

# Mason Energy Commission 11/1/2021

Meeting began 7:02

Present: Darrell Scott, Michelle Scott, Curt Spacht, Kathy Chapman, Dick Stockdale, Michele Siegmann, Joe Harney, Tony Burns (Mason Fire Chief) and on zoom, Garth Fletcher and Andrea Hodson (Harrisville Energy Aggregation Committee).

Minutes from October moved to be accepted by Dick Stockdale, seconded by Kathy, all said aye

**New Fire Chief:** We invited Tony Burns to the meeting to get to know him, and to let him know about the energy commission goals of saving the Town energy funds. He introduced himself:

He is 45 years old, has had 27 years in fire service; has a wife and three grown children, was last working in a town with lots more fire calls than Mason – about 10 times more, worked in Ga, where the fire dept was working on installing solar panels on the fire station roof.

Tony hopes to put in a lot of grants. He would like to see the Chief's vehicle to be hybrid. He feels it is important, he explains, to go 'green' with items on the truck, such as fans, extrication equipment, etc. He intends to purchase tools that use batteries interchangeably.

Tony wants to update Fire vehicles much more often, for safety and reliability.

Electric fire trucks. \$350,000 – \$500,000

Fire chief says if you buy second hand equipment, then you pay a lot for the maintenance costs, and especially for fuel costs which are going up this winter, by 120%

We asked Tony, shall we monitor the Fire house use of electricity. It was suggested that first we follow the info that we get that from Highway barn. Electricity for the Firehouse has cost over \$320 this year in prime rate costs. Kathy asks if there's a way we can do an energy audit of the Fire Department the same way as Highway. The consensus was that we should have a year's worth of Highway Barn data from our device before monitoring more buildings.

Tony feels there will be energy savings for the fire house, and he will be looking for ways to do this. MEC can be a resource for energy savings that he can access. Tony has some grant writing experience, and offers to help us out. MEC encourages him to attend meetings, and we can put him in the meeting reminder notices.

The monitor box we have in the Highway Barn is monitors 16 circuits, costs \$150, and was donated by Garth. If we could find a donor for the fire department, we could figure out the yearly usage on some of the circuits. We do know that the fire department paid \$320 in demand charges (per month? per year?). Tony believes that there are grants for weatherization assessment.

## Community Power

We had a presentation by Andrea Hodson from Harrisville Energy Aggregation Committee, via Zoom. She did an excellent job, but this is a confusing subject, and we still need more coaching before we can explain it well, and move forward into actually making it a reality for Mason.

There are 900 ratepayers in Harrisville, and they consume about 4000Mw/year. When Harrisville was planning for community power, they decided that three features were important: (1) the resulting rates were equal to or better than Eversource, (2) they could buy power with a larger mix of renewables, and they could use the money they saved as a reserve fund that could be used on training programs for townspeople who are learning to install, for example, solar arrays, hot water on demand, or insulated windows on local establishments. With these things in mind, Harrisville developed the warrant article verbiage that is part of the first step in adopting community power in the community. Their goal was to present this in May 2021 at the town meeting, so they walked their timeline backwards so that they could accomplish 2 public hearings on community power before Town Meeting. The point of the public hearings is to find out what kind of power people in the community want. They also developed ways to communicate with residents,

especially hard during COVID. They did Zoom meetings, managed a page on the town website, used a community newsletter, handed out postcards, and used the planning board's email list. The Energy Aggregation Committee needed to determine from the residents whether to aim for their 2021 Town Meeting to put the community power proposal to the town. To get this to happen, the BOS has to bring the warrant article. The Energy Aggregation Committee relied on the master plan and all the people who did the update to help them promote community power. They set up a questionnaire on the internet and checked in periodically with the BOS so conversations and updates were in the minutes.

Andrea stated that, for now, the individual electricity cost savings is in the neighborhood of about \$5/month, but when the rate increase goes into effect, probably in February, that amount should more than double. And there is no cap on rate increases.

Harrisville ended up with a 3-tier program, 100% renewable (including nuclear). This change will cost the town nothing, except possibly in legal review of contracts. There is no staffing necessary to administer the plan, and Eversource comes when the lines are down.

The first step is to establish an energy aggregation committee, then promote the idea of using community power to the town, then bring the plan to Town Meeting to be adopted.

To implement the adopted plan, the energy aggregation committee recommends a partner to the BOS. The partner could be CPCNH, Freedom Energy, or others. There is a growing number of partner organizations that used to be just brokers, and now are expanding the services they provide. Harrisville thinks that CPCNH is the based partner for them because it is a non-profit municipal organization that provides more services than Freedom Energy or Standard Power. They are at the point of trying to figure out if they have to write an RFP or do they simply make a recommendation based on what they now know.

The partner is paid as a siphon off the supply revenue that is generated with the rate payers pay their bills. The siphon is about .01%/kwh.

