

AVON CLEAN ENERGY COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES  
November 16, 2022

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Chairperson Firestone via GoToMeeting. Members present: Carrie Firestone, Christine Winter, Kim Stevenson, Bernie Zahren, Michael Guerrero and Michael Dawson. Member absent: Daniel Carvalho. Staff member present: Grace Tiezzi, Assistant Town Manager.

II. APPROVAL OF THE PRECEDING MINUTES –October 19, 2022

*Ms. Firestone made a motion to approve the October 19, 2022 minutes. Mr. Dawson seconded the motion.*

Mr. Dawson made two corrections to the October minutes.

*The motion was unanimously approved as amended.*

III. COMMUNICATION FROM AUDIENCE - None

IV. COMMUNICATION FROM COMMISSION – None.

V. OLD BUSINESS

Green Up Avon Sustainability Initiative - 100 Homes in 100 Days – Guest Presenter Kenny Foscue

Ms. Winter stated that Mr. Foscue is an active member of the CT Energy Network. He recently gave a presentation to that group regarding an initiative in North Haven where that community went from 20% to 30% participation in their home energy solutions effort. Mr. Foscue is also passionate about making sure that air quality in schools is what it should be.

Mr. Foscue stated that he is the Chairman of the North Haven Clean Energy Task Force. He stated that for a small town, they have done a lot. North Haven has done a total of three home energy solution campaigns. He has personally had two energy audits done at his home, both of which were very well done. He has cut his expenses because of these audits.

Mr. Foscue stated that, he feels, energy efficiency is the first step to move into a clean economy and addressing climate change. The cleanest energy is the energy you don't use. He stated that approximately 80% of CT homes have not had a home energy solutions (HES) assessment audit. North Haven's campaign objectives included: working with UI to recruit HES vendors; conducting a HES public outreach campaign; increasing the number of North Haven households with HES assessments, additional EE improvements; utilizing an incentive strategy to increase HES numbers; and raising funds for a selected local non-profit.

In 2014, Mr. Foscue stated that North Haven did their first campaign. They used Lantern Energy and Next Step Living. They chose a local non-profit charitable organization and got an agreement with the vendors that they would donate \$25 to that specific charity for each audit

they did through their campaign. This was just one more incentive for residents to do the audit. Their Town also established and publicized a “code” for residents when contacting Energize CT. Prior to the campaign, they also conducted publicity and outreach campaigns. He stated that the key to their successful campaign included: letters to all town residents announcing the campaign, along with a follow up letter; press releases to local weekly papers; yard signs; a “testimony handout”; as well as TV coverage of the 1<sup>st</sup> Selectman’s actual HES assessment. Mr. Foscue stated that North Haven had over 500 residents complete the assessments. Their chosen non-profit was given \$12,725 as a result of this campaign.

Mr. Foscue stated that North Haven also did a second, smaller campaign using grant money. They gave out 300 free assessments during that campaign. The third campaign had a late start due to Covid19. They worked with two vendors and picked the local food bank to which they donated \$6,025. They promoted HES, the Insulation Deal, as well as other rebates during this campaign.

Mr. Foscue recommended that Avon start by working with the town’s elected official to do a mass mailing; linking the campaign with a fundraiser for a local non-profit charity; combining HES with other clean energy programs, which could include heat pumps, solar or batteries; as well as a new consideration of the IRA energy rebates.

Ms. Winter questioned how North Haven vetted and selected the vendors for their initiative and how they dealt with the liability issues making those choices. Mr. Foscue stated that they worked with Energize CT as well as UI; they were the ones who came up with the two vendors from their own list, who had already been vetted. North Haven did interview the vendors prior to selecting them; they did not put out an RFP. He stated that the issue of liability never came up since they were working with an official agency.

Ms. Firestone stated that North Haven’s model seems better than what Energize CT suggested to Avon, using their 1-800 number for residents to call. She liked the idea of using a code to be connected to the selected vendors.

