

AVON CLEAN ENERGY COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
March 16, 2022

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m. by Chairperson Firestone via GoToMeeting. Members present: Bernie Zahren, Christine Winter, Carrie Firestone, Michael Dawson and Michael Guerrero. Melissa Firestone joined the meeting at 7:55 p.m. Member absent: Kim Stevenson. Staff member present: Grace Tiezzi, Assistant Town Manager

II. APPROVAL OF THE PRECEDING MINUTES – December 15, 2021, February 2, 2022 and February 16, 2022

Mr. Zahren attested that the December 15, 2021 minutes were an accurate representation of the meeting.

Mr. Zahren made a motion to approve the December 15, 2021 meeting minutes as written. Mr. Guerrero seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Regarding the February 2, 2022 minutes, Ms. Tiezzi stated that the highlighted portion reflects the changes that Ms. Winter proposed last month, as well as an edit made by Mr. Dawson. Ms. Winter suggested that Chairman be changed to Chairperson in the minutes as well.

Mr. Guerrero made a motion to approve the amended February 2, 2022 minutes. Mr. Dawson seconded the motion, which were unanimously approved.

Ms. Winter made a motion to approve the February 16, 2022 minutes. Mr. Zahren seconded the motion.

Ms. Winter made one edit to the minutes to correct the spelling of her last name.

The motion was unanimously approved.

III. COMMUNICATION FROM AUDIENCE

Chairperson Firestone welcomed Anagha Bhumireddy as a student member of the Commission. Anagha is a tenth grader at Avon High School and is President of the Climate Action Club at her school.

IV. COMMUNICATION FROM COMMISSION

Mr. Dawson stated that he has done some research over the past few weeks to get more input from solar experts and private businesses; he cold called several businesses. He explained to them the Town's situation with the Green Bank as well as certain project sites in Town that were not approvable based on system size or age of the roof. One company's representative stated, for example, that car ports could be built in the parking lot in the front of Thompson Brook. One angle was front of the meter arrangement, which did not make financial sense, although the PPA arrangement would make sense in this case. He stated that he got a sense that there are certain limitations from the Green Bank, but it seems that private businesses can fill that void. He feels that these sites should be revisited. He would

like this Commission to follow up with this company or even a different company. Mr. Dawson stated that another example would be Firehouse #1. This location was shot down from the Green Bank because it did not meet the system size of 50 kilowatts, although front of the meter arrangement could make a lot of solar. He stated that front of the meter means that the solar energy goes directly to the grid; it is guaranteed a price of 20.9 cents per kilowatt for 20 years. There are still benefits after the 20 years. He feels that this would more than pay for itself. Ultimately, he believes there are other solar opportunities for this Commission to explore.

Mr. Dawson stated that he also spoke with an organization created by the Federal Government [SolSmart]. They offer, free of charge, their expertise in local laws and codes; they assist local governments. He feels this could be a great resource for the Town. Once designated through this organization, Avon can have a reputation as being greener and inviting for people wanting to move to Avon.

Mr. Dawson stated that he feels this Commission should also consider proposing incentives for private business and residences for going solar. The Town could get a grant to help them. Again, this would not cost the Avon tax payers.

Ms. Winter stated that Mr. Dawson's ideas are very interesting. It could be something that is taken into consideration for some of the ARPA funds. Regarding other ideas in terms of incentivizing, she stated that although she agrees to having incentives, it would need to be embedded in some level of Town government, possibly with Planning and Zoning. She stated that there has been talk with doing some kind of Town-wide assessment and plan regarding where the Town stands in terms of energy use and sustainability and efficiency efforts.

Mr. Dawson stated that he agrees with using the ARPA funds. The incentives could be on a first come, first served basis. It also could be progressive; the amount of award could be based on household income, etc.

Chairperson Firestone thanked Mr. Dawson for taking the time to do this research. She stated that as the Commission works on a vision for the Town, they have a plan that, in part, includes solar with incentives and also trying to figure out what incentives are out there. The Town Council is interested in figuring out what the grand vision is for Avon in terms of sustainability, not just energy, but walkable sidewalk and bike paths, etc. She asked if Mr. Dawson would continue his research. Mr. Dawson agreed.

