

AVON CLEAN ENERGY COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES  
August 17, 2022

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairperson Firestone in the Selectmen's Chamber at the Avon Town Hall. Members present: Carrie Firestone, Christine Winter, Kim Stevenson, Michael Dawson, Michael Guerrero, Bernie Zahren, Daniel Carvalho and student member Anagha Bhumireddy. Staff member present: Grace Tiezzi, Assistant Town Manager.

II. APPROVAL OF THE PRECEDING MINUTES – June 15, 2022

*Ms. Winter made a motion to approve the June 15, 2022 minutes as written. Ms. Stevenson seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.*

III. COMMUNICATION FROM AUDIENCE

Fran Gurtman of Bike Walk Avon CT stated that she was in attendance to just observe.

IV. COMMUNICATION FROM COMMISSION

Ms. Firestone welcomed Dan Carvalho to the Commission. Mr. Carvalho stated that he was born and raised in Portugal. He grew up in Hartford and started his first construction company when he was 21 years old. He has lived in Avon for 13 years and is a coach on the Avon Soccer Club. Each Commission member introduced themselves.

Ms. Firestone stated her excitement regarding the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act. She stated that this Commission should be grateful to be a part of world changing events.

Mr. Dawson stated that he has started biking to work some days. He bikes 11 miles to New Britain, which takes him about 40 minutes each way.

Anagha Bhumireddy stated that the Climate Action Club has introduced a pilot bio-digesting program at the high school. They recently had a meeting at which the project was approved. This bio-digester breaks down organic food waste into slush which can be applied as fertilizer to enrich the soil and plants. There is a small plot of land that they will be using for this. Ms. Firestone congratulated the Climate Action Club for putting a lot of work into this project. In response to a question from Ms. Winter regarding having too much compost, Anagha stated that they will give some of the excess production to the Garden Club, local farms and possibly for the land across from the fire station for the native plants there.

V. OLD BUSINESS

Connecticut Green Bank Solar Marketplace Assistance Program – Status Update

Ms. Tiezzi stated that back in March and April, the Board of Education and the Town Council approved the Green Bank's proposal for power purchase agreements to install and operate solar arrays at Roaring Brook School and Avon High School. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the Department of Commerce has opened an investigation on tariffs; this has put a stop to a lot of solar projects. The President issued a moratorium on the tariffs back in May; it is taking time to filter down to the consumer. She stated that the Green Bank has been working to negotiate and execute agreements with their selected contractor to install the arrays in Avon and in the other communities with whom they have executed PPAs. These negotiations have been complicated by ongoing inflation issues, supply chain disruptions and an issue related to tariffs on photovoltaic panels imported from abroad. The Green Bank continues to work to honor their original

pricing commitment to the Town of Avon in light of these developments. Ms. Tiezzi stated that it will be up to the Board of Education and the Town Council to decide if the Town should proceed.

Ms. Firestone questioned if there was a timeframe for the Greenbank to come back with an update. Ms. Tiezzi is hopeful that it will be within the next few weeks; she should have an update to this Commission by their September meeting.

#### Green Up Avon Sustainability Initiative – Planning Session

Ms. Firestone stated that the name of their Clean Energy Commission campaign is Green Up Avon. They are looking at ways that they can serve as a community. They talk about reduce, reuse and recycle. She suggested starting with reduce since that is what their first initiative is about; how to be more sustainable in multiple ways.

Also, Ms. Firestone stated that she is hearing that people are driving more erratically around Town. She spoke with the Police Department, who will be coming to a community forum on August 30<sup>th</sup> to talk to the community in terms of how they can work together to make this a more drivable, walkable community.

Ms. Firestone stated that one of the best ways, she believes, to get people involved, is to have events and forums at the library. The first event is September 8<sup>th</sup>, Energize CT, which is learning about their home energy assessment program. Energize CT will give an introduction, explain what a home energy audit is, what the process is, and how Energize CT is involved. She asked Ms. Stevenson to talk at the forum about what she has done at her old historic house. She will also ask Jamie Wolf from Wolf Works to discuss what a net zero house looks like. Ms. Firestone stated that Energize CT suggested having several contractors at the forum to sign people up on the spot. Ms. Tiezzi stated that it cannot look like the Town is favoring specific contractors. Mr. Guerrero suggested having a contact list for people to sign up at the forum and have Eversource call those people back.

Ms. Firestone stated that they are trying to get as many people as they can to sign up for the home energy audits. She was thinking of doing a catch phrase like “100 houses in 100 days” to help encourage people. There is a lot of incentive for people to do this because it will save them money. Logistically, they need to figure out how to do this to serve the community in the most effective way. Ms. Stevenson stated that they can have people sign up at the forum if they are interested; they can use one of the Eversource’s recommended contractors. If possible, the Town can do an RFQ in the near future. Mr. Guerrero felt that an RFQ may be more work than necessary. Ms. Stevenson stated that she found her contractor from Angie’s List. She stated that people can share their experiences, perhaps on Facebook; this Commission would also encourage people to do their own research. Mr. Dawson stated that he feels they are missing the mark and overthinking things by getting into the details of contractors; people should be able to figure it out on their own. The main goal is to get people signed up for the energy audits. The Commission members agreed.