Ms. Winter stated that North Haven worked with UI and they recommended several companies to do the Home Energy Solutions Program. After the assessments are done, those selected companies make recommendations to the homeowner, that might include improving the insulation, etc. She stated that residents then need to call someone to do the follow up work. She questioned if UI also helped connect residents with vendors to do the follow up work. She feels that many people are insecure and do not always know who to call. Mr. Foscue stated that if Avon gets good HES vendors, they can do both jobs or could recommend someone for the resident to call. Ms. Stevenson stated that Diane Del Rosso is a good contact at Eversource. She recommended that the Commission reach out to her.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that Avon did a HES campaign several years ago, although it was not very successful. They did send out at least one Town wide letter. She believes Eversource facilitated and paid for that mailing. Ms. Stevenson stated that she recalls notices going out from the schools regarding the solarize campaign. Ms. Winter stated that she believes a big part of the success with North Haven’s campaign was that they advertised in several ways as well as being repetitious.

Ms. Firestone questioned if there was a social media piece to North Haven’s campaign. Mr. Foscue stated that there was some social media advertising for the second campaign, but not the first.

Regarding the Inflation Reduction Act, Mr. Foscue stated that there is a long list of substantial rebates coming, especially for heat pumps. This is a very important initiative for people to do as well. Ms. Firestone stated that this is on their radar; they are waiting to hear from the experts. She suggested having a forum on this topic in the future.

Mr. Dawson stated that North Haven residents were given a choice of two vendors. To him, it seems that this is a very limited number. He questioned the Commission members about what an ideal number would be. To him, that number would be five. Mr. Foscue stated that if they believe a lot of people will sign up, they might want more vendors. The vendors for North Haven did get a little behind; it might have been more advantageous to have a third vendor.

Ms. Firestone stated that they did look to see if there were any vendors from Avon or the Farmington Valley, although they did not find any local vendors. She suggested going out to a 25-mile radius. Ms. Tiezzi stated that her concern is to make sure the process of selecting vendors is a fair one. A recommendation from Eversource would be acceptable. She stated that she will talk to Diane Del Rosso from Eversource as well.

Ms. Winter stated that she has had two audits at her home. The last time, they had heat pumps and insulation installed. She selected a local company to do this, although they were not on the official list of vendors, but they were approved for the rebates. She stated that there are good vendors who are not on the list; the list is not comprehensive. Ms. Stevenson stated that there are HES audits and there will be immediate measures that the vendor will do. Then there are second and third-tier measures, which sometimes you need to find another vendor to come in and do that work. She stated that insulation is one of those second-tier measures.

Mr. Dawson questioned who paid for the yard signs in North Haven and who put them on their lawns. Mr. Foscue stated that there were about 50 signs. The task force members put them in their yards; signs were placed on Town property as well. The signs were not the most crucial part of the campaign. He feels that a letter would be the best way to reach people. He stated that they did not do yard signs during their second campaign. Also, he believes that one of the vendors paid for the signs. Ms. Firestone suggested having a sign put up on a property while the audit is being done.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that she has heard recently from Social Services, that there will be a large draw on their fuel bank fund in the near future. This might be a good cause for having part of the cost of the audit to be donated. She stated that the food bank is another good cause; there are many people in need. Mr. Dawson stated that he would like to see, possibly, \$50 from every audit go to one of these great causes.

Ms. Winter stated that it is important for individual homeowners to save money. Eversource recently reported that they are in the process of requesting a 20-40% increase in their rates in the coming months. She questioned if the Commission is in danger of representing this initiative by saying the audit will save residents money and then Eversource raises rates. Even after the audit, people may not see any changes to their bills because of a possible increase. Ms. Stevenson stated that this Commission can tell people that if the audit is not done, their electric bills could possibly be up to three times higher than it currently is. They need to get people to realize that if they did not do the audit, what the amount of their electric bill could be. She stated that this would be a powerful message.