Chairperson Firestone suggested inviting Bernie and Mark from PACE to their next meeting. She believes they can help Avon, as a community, figure out next steps. They can give the Commission an overview of what they have done in their communities as well. The Commission can then decide where to direct their energy with regard to solar. The Commission members agreed. Mr. Dawson stated it would be helpful for him to talk to them prior to the next meeting.

Mr. Zahren stated that both West Hartford and Simsbury are ahead of Avon in this area. He believes that the men from PACE would be very willing to help. Mr. Dawson has been talking about privately owned buildings as well as Town-owned buildings. Mr. Zahren stated that the Town would be obligated to put out an RFP for any Town owned building. Mr. Dawson stated that the RFP would be needed for other sites in Town. Incentives for private businesses and residences would be separate and something that the Town would organize through the ARPA funds.

V. OLD BUSINESS

Connecticut Green Bank Solar Marketplace Assistance Program – Status Update

Ms. Tiezzi stated that she attended the Board of Education meeting last night, at which they approved the PPAs for the high school and Roaring Brook School. The district staff did not recommend the middle school because of community concerns regarding the future of that building. She has asked that this matter go before the Town Council on April 7th for final approval. Assuming it is approved, they will then move forward with designing and permitting of the systems. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the Town Council will receive a brief presentation from Emily and Mackey and will hopefully call the matter to a vote. She stated that if they move through the design and permitting process quickly, construction could start right after. Since they have already accomplished most of the approvals, they are in good shape. Once they have the PPA approvals, staff will sit down with the Green Bank and their construction partner to make a timeline.

Development of Vision, Goal Setting & Possible Revision of Charge - Discussion

Ms. Tiezzi stated that Chairperson Firestone wanted to give focus to the item under new business. She felt that if too many items were discussed tonight, they would not be able to give their full attention to any one item. Chairperson Firestone requested that this item not be discussed tonight but at the next meeting.

Mr. Guerrera questioned if the men from PACE would be invited to the next meeting to take part in this vision and goal setting discussion. Ms. Tiezzi stated that she will discuss this with Chairperson Firestone; these men will bring a lot of expertise and focus into the discussion.

Ms. Winter stated it would be helpful if the Commission members could possibly talk with Melissa Everett, who works in a certain Town in New York. The whole Town took on a major initiative about sustainability and efficiency. It was a very successful and amazing effort. She would like to try and include her in the next meeting as well. She can give good ideas to this Commission of things that their Town has already done. Mr. Zahren stated that the Town is Bedford, NY. This is a very well run community. He feels that Melissa Everett would be a great resource. This community is one of the best in the country, if not the world, at being sustainable. They also have hundreds of volunteers.

American Rescue Plan Act Funding - Discussion

Ms. Winter stated that they discussed, at the last meeting, trying to make sure that the Town Council would develop a criteria for evaluating the various requests for this funding that was organized around some kind of central philosophy including a big focus on sustainability and efficiency. It would be appropriate to try and involve all departments with this as a focus. She believes this is a golden opportunity. She questioned how requests for ARPA funds would be evaluated.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that projects were brought forward at the Council's request. The criteria for proposing projects were projects that were already identified as a need. They also looked to projects that became apparent as a need due to Covid 19. An example of this was the Recreation Department identifying a need for programing space; they currently do not have a building where they are a first priority. They

needed a multipurpose room at the Senior Center that would be dedicated to recreation. The guidance that has been recommended to the Council in terms of considering these projects, are projects that will impact a large cross section of the community; that have little to no ongoing operating costs; as well as capital projects. Ms. Tiezzi stated that at the last Council meeting, one of the members brought up the topic of sustainability. There was some discussion, but she feels it would be helpful if there is a representative from this Commission that would speak at their next meeting. The Commission members agreed that Chairperson Firestone should go to the Town Council's meeting to present an organized request that the Clean Energy Commission's issues should be prominent in their decision making.