The Energy Aggregation Committee has spent about 1 hour/week from May 2020 to February 2021 to get their plan before Town Meeting.

Something to consider: RSA 53E passed in 10/2019. In the fall of 2020, Eversource introduced HB315 that would have torpedoed community power. There was a statewide reaction to that, including public hearings, and now the PUC has started rule-making. Community power can't be implemented until rule-making is complete. The legislation is very specific about the type of committee, not the same as Energy Aggregation Committee. The BOS has to appoint the committee. The bottom line is that the rates will be better, there will be more renewables, there will be a reserve fund, and it won't cost the town anything. There will be no launch if the rates aren't the same or better than Eversource.

With respect to ARPA money, it doesn't have to be spent for 3-4 years. Harrisville has been brainstorming ARPA projects, like expanding their solar arrays on the town hall and fire station. They believe ARPA can be used for this because it's for building resilient infrastructure.

With respect to Andrea's advice for Mason, create a goal of community energy plan. What do we need to get to our goal. Have to have 2 public hearing on community power. It democratizes CP so you need to find out what is needed by the population you wish to serve. We could maybe get a page on the Town Website. So rate payers and the committee need to have clear words, and make it clear!

Andrea advises us to set up a timeline. Community Power Coalition of NH (CPCNH) has info, and help. Their mission: The Coalition will create value for our Community Power member municipalities by jointly contracting for services, developing projects and programs together, educating and engaging the public, and advocating for communities and customers at the Legislature and Public Utilities Commission.

Step by step: Andrea suggests hooking the CP into Master Plan. We made alternative power sources part of the Mason Master Plan (MP). We plan to contact the people who worked on the Master Plan. Electricity rates have been approved to go up from around 8 cents/kw to 17 cents/kw by January 2022.

From the Local Energy Solutions website: [www.nhenergy.org/communitypower](http://www.nhenergy.org/communitypower)

*Under a Community Power program, a local government such as a city, town, or county, may procure electricity on behalf of its residents & businesses. Community Power programs also enable economies of scale associated with bulk purchasing power to lower electricity costs for communities. Community Power programs democratize energy sector governance by enabling local communities to choose where their electricity comes from.*

*Electric distribution utilities (Eversource, NH Electric Cooperative, Liberty Utilities, Unitil) continue to deliver electricity to customers over their poles & wires.*

*A 4 Step Process for Authorizing Community Power -*

- 1. Governing body (select board, city council, county commission) establishes a "Community Power Committee", or designates an existing committee as responsible for supporting development of a Community Power Plan*
- 2. The Committee develops an aggregation plan, sometimes in partnership with expert nonprofits, regional planning commissions, or consultants.*
- 3. The Legislative body votes to approve the plan.*
- 4. All residents and businesses are notified and provided the opportunity to opt-out of participation before program launch and enrollment.*

The cost for the 'broker' is part of the bills. Which is about \$0.01/kwh for the cost.

Read the legislation, RSA53e because it is specific about the committee, Electric Aggregation Committee to be formed (is it the same as the MEC?) Nashua and Keene are CP applicants too.

Below are some of the questions people at the meeting asked Andrea or ourselves:

We need to know how much power we need? Are we going to be applying by ourselves or with another town?.

So Harrisville joined with other towns who have Electric Aggregation brokers. PUC is now in the process of CP seekers.

Eversource wrote legislation that they got passed due to the ignorance of the new legislators. HB315. What was it, is it? Will it negate the RSV53e?

What does the original legislation say? What you need to know, and who can provide you with what. Harrisville recruited people on committee who were skeptical to help with the educational process.

Big Education Message: it will save money, and it will not cost the town. In fact, when you take out the profit margin that Eversource has been getting, the savings are obvious.

ARPA money? What is it? If the project falls in the self reliant infrastructure. So Community Power may qualify. That is a reason to get this process in position ASAP.

Andrea suggests we target a Town Meeting, 2022 or 2023 So the town, the commercial electricity users in town, as well as residents will all be affected by this savings.

**Winter Energy/fuel Savings flyer** Kim Hemmer helped polish up our winter version of energy education flyer, and Kathy will send it to be posted on Town info that goes out. Michelle will post to local FB pages.

**New MEC members:** We discussed how to include new members. Kim Hemmer was nominated by committee as a potential alternate by Dick Stockdale and seconded by Kathy C. We will ask her if she is interested and invite her to the January meeting.

**Town Electric bills:** Darrell asks how can we make the charts he has for the lighting. BOS concern is that the Treasurer says electricity is going up over the past year. The data says that electricity is the same over the past 5 years, It totals about \$11,000. The loan payment is the only extra expense.

Darrell will decide how to send as a pdf, or printed out for the BOS

**NH Saves** is in jeopardy regarding its funding? Who is holding this up? Let committee members know what the status is.

Dick moves to adjourn, and Michele seconded it at 9:06