Ms. Firestone listed the big picture goals for Avon, which included to locate and assess space appropriate for solar arrays; to replace the Town fleet with more efficient vehicles; to encourage residents and businesses to incorporate efficiency tools and reduce building related emissions; reduce vehicle emissions by identifying ways to make Avon more bicycle and pedestrian friendly; build a more resilient, balanced ecosystem by reducing the need for lawn machinery and increasing the use of native species; reduce emissions by identifying ways to proactively manage solid waste; coordinate the Town officials to ensure that new construction and retrofits of Town buildings are completed in a climate responsible manner; provide opportunities to connect with other communities and like-minded organizations to share ideas and partner on projects; carefully consider equity and the long-term impacts of their decisions; and encourage community involvement every step of the way. She stated that the Commission does not have enough time to do all of these goals at once, so she chose four big picture goals.

Ms. Firestone stated that building efficiency is to try and get residents more efficient. She stated that they could also do a forum for businesses in terms of the Energize CT, which is something that the

Commission could consider in the future. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the Avon/Canton Chamber of Commerce might want to get involved with this type of initiative.

Regarding transportation efficiency, Ms. Firestone stated that someone from Clean Cities will be speaking at their October meeting to discuss how they can look at making the community more bike and walk friendly. Also, the library will be holding an e-bike forum on September 26<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Zahren stated that car and school bus idling has been discussed by this Commission over the last several years. Although there is an ordinance against idling, it is not enforced. Ms. Firestone stated that getting graphics and communications out about this issue would be very helpful.

Mr. Zahren stated that the other discussion this Commission has had in the past was about how to get parents to stop driving their children to school when the school bus drives, mostly empty, right by their houses. Ms. Tiezzi stated that she and Hiram Peck worked together on a request for proposals for a connectivity plan that takes inventory of what the facilities are and where there are opportunities to make connections back to the rail trail; how they facilitate their on-road facilities and off-road facilities for all types of non-motorized vehicles. The Town Council will review this RFP at their September meeting. They are looking to hopefully get funding for this through ARPA.

Ms. Firestone stated that another goal of the Commission is reduction of food waste. There is a crisis with food waste in the State and they need to figure out how to handle this at the municipal level. Education needs to be given in terms of how to not create the waste in the first place by doing smarter shopping as well as meal planning, both of which saves money.

Ms. Firestone stated that the last of the four goals is lawn care. The amount of emissions that come out of leaf blowers is huge. She stated that there is a movement regarding this issue. Ms. Winter stated that this could tie back to the building efficiency piece.

In summary, Ms. Stevenson stated that communication is most important with all of their goals. Regarding transportation, they are not talking about transportation being more efficient, instead, they are talking about decarbonizing transportation. Regarding building efficiency, efficiency is reducing the loads, although solar is not efficiency; it is the generation of electrons using a clean sustainable source. She stated that lawn care is much more than that; it is sustainable landscaping.

Ms. Firestone stated that they need to start thinking as individuals in terms of what they can do to support these goals. Also, engaging with other towns that are already implementing some of these initiatives and that can help support their efforts. A point person will be needed for each of their goals. A point person is needed for identifying legislative priorities. She volunteered to be the point person for organizing educational events. She would like to hold a municipal leadership summit. Ms. Stevenson volunteered to help with this. Ms. Firestone stated that a research person is needed for researching emission reducing technology and to report back to the Commission in order to have a better understanding of what they are trying to do. Point persons are also needed for engaging with the community as well as to leverage available funding and engaging target populations. There was some discussion regarding having a newsletter go out to residents to help spread the word and build community. Ms. Stevenson suggested having a newsletter that goes out to all Avon students, possibly sent out jointly by the Climate Action Club and this Commission on a monthly basis. Ms. Firestone and Anagha will work together in terms of the details.

Ms. Firestone suggested having a forum on how to invest in terms of supporting the climate and what are the different ways to do that. Ms. Zahren stated that he has a lot of information on this topic. He stated that people should be investing not just for their retirement, but for the good to where that money is going. Ms. Firestone stated that she would like to see discussions for different income levels as well.

Ms. Firestone stated that if anyone has a film idea for a film festival, where people can watch a film or documentary and then discuss it as a community, to please let her know.

Ms. Firestone stated that she feels one of the groups of people that could be targeted are students but also senior citizens. Seniors have a stake in these issues since most of them have grandchildren. Seniors have the wisdom and knowledge; they might be interested in working on some of these projects. This Commission needs to be more relational in getting the word out.

