

AVON CLEAN ENERGY COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
February 15, 2023

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 p.m. by Chairperson Firestone via GoToMeeting. Members present: Bernie Zahren, Carrie Firestone, Christine Winter, Michael Dawson and Michael Guerrera. Members absent: Kim Stevenson and Daniel Carvalho. Staff member present: Grace Tiezzi, Assistant Town Manager.

II. APPROVAL OF THE PRECEDING MINUTES – January 18, 2023

Ms. Firestone made a motion to approve the January 18, 2023 minutes. Mr. Guerrera seconded the motion.

Ms. Winter and Mr. Dawson each made one edit to the minutes.

The motion to approve the minutes as edited was unanimously approved.

III. COMMUNICATION FROM AUDIENCE

Bruce Appell, Fire Chief and Avon resident, stated that the Fire Department received a Neighborhood Assistance Grant for \$2,500 toward solar panels for one of their fire stations. He believes that they have a two-year window in which the funds need to be spent. Because this amount of money will not fund a lot of solar panels, he asked the Commission to look out for other grants or matching funds that they could put together with this recently received grant.

Ms. Firestone questioned where the Town is in terms of assessing fire stations. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the architect is doing an analysis in terms of a roof inventory, including which roofs might be optimal for solar. Specific to fire houses, she stated that the Town recently had a third party consultant come and develop a master plan for department facilities and apparatus. This will help the Town make decisions regarding renovation, expansion and new stations. The result of the study has recommended renovations to Company One, which is the facility on Darling Drive as well as a new station to replace Company 3. The Town is now putting together a Building Committee and making plans to get further into the design process for some of these projects.

Ms. Tiezzi suggested that Mr. Appell could ask if CT Water would be willing to change the scope of the grant; \$2,500 for solar will not go far. CT Water might allow them to use the grant money to implement other energy efficiency measures at Company 2 or Company 4.

Ms. Firestone stated that she would like this Commission to recommend, as they are developing a plan and putting a Building Committee together, that they employ best energy efficiency practices when building and renovating the fire houses. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the plan will go before the Town Council in March. If the Town Council moves forward with the building projects, they would then look to appoint a Building Committee and approve a Charge and a Statement of Need. She stated that one of the standards now is to build to energy efficient standards. Once the Building Committee is appointed; this Commission could speak at one of their initial meetings or the Commission can draft a letter.

Mr. Appell stated that he lives on New Road, just above the low head dam on the Farmington River. He stated that DEEP is in the process of looking at removing that lower head dam. The dam in Collinsville Center has a hydro plant in it; it has a turbine that produces energy. The secondary contractors of the dam have been visiting the site on the lower head and are in the process of putting together a proposal to DEEP to turn the lower head dam into a hydro producing facility as well. He stated that he is unsure where this currently stands. They have had a site mason there to assess the brickwork of the existing structures. There is a safety issue that needs to be addressed. He asked if this Commission could possibly draft a letter in support of this.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that she attended a meeting for the dam, although she is unsure of what the context of the meeting was. She will discuss this with Larry Baril, who was also at this meeting.

Mr. Zahren stated that there was a big contention between Avon and the Town Manager in Canton in terms of getting the dam turned into a hydro plant. He stated that there are a lot of concerns regarding controlled flows. He believes the lower dam, the far side of the river, is in Burlington and the other side is Avon. It would not be an easy process, having to get all of the Towns working together.

IV. COMMUNICATION FROM COMMISSION

Mr. Guerrero shared a working document for Green Up Avon 2023, a Strategy and Commission Plan. He is hoping this document can guide the Commission and give some structure to their initiatives moving forward. The document includes what the ultimate goal is and what the current state of the goals are. The goals can be edited as they go. The other sections of the document are objectives; their target audience and channels; their strategies, tactics and activities; what their key message is; evaluation and measurement of each event; and an activity tracker. He stated that this document is just a way to guide this Commission; to give them structure. He welcomed everyone's feedback on the document.

Ms. Firestone stated that she would like to sit down with Mr. Guerrero and Ms. Tiezzi to talk through the Commission's feedback to make this a polished, working document. She believes this will help keep the Commission on task. She stated that when they do hold events, they need a more strategic plan. They need a clear strategy in terms of who is doing what for each event.

Ms. Winter thanked Mr. Guerrero for his effort and stated that the Commission could benefit from systematizing their goals and their progress through this working document. She questioned if this document is intended only for the Commission's internal use. Mr. Guerrero stated that it is for internal use, but the document could possibly be simplified to be used for external uses and as a marketing tool, reports to the Town Council as well as for grants.

Ms. Winter stated that she is confused about having a few things moving forward and not sure how they will interact with each other, including the Green Up initiative and their long range plan and their consultation with Bedford 2030. She is unsure how the pieces will fit together. Also, she questioned about if this Commission is still getting ARPA money from the Town Council for developing their long-range plan.

Ms. Firestone stated that they were going to use the funds to do a more extensive analysis of Avon's energy, although this was very extensive and expensive. Ms. Tiezzi's analysis that she is working with Bernie and Mark seems to fit their needs for now. The idea is to figure out the

big picture needs internally and then figure out money. In terms of this Commission, the overarching initiative is Green Up, which is to help Avon be more efficient and more environmentally forward thinking. Under the umbrella of Green Up is the energy efficiency program for people to sign up to make their homes more efficient, as well as the pollinator work. There are also seminars; the community is interested in things like this.

