

ECC Meeting, 1/25/18
MINUTES

Attending: Doug Adams, Iris Bloom, Tom Konrad, Evelyn LaFontaine, Amy Moses & Eric Stewart

Guests: Judith Karpova & Larry DeWitt, Town of Rochester ECC. Town Supervisor Rich Parete was to appear, but did not show.

Minutes submitted by Eric

Discussion/Vote on proposal to build 2 solar farms in Town of Rochester:

Our guests presented an over-view of two solar farms proposed in the Town of Rochester. On the Tuesday following our meeting, the Town will vote whether to build 2 solar farms on 2 separate parcels of land. The voters could approve one, both or neither of the sites. The sites, developed by the solar energy company Borrego, will be part of the Community Solar Program. The first of these is at Rochester's current sand mine. The second is on a wooded parcel near the transfer station. Both sites had various advantages and disadvantages, but both were deemed appropriate for solar installations. It was shown that the town could purchase sand for use on icy roads and other purposes more inexpensively from another local source rather than by mining it themselves. There are concerns about clear-cutting 20+ acres of post-farming woodland (Trees less than 50 years old), but it was argued that the benefits of generating clean renewable energy for decades far outweighs the negative environmental impact of removing the trees. To help mitigate this impact, a mix of pollinator-attracting native wildflowers will be planted at both sites, actually increasing biodiversity.

It was decided that Larry DeWitt would write a draft statement of approval on behalf of our commission and send it to Tom. Tom will then distribute the statement proclaiming MECC's support of the projects to our membership to read, edit and vote on. The proposed statement of approval would then be sent out on our FB page, Town website, Twitter, etc. Individual members could then also send out on their own social media platforms. UPDATE: The statement was drafted, edited, approved and distributed as planned. The text of the statement was:

"The Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission has reviewed and supports the two Town of Rochester Solar Lease Projects for which there is a Town of Rochester referendum on January 30, 2018. We urge our neighbors in the Town of Rochester to vote "Yes" on Proposition #1 and #2 on Tuesday, January 30, 2018 at the Accord Firehall. Turnout is crucial, so even if you don't live in Rochester, please pass this message on to people who do!

"Both of these solar projects, if approved, will be a major step forward in our greater Rondout Valley towards a clean energy future. Our local communities must take up the mantle of environmental responsibility and protect our climate. Regarding Proposition #2, we believe that clearing the new-growth trees is a small sacrifice for the greater good of displacing fossil fuel generation with clean solar."

Rochester held the vote. Solar farms on both sites were approved by narrow margins.

Communications Committee Report (Iris):

Iris discussed the need for the MECC to have an active presence on variety of platforms. Re: The information presented—she said that local issues would be the focus but that pertinent news from elsewhere would also be featured as warranted. Other points:

1. Our Twitter and FB pages are up and running.
2. The recent Climate Change presentation by Tim Guinee generated a great list of names and email addresses that are currently being entered in a database for outreach and networking.
3. Iris will create a one-page update/newsletter that will be emailed to our list. Among other info, this will include our position statement on the Rochester solar farms.
4. The next Communications Committee meeting is on 2/27.
5. RE: Facebook Page—Anyone on commission can post, and all are encouraged to do so.

LONG-TERM PLAN TO LINK RESOURCES IN HIGH FALLS (Eric)

Eric roughly outlined the start of a master plan that would involve the MECC, Town Board, HFCA, HF Conservancy, O&W Rail Trail, D&H Canal & Museum and DEP. The idea would be to link all the sites in HF from 209 to Rosendale line with a linear park/walk & ride trail that would also serve as a pollinator corridor. This plan is just in the beginning stages. Maraleen Manos Jones is already working with DEP and pollinator corridor idea. HF Conservancy has also already working on this idea. Eric will meet with HF Conservancy, HFCA and Marbletown Rail Trail Committee to flesh out this idea. Tom mentioned that According to Tom, Rich Parete suggested a similar walk/bike path to go on top of proposed water pipeline running from HF bridge to SUNY Ulster. Perhaps this too could be incorporated in larger scheme. However, Doug noted that proposed pipeline would run under the streets (Lucas Ave & Leggett Road) and not alongside, making this idea a non-starter. SAD!

STREET LIGHT UPDATE (Tom)

Tom plans to restart the street light removal process. He will revise the letter from the last go-around and present a list of lights to be removed to Town Board for approval. Tom will bring this list to next ECC meeting.

BENCHMARKING (Evelyn)

Evelyn had meet with Town Clerk, Heather Moody, and has started gathering needed records and bills; however, progress has been delayed due to Heather being overwhelmed by tax deadline. Supervisor Parete will be hiring an assistant who will probably be taking over this task from Heather.

EV CHARGERS (Tom)

Tom met with Jacqueline Williams, new owner of Rock Cliff House. Plans for MECC to work with her to install an EV charging station in HF is still on track. She will probably also install a Tesla charging station as well. Current plan calls for 2 chargers with 4 parking spots.

There was also a discussion about snow/ice issues at existing station @ Community Center. It appears that this has not been a problem as the CC has been keeping the area shoveled.

ESC (Energy Smart Communities)

Tom requested a volunteer to attend ESC monthly meetings at behest of Manna Jo Greene. Amy volunteered to attend first meeting with Iris and Evelyn volunteering to do so as well on a rotating basis. Tom to forward appropriate info to Amy.

RENEWABLE BY 2035 (IRIS)

Iris brought forth a proposal to have Marbletown officially commit to become a 100% renewable energy community by 2035. She gave examples of similar programs in other cities including ones in Atlanta, Philly and Abita Springs, LA. Such a program would be focused on the whole community and not just the town government. Program would include an on-going series of workshops and presentations. There was also discussion of making the program more ambitious by moving date of goal to 2025 instead.

GAS PLANT IN TOWN OF ULSTER (Iris & Eric)

Iris gave an overview of the proposed Lincoln Park peaker plant in the Town of Ulster that would generate back-up electricity using fracked natural gas as a fuel. Iris provided tons of background on the many ways this plant is so awful—two 80' smoke stacks, a 50,000 gal. diesel storage tank, significant air pollution, presence of wetlands and aquifers, energy produced would not be used locally but sent downstate, etc. Eric then discussed how he raised this same issue at the EMC meeting the previous evening and is working with Margot Becker to draft an opposition letter from the EMC to send to Town of Ulster and Glidpath, the corporation who would be building the plant. Iris will provide Eric with the needed information to then forward to Margot. UPDATE: Thanks to Iris's help, Eric and Margot are working on the letter now in cooperation with various other interested parties. They will present the letter at EMC meeting later this month.

RIVERKEEPER SUMMIT

Riverkeeper will be presenting a summit at the Rondout Municipal Center in March. Exact date TBA. It is hoped that MECC will have a strong showing at this meeting since it's being held in our own town hall.

Meeting adjourned @ 9:10.