

Energy Committee Meeting & GOPIF Workshop
Tuesday, January 25, 2021
Via Zoom @ 4:30 pm

Regular Meeting

Committee members: Yvette Meunier (chair), Victor Langelo, Jared Entwistle, Nancy Chandler, John Berry, Nick Whatley, Rod Melanson (staff)
Attendees: Michael LaCharite, Matt Nixon, Steve Pelletier, Johnny Mui, Steve Lieber - Affinity LED.

The members present introduced themselves and mentioned their areas of interest. Yvette described the committee's purpose and work to date.

Workshop

Yvette gave the following overview of the Community Resiliency Partnership and the purpose of today's meeting:

The Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future is allocating 4.75 Million dollars in grants to support municipalities to reduce their carbon emissions, transition to clean energy, and become more resilient to climate change effects such as to extreme weather, flooding, rising sea levels, public health impacts, and more through their Community Resiliency Partnership. The work of the Energy Committee and findings of Topsham's Climate Action Plan align with this work.

In order to be eligible to apply for grant funding, the town must undertake a few steps. One is to have the Select Board pass a resolution allowing the town to join the partnership. This was done last Thursday. Then the town must complete a hazard mitigation self-assessment, then document what resiliency steps the town has already taken from the list of community actions, and identify 3-5 priority projects from that list they'd like to tackle in a public workshop. The self-assessment and list of actions are in the agenda packet.

1. Invitation for public comment

There were no comments.

2. Review of 2010 Climate Action Plan

Results of the GHG emissions inventory identify Transportation as the largest source of emissions at 77% followed by 13% residential and 9% commercial. Besides transportation residential heating and electricity generation are the other two top emission sources. Recommendations included changing our energy portfolio standards to more renewable resources we can reduce GHG. Under new directives Gov. Mills is addressing our energy portfolio standards with a target of 80% renewable by 2050. It also included reducing energy usage by investing in more energy efficient appliances, reducing heating costs by switching to

solar hot water and geothermal and other boiler upgrades as well as weatherizing. It also called for less vehicle miles driven through carpooling, using the train, expanding the bus system and investing in hybrid vehicles.

3. Review of Community Actions

Topsham has already undertaken several projects which include: Working on a complete streets policy (which supports bike/pedestrian uses and transit), the High School was built with energy efficiency, weatherization and renewable energy use in mind, the town currently has an RFP out for LED street light upgrades, Topsham has an ordinance which allows commercial property owners to install energy upgrades using a state loan program, we have a climate action plan, we have a solar zoning ordinance and our town, as well as our water and sewer departments all, have solar power purchase agreements. And finally the town has an Energy Committee which provides education and outreach.

4. Invitation for public comment

Rod mentioned that this was the start of potential long term outreach.

Matt Nixon mentioned outdated actions in the 2011 climate action plan. He mentioned wood energy as being outdated. Updating the climate action plan would be a useful project for the grant since it would involve a significant effort and a lot of participants. LED conversion would be another project that could use the grant funding. Dealing with climate resiliency should be part of the climate action plan. Coastal erosion is already a concern along Pleasant Point.

5. Review the Results of the Community Resiliency Self-Evaluation

This tool is intended to help organize a community's approach to increasing resilience to natural hazards and climate change impacts. Using data from the Sagadahoc County Hazard Mitigation Plan and from Topsham's Comprehensive Plan we have made several observations.

1. Topsham has a great understanding of our tracking our underlying societal characteristics and trends which increase vulnerability. Topsham's 2019 Comprehensive Plan has identified an aging population, and decrease in affordable housing units as concerns while offers strategies to address these issues through investments in the downtown and in land use planning. In addition, Topsham has financial reserves through an annual budget surplus and is engaged in mutual aid with neighboring communities which demonstrates our ability to build resilience. Topsham has also done a good job to take steps to reduce exposure to flooding by being engaged with the Sagadahoc County Emergency Management Agency, and has contributed to the updated 2021 Hazard mitigation plan. Our EMS, DPW, and Planning Office work with the regional agency to develop identified risks and mitigation measures. Also, town is engaged in a watershed management plan and implementation effort with MDEP in the developed area of Topsham Fair mall. There is a stormwater compensation fee utilization plan (CFUP) in place for stormwater improvements.
2. In the short term Topsham should be focused on updating its 2010 Climate Action Plan and lessening its reliance on fossil fuels.

3. In the long-term Topsham could benefit from assessing and creating a plan for low-probability-but-high-consequence events like a 1-in-100 year flood, or a prolonged electricity outage or heating fuel shortage or heat waves. As well as assessing emerging risks like contaminated drinking water drought, and vector borne diseases.

Considering the results of the self-assessment and takeaways from the climate action plan, what actions do you consider a priority for Topsham?

Nancy asked about the credits from our PPA and how reducing our existing electric usage by switching to LED street lights will free up power we already purchase.

Yvette responded by explaining the PPA means we're buying a given amount of KWhs. If we free up some of those by reducing our electric load from street lights, we need to find another use for that power such as heat pumps, heat pump water heaters, and electric vehicles.

Nick re-enforced the fact that the PPA KWh are purchased at a lower rate than the normal power rate. So utilizing any extra credits would help the town save money otherwise spent on other fuels.

Nancy suggested an opportunity to install a fast charger at Topsham Fair Mall. In line with reducing our vehicle emissions, she suggested grant money to extend Brunswick Bus to Topsham. Changing our culture around transportation was important. The school board is exploring electric school buses. One issue with adding school buses is the need for fast chargers at the schools for the buses.

Jared mentioned an app and system for sharing electric vehicles. He also supports using the grant for LED conversion and getting electric vehicles in the town's fleet.

John Berry suggested the first round be used for projects that lead to future follow-up projects. The climate action plan being one such project. Another good use are projects that have high visibility.

Steve Pelletier: One consideration for the Committee is utilizing smart management companies (e.g., the Mobility House) that provide smart management tools for EV fleet charging. They have a ChargePilot system that manages energy use and charging for fleets by monitoring utility rates and vehicle schedules (e.g., school buses).

Steve also asked about grant options for electric school buses and whether we can learn from other communities. Nancy replied that Mt Desert Island has one electric school bus. The Maine DEP has access to federal money that can cover 45% of the purchase. Electric school buses cost approximately triple the cost of regular buses.

Nick said that school buses combined with solar were a good match since they are unused in the middle of the day when the sun is shining.

6. Yvette will follow-up with a doodle poll to schedule an interim meeting to review the feedback and figure out what project we should ask for grant funds.

Workshop concluded at 5:32 pm. Committee adjourned.