Ms. Firestone thanked Mr. Foscue for presenting tonight and stated that it was great to learn about the model that North Haven used and how it was so effective. She feels that Avon's

challenge may be figuring out how to work with Eversource. She thanked him for inspiring this Commission.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that she will not only reach out to Diane Del Rosso, but she will also reach out to Mark Massaro, who is not only an Avon resident, but also their Eversource Community Liaison. There was a short discussion regarding selecting vendors for this campaign. Ms. Firestone stated that she feels this is the hardest part of the process. Ms. Tiezzi stated that she would like to better understand the process that Eversource uses to select the vendors. She stated that it also may come down to which vendors are willing to take part in the charitable donation component. Ms. Winter suggested having a small subcommittee to interview the vendors; this is an important step. Ms. Stevenson stated that also getting feedback from people who are using one of their selected vendors for the audit would be helpful. This will help the Commission get a sense of the quality of work as it is happening.

### Ongoing Project Update

#### Connecticut Green Bank Solar Marketplace Assistance Program

A project kick-off meeting was held on October 18<sup>th</sup>. At this time, the Green Bank's construction partner, Verogy, is developing construction plan sets; this effort is expected to take through the end of the calendar year. We anticipate permitting the projects in January/February and mobilizing construction in June. Construction should wrap up in September and the system would go live in October. Updates will be given as the project progresses.

### EV Charging Stations

In late October, the Town was notified that their incentive application was accepted by the utility. At this time, they are waiting to hear about the status of their application to the DEEP grant program before proceeding.

### Town-wide Energy Plan RFP

Ms. Stevenson, Ms. Firestone and Ms. Tiezzi continue to work with PACE to determine what can be completed in-house with their assistance and what should be contracted out to a third party.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that Ms. Stevenson has been working with a company called Dynamhex. They are a software platform that takes parcel level energy use data and building data, in terms of square footage, etc., and puts it through an algorithm. It comes up with parcel level greenhouse gas inventory. It then takes each parcel through a user interface and allows you to see the greenhouse gas inventory and see however many energy efficiency measures that the parcel could take to reduce their carbon footprint and to make connections between those resources and available rebates and incentives. Ms. Stevenson stated that they help to identify the energy usage, intensity of a building; this helps to see if a building is an energy hog or if it is energy efficient. She stated that it recommends energy improvement measures for a building as well as the estimated costs and estimated carbon savings for the building. It also enables you to identify where this Commission should be targeting. They should be targeting the biggest energy users that have the greatest potential to save money.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that this is a service type of platform; there are ongoing costs. She would need to get more information regarding these costs to see how it might fit into the overall plan

prior to discussing this with the Town Manager. Ms. Stevenson stated that they could do this just once, giving them the data for a one-time cost. There would not be any ongoing costs for this data. Ms. Tiezzi felt that the one time cost service would be better.

Ms. Firestone questioned if an RFP would be needed. Ms. Tiezzi stated that she believes this would be a sole source. She will talk to Mark and Bernie from PACE to see how this might fit in with their overall planning.

### Solar on Municipal Properties

In October, the Director of Public Works engaged a local architect, who has designed and provided construction oversight for a number of Town and school roofing projects, to conduct a roof asset inventory on municipal buildings. The inventory will verify roof age and condition and assist the Town and the Board of Education in prioritizing roofs for replacement and, in turn, opportunities for solar panel arrays. This will be a nice complement to the work that this Commission is doing with PACE in terms of the energy plan.

At the last meeting, there was discussion of the feasibility of installing ground mounted solar at the landfill. Ms. Tiezzi was asked to research past discussions regarding the topic and report back.

By the way of background, the landfill is made up of several “cells”. The municipal solid waste cells were closed in accordance with state requirements in the 1980’s. These continue to be monitored and are in compliance with DEEP regulations. The Town continues to operate an active “bulky waste” cell that is used to collect leaves and brush that are brought to the Transfer Station by permit holders. This cell is permitted by DEEP and the contents are reduced (ground down) regularly to make space in the cell in the event of a significant weather event. There is a recollection from colleagues of past conversations regarding siting solar at the landfill. At that time, it was understood that in order to accommodate a suitably sized ground mount array at the landfill, the Town would likely need to complete significant tree removal or close the active bulky waste cell. Neither of these options are possibilities at this time. Ms. Tiezzi would suggest that the Commission focus its efforts on other projects and opportunities.

