user friendly. She feels that it is unrealistic to think that the Town will actually ever see this piece of the project.

Regarding the middle school, Mr. Dawson stated that at the onset of this project, two or three buildings did not make the cut because of the age of the roof. He feels optimistic about the building and the Green Bank keeping good relations with the Town and working to find a good solution if necessary. Regarding the curriculum piece, he is hopeful that it will stay a part of this project but they could possibly discuss this as a new business item.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that, regarding the capital plan for the schools, the Town does not have a plan at this current time for any new school renovations or construction. If they were to do a construction project, it would be a multimillion-dollar project and chances are they would be half to three quarters through the contract period, at which time the solar panels would have depreciated in value and there will most likely be better technology on the market at that time. She stated that when talking about a multimillion-dollar project, the Town would work with the Green Bank to do what makes sense even if the Town had to decommission the panels. It would be a small price on what the Town would be building and what they could potentially reap from whatever that new technology is. Ms. Tiezzi stated that if it were to come to this, she feels that the penalty would basically be a cash payout for the value of the energy that the Green Bank is not able to produce. Regarding the educational program, it is in the power purchase agreement; a term was added that states the Green Bank will work with the Town on an educational program.

Chairperson Firestone questioned what recourse the Town would have if the Green Bank does not fulfill what is in the power purchase agreement. Ms. Tiezzi stated that there are legal recourses. Also, the Commission should keep in mind that this is not a private company. The Green Bank has a stake in the State of Connecticut as well as working with municipalities.

Ms. Winter stated that once the project is completed, it will be maintained by Investment Prosperity Capital. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the power purchase agreement is with the Green Bank. The Town will be working with the Green Bank.

Mr. Guerrero feels that the Commission needs to be confident in their decision they made at their February 2nd special meeting even though they feel that they did not have adequate time to process all of the information that they received that night. He feels that they need to believe it was a positive decision and start to look forward. The other boards and commission will also be looking at this project and making a thoughtful decision as well.

Chairperson Firestone asked that, moving forward if there are any changes, the Town communicate it to all of the parties involved. They want to build trust, consistency and transparency across all of the boards in Town as well as with Town officials. The more communication across the boards the better. Ms. Tiezzi state in the future she will send changes via email to the Chairperson and/or Commission members. Likewise, if a member hears something that is contrary or concerning to them that they please reach out to her directly.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

Introductions

Ms. Stevenson rejoined the virtual meeting.

Chairperson Firestone asked that each Commission member take some time to get to know each other by way of brief introductions.

Nominations and Elections of Vice Chairperson

Chairperson Firestone stated that the first person that naturally came to her mind to fill the role of Vice Chairperson is Christine Winter. She has been on this Commission for quite some time.

Chairperson Firestone asked if there were any other nominations. There were none.

Chairperson Firestone made a motion to nominate Ms. Winter as Vice Chairperson of the Avon Clean Energy Commission. Mr. Guerrero seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Development of Vision, Goal Setting and Possible Revision of Charge

There was no discussion. This will be discussed at the March meeting.

Overview of ACEC History and Charge

There was no discussion. This will be discussed at the March meeting.

Visioning Exercise

Chairperson Firestone asked that each Commission member be prepared to share their vision of what they would like Avon to look like.

Chairperson Firestone questioned if the Commission members would like to invite Bernie and Mark from PACE to their next meeting to see if they would like to add to this Commission's vision. The other option could be to invite them to another meeting where they can give a presentation about what PACE is doing as well as what they are doing in their towns. She feels that this would help enrich this Commission's understanding of clean energy. Ms. Winter stated that Bernie and Mark did research about Avon and presented it to this Commission in the past. She feels a presentation would be beneficial. Mr. Dawson stated his concern regarding the timeline of not having them to the next meeting. To have their input after the fact is less useful. Also, thinking about implementing any vision requires money; there is currently a unique opportunity where there is money from the federal government that the Town Council will have many people vying for. He feels time is of the essence.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that the Town of Avon is receiving almost \$5.5 million in ARPA funds. This is not recurring funding; programs or services that will eventually have to be made up in the operating budget want to be avoided. The Town will be focusing on capital projects primarily as well as projects that have little to no operating costs that are associated with them that come from either a master plan; a need that has been exposed during the pandemic; or a recommendation of a consultant or commission. She stated that if this Commission has any projects to try and move forward, they could be brought before the Town Council. Mr. Dawson, again, stated that he felt there was an urgency to discuss this issue.