Ms. Winter stated that she would have liked the Commission to talk through the long-term plan before a change in direction was made. Ms. Tiezzi apologized if there was any miscommunication. She stated that she worked together with Ms. Firestone and Ms. Stevenson to put together an RFP. It was talked about at a meeting to first talk to Mark and Bernie prior to the RFP going out. They came back and said they would give Avon the tools to do this themselves. She stated that the draft plan is currently with the Town Manager. Once he looks at it, it will be shared with Mark and Bernie, and then the Commission members. She stated that this is a 2-year plan. Hopefully she will be able to share this plan with the Commission in the next few months. Ms. Winter stated that Mr. Guerrero's working document could dovetail with this plan. She stated it could work in concert; it would be good to have this document that spells out the details.

Ms. Winter stated that the wording in the document is focused on residents; she suggested possibly adding something about businesses as well since that is an important piece.

Mr. Dawson stated that after the last meeting, he started a pile of used textiles. He is hopeful that Avon will soon join in this effort.

At a previous meeting, Mr. Dawson discussed the French law regarding car ports. He stated that it is now actually law. This is a big win for France. This is retroactive and not just for new parking lots. Mr. Zahren stated that the big problem with carports has always been that there are tax credits and subsidies for the solar panels themselves, but they never include the structure of the carports. There may be some new provisions in the Inflation Reduction Act that helps pay for the structure that holds up the solar panels. Ms. Firestone asked Mr. Dawson to look to see if any states are entertaining legislation that mirror France in any way.

V. OLD BUSINESS

Green Up! Avon Sustainability Initiative

Ms. Firestone stated that she has been calling contractors and they are all overwhelmed. She stated that more people are signing up for solar. In order to get solar, people have to get an energy audit done, which is backing the contractors up. Some contractors are booking out until next year. A contractor will be contacting her tomorrow who is interested in coming to Avon in late spring / early summer.

Ms. Winter stated that she spoke with Bernie Pelletier who stated that the contractors are constrained by the amount of money that they get from Eversource; the money is given out on a monthly basis. They are booking out because the money runs out for the month.

Pollinator Programs

Ms. Firestone stated that they are having their film screening on invasives on March 1st. They will have two experts to do follow up conversations after the film. She asked that Commission

members please post this event on social media as well as send information to neighbors and friends. It will be an interesting program.

Bedford 2030 Clean Energy Coach

Ms. Firestone stated that the Bedford coach will be in contact with her soon in terms of talking to the Commission members. He is a good resource to help this Commission figure out how to move forward.

Environmentally Responsible Investing Program

Ms. Firestone stated that they tentatively scheduled this forum for April 19th since it is Earth Week; it is important for the Commission to do something that week. She stated that Mr. Zahren will focus on the content; the team will work on getting the word out.

Mr. Zahren stated that he would like to name the forum "Sustainability Investment". Mark and Bernie from PACE can hopefully join as a panel; he is waiting to hear back from them. He stated that there are several good topics to cover including green washing, and what it really means to invest for sustainability for the planet for future generations. He will get the press release out so they can get a good crowd. He also has some challenges for the audience. This will be an exciting event.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that Bernie's idea for everyone to bring a "buddy" to this event is a great way to fill the room. She would like to ask Bernie and Mark to circulate this information in Simsbury and West Hartford as well. Ms. Winter suggested sending out invitations to local financial advisors as well. Ms. Firestone agreed.

Ongoing Project Updates

CT Green Bank Solar Marketplace Assistance Program

Verogy is finalizing the interconnecting applications for the utilities and is preparing documents for submission to Planning and Zoning.

EV Charging Stations

The Town continues to wait to hear from DEEP on the status of their grant application.

Town-wide Energy Plan

Ms. Tiezzi stated that she has shared the initial draft of an energy plan with Carrie and Brandon for review. Once Brandon provides feedback, she plans to share it with Mark and Bernie from PACE for assistance with some of the data. Next, she would plan to present the draft to the Commission for feedback and assistance with goal setting.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that this Commission has discussed how they could make inroads with the commercial properties in Town. She stated that Mark Massaro suggested that they start with the Small Business Energy Advantage Program, which is basically the home energy solutions audit for commercial entities. She is unsure if this program is experiencing the same issues that the residential side has been. If this is something that the Commission wants to take a look at,

she will do some research. Ms. Firestone stated that when she is talking to the home audit contractors, she will ask them about the business aspect.

Ms. Firestone stated that it is getting more active in the legislative season. She feels that someone on the Commission should start tracking Bills to see if there is anything that would be appropriate for this Commission to write a letter for. Ms. Winter stated that she would be willing to make a list from the League of Conservation Voters and the Sierra Club. Ms. Firestone asked that she look at the list of Bills and report back to the Commission in terms of where each Bill is.

Ms. Winter stated that one of the problems is that DEEP and the Department of Energy merged; it was good for shareholders but not for consumers. There is an outside person calling it like it is. She stated that Katie Dykes is praising this person. Ms. Tiezzi stated that this is the Executive Director of PURA, Melissa Gillette. PURA is the group that has oversight over utilities, which is under the umbrella of DEEP. She stated that there have been moves to try to disassociate it from DEEP. Ms. Firestone stated that this is why the Commission needs to know what is happening on the State level.

VI. NEW BUSINESS - None

VII. ADJOURN

Mr. Zahren made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:37 p.m. Ms. Winter seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted:
Chairperson Carrie Firestone

Attest: Alison Sturgeon, Clerk