### School Bus Contract

At the Commission’s request, Ms. Tiezzi spoke with Susan Russo, BOE Business Manager, regarding the status of the school bus contract. In October, the Board of Education executed an extension to its current contract with Specialty Transportation through 2029. During contract negotiations, electric school buses were a topic of discussion. There is a state statute on the books requiring all school buses to be electric by 2040. Districts with larger emissions footprints (generally larger cities and Alliance Districts) are required to be fully electric by 2030.

Specialty does not recommend purchasing electric buses at this time due to the cost of purchase and ownership relative to the sophistication of electric school bus technology. A single electric bus is about \$300,000. In addition to the purchase cost, the bus contractor would be required to purchase parts, chargers, back-up batteries and hire a new mechanic with specialty experience in electric buses. All of these costs would be passed on to the Board of Education directly through the contract. However, as technology improves and the buses become more affordable, the BOE and Specialty will be able to reopen the contract negotiations at any point during the contract term to discuss adding electric buses to the fleet. When the

BOE's contract is up for renewal in 2029 the Board will put the contract out for an RFP and include an electric bus component.

While there are state grant programs available to offset the cost of these purchases, they are prioritizing Alliance Districts at this time to help them meet the aggressive 2030 target. It is unlikely that funding would be awarded to Avon at this juncture.

In summary, the District has an interest and desire to move towards an electric bus fleet and continues to monitor the state of the technology with the assistance of its contractor. If there are further questions or interest in a more in-depth discussion, Ms. Tiezzi would recommend inviting the BOE staff to a future meeting.

#### VI. NEW BUSINESS - None

Ms. Firestone stated that the Avon Clean Energy Commission will not be meeting in December. The Commission members can use this time to reflect on what they have discussed at recent meetings as well as contemplate next steps.

Ms. Firestone stated that the pumpkin initiative last month was a great success. She thanked the Commission members for all of their help and input.

Mr. Dawson stated that France's legislature has just approved the requirement of all parking lots in their country that have at least 80 spaces, whether they are brand new or retrofit, to put in carports. This has to be done within a certain amount of time to be all electric carports. They are estimating that they can generate 11 gigawatts from this. He suggested this Commission reaching out to the legislation with their ideas regarding this topic. Ms. Winter suggested getting groups in Town together, CT Energy Network, the Sierra Club, League of Conservation Voters, etc. to write to the legislators. Ms. Firestone asked that Mr. Dawson do some research regarding how this process happened in France.

Regarding national parks in our backyards, Ms. Firestone stated that, in terms of soils and plants, she planted native plants in her entire front yard. She referred to the book, Nature's Best Hope, by Douglas Tallamy. The book discusses using our yards to create habitats; it is a new approach to conservation that starts in your own yard. She feels this would be a good partnership with the Library. She would encourage residents to read it over the winter months and have a community talk; she will discuss this with Glenn Grube. It would be a good way to get people to talk about spring initiatives. They could also have a panel of experts to talk to the community as well.

Ms. Stevenson stated, in terms of the energy campaign, she went to a Bedford 2030 event and she met their advisor. He told her that he would be interested in working with Avon. She would like him to come to a meeting to talk to the Commission about his work and what he does so the Commission members could brainstorm. He may be willing to work with Avon residents as well. Ms. Firestone stated that this would be a great idea. Once the Commission members have a better idea of how the energy campaign should move forward, the Bedford advisor could possibly come for a kickoff meeting where they would encourage Avon residents to come and listen to him speak.

#### VII. ADJOURN

*Ms. Firestone made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:04 p.m. Ms. Winter seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.*

Respectfully submitted:  
Chairperson Carrie Firestone

Attest: Alison Sturgeon, Clerk