In response to Mr. Dawson's question, Mr. Zahren explained why the initiative of the microgrid failed. He stated that the developer was able to put off any discussion about a microgrid for the first phase of the development; the proposal for a microgrid was put off until the second phase. The Town does not have control over forcing a developer to do anything. The second and third phases of this development may never get built.

In response to a question from Ms. Winter regarding 20 Security Drive, Ms. Tiezzi stated that this is an office building that is being converted into apartments. She believes there are a number of affordable units proposed in this development. Although she is not intimately involved in the planning and zoning process, the developer seems interested in sustainability and integrating some of these features. As for a microgrid, she is unsure. She will mention this to the Town Planner and will get a broader update about this development. She stated that the Town did learn, through the original RFP for the microgrid, that offices, like the size of the Town offices, are not big energy users; it is all about the use profile. Ms. Winter stated that now is the time to be discussing this since it is in the pre-construction phase.

Mr. Dawson reiterated that he would come up with a good design for a grant program to incentivize solar for residential and private business projects. He will continue to do more research. Ms. Tiezzi asked Mr. Dawson to email her his thoughts as well as a suggested budget number for what might be appropriate; she will include it in the developing list of ARPA proposals.

Ms. M. Firestone asked how much ARPA funding is available. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the Town of Avon is getting \$5.4 million from the American Rescue Plan Act. The final ruling was that Towns could spend this money on any municipal use. The Town Council has already earmarked approximately \$2.2 million for paving, recreation projects and other types of environmental remediation projects. This is an ongoing process. The Town Council continues to discuss and identify projects. They are slowly approving different projects. She stated that there is more information on the website, if anyone was interested. They are also trying to keep the community involved. Ms. M. Firestone questioned if anyone in the community could submit a proposal. Ms. Tiezzi stated that, yes, they could, although most of the proposals have come from department heads and some from nonprofit organizations in the community. The Town Council will see every proposal that is submitted.

Ms. M. Firestone state that she believes this Commission should propose something specific to the Council, more specific instead of a broad-brush idea. She feels that the Commission's efforts might be better spent proposing projects like electric vehicle charging stations and getting funding for solar projects.

Ms. Winter stated that her initial reaction was why the Council would spend this money on paving roads. Ms. Tiezzi stated that it is important to note that the ARPA guidelines have changed and that up

to the first \$10 million, the Town could spend these funds on regular expenses. This somewhat changed the Town's approach. A lot of what happens in Town government is very long range; a lot of the projects that have already been approved, have been in the capital planning for many years. The ARPA funding is giving the Town an opportunity to complete double their capital budget in one year. The priorities of the projects include what will impact the community in a variety of ways and what will serve the community in the long term. Ms. Tiezzi stated that, at the same time, they are looking at projects that are determined to be priorities for other reasons and seeing how the Town can make projects sustainable, equitable and making sure that they are designed for maximum resiliency. She believes this is where this Commission can have the most influence.

Ms. M. Firestone stated that if there is still \$2 million to be distributed for projects, this Commission should think about, in terms of incentives, what the incentive should be and how many people they want to be able to service through that incentive and have that as a legitimate proposal for the Town Council. If they do not do this, she is afraid the ARPA money will be used for things other than improving energy use and efficiency.

Ms. M. Firestone stated that if there was a way to leverage funding from ARPA with Eversource to convert neighborhoods away from fuel oil, that would be such a tremendous impact. She feels that a lot of residents would be interested in this conversion, especially since prices have increased. Ms. Winter agreed that people need to move away from fuel oil as well as natural gas and move to a clean grid. She stated that these types of projects are very complicated, but if they concentrate on solar and insulation at this point, she feels they could have a bigger impact.