Mr. Carvalho stated that although this Commission has great ideas, ultimately people are most concerned with costs and saving money. They need to look at the bigger picture. They can convince people to go green, but the affordability factor plays into this. Ms. Stevenson stated that the first costs of buying an electric vehicle, for example, might be higher; but the total cost of ownership over the years will be equal or less. They need to think about the financing and funding structures so at the end of the day people feel that it is better for the environment as well as being lower in cost. Ms. Firestone stated that it is about equity. A lot of this is just communication and education.

Mr. Carvalho stated that the Commission members need to be prepared in terms of how to answer tough questions that people in the community might ask them. Ms. Stevenson stated that having experts is part of this as well. Ms. Firestone stated that having expert speakers will be part of the forum on September 8<sup>th</sup>. They need to get the word out to neighbors and the whole community. There was a discussion regarding how to get the word out about the upcoming forum, including the Town newsletter, the library newsletter and website, and the senior center newsletter.

#### Commercial Solar Research – Status Update

Mr. Dawson stated that he spoke with Paul Michaud who is an environmental lawyer. He is bridging a public/private partnership between businesses and municipalities. He is currently doing this in Coventry and Greenwich. This is a legitimate way to increase the production of solar and to possibly market the Town as net zero. Mr. Dawson feels that Avon should target local business owners. This would be a no money down situation in that all the money that is generated pays for the panels; the Town would get quarterly checks for the energy produced; and the owner of the business who makes their rooftops available gets paid for leasing their roofs. He stated that he does not see a downside to this. His next step will be to call the Towns of Coventry and Greenwich.

Ms. Stevenson stated that she presumes this would be on a commercial scale and solar panels that are using the new tariff; they are selling the electricity to the buyers in the Town. It needs to be figured out if this virtual net metering is just allowed for State and municipal customers or if it can be used for private businesses. She suggested having Mr. Michaud come to one of their meetings to educate them on the mechanics of how this would work. Ms. Tiezzi stated that Mr. Michaud worked on the initial project regarding the solar panels that were put on the school; he is very familiar with the Town of Avon.

Mr. Dawson stated that PACE had offered to look at potential rooftops in Avon. They could then figure out from those rooftops who owns them and possibly target them. Ms. Tiezzi stated that they would need a third-party professional consultant for this. There was an initial energy management plan done in 2016 and it was determined that all or most all of the goals in the 2012 plan were met or exceeded. She stated that this might be a good place to start again to see how far they have come in the last 6 years, not only including the Town and Board of Education buildings, but how to do this as a community. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the Commission might want this to be the project that they bring before the Town Council in terms of the ARPA funding. She stated that they would need to run an RFP since this would be starting over with a new expansion of the scope. The Commission may want to work with Dan to put a scope together for review of approximately how much funding would be needed and then approach the Town Council and Board of Finance. An RFP could then be run in order to select a consultant.

Ms. Firestone stated that she feels that this would be a great compliment as they are trying to reach out to the community for their involvement. Although the Commission members agreed to hold off on asking Mr. Michaud to come to their next meeting, Mr. Dawson stated that he will continue his research by contacting the Towns of Coventry and Greenwich.

#### VI. NEW BUSINESS

### EV Charging Stations – Status Update

Ms. Tiezzi stated that back in 2020, the Library Director and herself investigated the feasibility of installing an EV charging station at the library. The request for a station was included in the Library's FY 2021 operating budget, but ultimately was not funded, along with other new initiatives, due to the economic uncertainty that came along with the onset of the pandemic. She stated that currently there are a number of incentives that are being offered by the utility as well as the State DEEP. In order to take advantage of these incentive and grants, they are working with a few vendors to get pricing and incorporating the incentives and potential for grant funding.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that there is some capital funding that came to the Town in 2020 that may be used. She stated that every five years under their agreement, Tesla is required to do the accounting to figure out if the panels produced more or less than what was estimated. If it is less than expected, the Town receives a check for the difference. These funds, which total approximately \$14,000, have been set aside; this project may be a good opportunity to use some of these funds. Ms. Winter stated that she likes the idea of taking money from one environmentally sensitive project to use for another environmental project.

Ms. Stevenson questioned how many physical units does this project entail. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the proposal is for two units. Ms. Stevenson stated that there are incentives for charging stations. She suggested that as they continue to move forward with this project, they think about more stations and locations for when these funds get released. Ms. Tiezzi stated that there has been some discussion regarding putting stations at some of the trail heads. This initial project can be used as a model for moving forward with other projects. She stated that funding may be gotten from the Infrastructure Bill as well. Ms. Stevenson suggested other areas for charging station locations could be playgrounds as well as the middle school tennis courts.

### VII. ADJOURN

Ms. Stevenson made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:38 p.m. Mr. Dawson seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted:  
Chairperson Carrie Firestone

Attest: Alison Sturgeon, Clerk