Chairperson Firestone questioned what the timeline would be for the Town Council accepting proposals. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the Town Council has already approved supplemental appropriations; they have approved projects in the amount of approximately \$1.2 million, which were projects that were already in the Town's capital improvement plan for the current year. These items will go to the Board of Finance at the end of the month for approval, although there is still ARPA money that remains. She stated that the Town Council will be hearing a presentation on a fiber optic buildout project. From there, they will be looking at Town staff for recommendations on how to allocate the remainder of the funds.

Ms. Stevenson stated that approximately half of the projects already presented to the Town Council relate to sustainability in some way. She suggested trying to get money in order to have a professional firm work with this Commission to figure out how to operationalize their vision with a plan. She feels that this will be money well spent.

Chairperson Firestone suggested that this Commission make recommendations to whatever project is being sent forward to be as sustainable as possible in the context of the project. They should recommend to the Town Council to build both sustainability and equity into consideration of each project. Instead of coming up with their own projects, this Commission could put their energy in helping figure out, even if it costs more, how to maximize sustainability and equity into projects.

Ms. Winter stated that she likes Ms. Stevenson's idea as well as trying to tie together the proposals that are coming from all different entities around Town. She would like to see an overarching philosophy

about how the money is going to be allocated. It would make sense given the nature of the extreme emergency that they are facing when it comes to climate and to prioritize to all of the departments that this should be part of whatever they are proposing. She suggested talking to the Town Council in terms of how they are going to make these decisions and propose that the issues that are related to clean energy, sustainability and equity should be at the top of the list.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that having the Commission look at and discuss the projects that are already being proposed as well as talking to the Town Council, possibly at their March meeting, is a great idea. She stated that if there are other projects that individuals of the Commission or the Commission as a whole would like to be considered, to email her.

Chairperson Firestone stated that she will reach out to Bernie at PACE and she and Ms. Winter will go to the Town Council's March 3rd meeting on behalf of the Commission. The Commission members agreed.

Regarding equity, Ms. Winter stated that there is a proposal for a new apartment building on the other side of Route 44, which is supposed to include housing for lower income. She feels that this is a perfect opportunity to make sure that this building is energy efficient as a priority. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the developer has already received approvals. She believes there were some sustainability features in this development.

Discussion and Potential Amendments to Meeting Schedule

Chairperson Firestone stated that it might be helpful if this Commission met once a month instead of every other month. Ms. Tiezzi stated that, by law, all public boards and commissions are required to approve a meeting schedule for the following calendar year and file it with the Town Clerk's Office on or before December 31st of the prior year. This Commission approved a meeting calendar at their December meeting for the year 2022. This calendar had bimonthly meetings. What can be done now, is to keep the meeting schedule that is currently on file and in the off months, a special meeting of this Commission can be set, or the meeting calendar can be amended. The only difference between a special and regular meeting is the agenda. Business can be added to an agenda for a regular meeting with a two-thirds vote of the Commission during the meeting. With a special meeting, nothing can be added to the agenda once it is posted. Ms. Tiezzi recommended that for now, they keep the bimonthly meeting schedule; the Commission can schedule a special meeting for March 16th at 7p.m. When it comes time to approve the schedule for 2023, they can do that with 12 meetings a year. The other option would be to amend the meeting schedule going forward. Mr. Guerrero stated that he likes the option of the special meetings, which gives the Commission some leeway in the summer time if there is a month when members cannot make a meeting because of vacations, etc. The Commission members agreed.

Sustainability Themed Community Event

Chairperson Firestone stated that she is putting together an environmental festival on May 14th. It is going to be very grassroots and community-based festival with an electric car show and a composting area and a pollinator pathway habitat area. It will be held at the Congregational Church. She asked if the Commission was comfortable being one of the partners on this event. This is a zero budget event. She stated that the other partners are the Avon Congregational Church, the Girl Scouts, Steve Mitchell and the Avon Garden Club. Ms. Winter stated that this Commission would be highly remiss not to partner with them for this event. The Commission members agreed.

VII. ADJOURN

Chairperson Firestone made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:20 p.m. Mr. Dawson seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted:
Chairperson Carrie Firestone

Attest: Alison Sturgeon, Clerk