Ms. Tiezzi offered guidance on next steps for the Commission. She stated that Mr. Dawson has done a great deal of research of this type of grant program that is happening in other communities. It seems that there is interest on this Commission although they are unsure of what the possibilities are. She asked that Mr. Dawson email her some of what he has found and she will share it with the group. This will help, at the next meeting, to have a more detailed discussion.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

Impact of Global Events on Local Energy Markets - Discussion

Chairperson Firestone stated that she would like this Commission to take the very noteworthy things that are happening in the world right now and use it as an opportunity to communicate with the community through outreach and education; helping the community while meeting their patriotic responsibility to conserve energy. She stated that the world is changing very quickly regarding energy markets and the price of gas. Her thought is, as a Commission, to organize a series of forums at the library. They could invite experts in the field to help the community better understand each topic. They could call the first forum, "What's up with the price of gas?". Experts could talk about what is happening with gas prices, what is causing it, etc. to better educate the community about this topic. Another idea for a forum could be on incentives and programs that people can get help in terms of energy savings. This would be a way to connect with the community, ask questions and help them understand who this Commission is and what we are doing. Another suggestion would be to help the people understand how to get energy audits. Only 29% of homes in Avon have had energy audits. Many people do not even know about this program. The Commission could also offer ideas about insulation; replacing old appliances with more efficient replacements; ways to conserve gas, etc. They

should think of things to do as a Commission in terms of how the community can come together to conserve during these trying times.

Ms. Winter stated that Chairperson Firestone has many great ideas. People are upset about the prices of gas, but there is a lot behind why the prices are high. It is good for people to better understand the “why” and at the same time help pop the bubble of some of the myths. She agrees that it is patriotic to conserve energy. It is important for the community to have a better understanding. This Commission is not powerless; people are not powerless. This Commission should do what they can to expand the narrative and help people do what they can to take control of the situation.

Chairperson Firestone stated that it is a matter of coming up with a list of things that this Commission can do. They could then source those things out to multiple places as well as bringing in experts to explain and talk about them. They also need to discuss finding ways to get the word out.

Mr. Guerrero stated that he agrees with these ideas. The Commission needs to walk before they run. This is a great way to introduce themselves to the community and to create the dialogue without too much political candor tied to it. He would be happy to help in any way.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that she spoke with Mr. Grube after Chairperson Firestone brought this concept to her attention. The natural home for this type of program would be the library. Mr. Grube is more than happy to work with one or two representatives from this Commission to come up with a program or programs that the library and Clean Energy Commission can work together on.

Chairperson Firestone will put out an email to the Commission members to ask for names of experts for the first forum, “What’s up with the price of gas?”. Then the Commission members can put out suggestions for conserving energy in different ways and divide it up or work together to figure out a plan for other forums. She feels that the home energy audit is very important; it can have a big impact. She volunteered to take on the program piece of this.

Ms. Winter stated a subtitle for the, “What’s up with the price of gas?” forum could be, “And what can we do about it?”. This will help people grapple with this issue and it might also entice more people to come.

Mr. Dawson stated that all of the members of the Commission could get involved in these forums, not just others in the community. Ms. Winter stated that this is a great way to introduce themselves to the people of Avon and becoming more visible. Mr. Guerrero stated that a lot of the progress will rely on the individual actions of people across the Town.

Ms. Winter asked Anagha if there was anything this Commission could help with in terms of things going on at the high school. Anagha stated that they are looking into composting in terms of food waste management. They have done a great deal of research, looking at aerobic versus anaerobic. They then moved on to bio-digesting. They have been in contact with Quantum Biopower in Southington. They will collect food waste scraps in bins around the school, mainly in the cafeteria. This company would then come and pick the bins up and would turn the scraps into electricity, fertilizer and water.

Chairperson Firestone stated that she will be in contact with Anagha since composting and food waste will be a topic at the upcoming festival. She stated that the Commission can use the festival to get the

word out on a lot of these topics that they have discussed tonight as well. The members should also think about how to use their booth/space as to how to present the energy audit, etc.

VII. ADJOURN

Mr. Dawson made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:56 p.m. Mr. Guerrero seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted:
Chairperson Carrie Firestone

Attest: Alison Sturgeon, Clerk