

Minutes of Pepperell Climate Change Committee – 2022-08-03

Meeting Recording: [Custus Recording - Climate Change Committee Meeting 2222-08-03](#)

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Committee Members in Attendance:

- Ken Hartlage
- Jessica Veysey-Powell
- Jason Veysey (absent)
- Renee D’Argento
- James Scarsdale
- Robert Cataldo (absent)
- Beth Faxon

Guests:

- Wayne Burton
- Kevin (surname???)

Agenda for Aug 3 Meeting

- 1. Open meeting
- 2. Acceptance of minutes from prior meetings
- 3. New Business Discussion / Action Items
 - a. Municipal Aggregation program – discuss name, logo, options, and adder fees
 - b. 40R Zoning – discuss proposed zoning bylaw, sited and other 40R related matters
- 4. Any other business not reasonably foreseen by the Chair
- 5. Adjournment

1. Open meeting - Ken

2. Acceptance of minutes from prior meetings

3. New Business Discussion / Action Items

3a. Municipal Aggregation program – discuss name, logo, options, and adder fees

Overview of Municipal Aggregation

- Town Meeting approved exploration of Municipal Electrical Aggregation by CCC
- Would allow the town to procure electricity on behalf of residents and businesses
- Currently, procurement of electricity is done on our behalf by National Grid for most ratepayers in town, except for those with individual contracts with suppliers, who would not be directly affected by Municipal Aggregation
- National Grid will continue to supply us with electrical energy
- Purchasing will go to the town
- Justification is that it gives us more flexibility in terms of the energy options that can be offered to the community
- May be able to procure at a more competitive price than National Grid

Actions required by CCC:

- Start official kickoff of process for creating a *Municipal Energy Aggregation Plan* that is submitted to DOER and public utilities department for review
- Plan Reviewers require some information from the town:
 - Name of program (to be used by a required outreach program to town residents)
 - *Options* for energy mix choices – ratio of renewable energy to fossil fuel energy. CCC hopes the community will select greater portion of renewable options.
 - *Default option* – initial option assigned automatically to all participants until they switch to another option or withdraw
 - *Adder Fee* – whether to have one or not

Discussion of Name

- Looked at names some other communities have elected.
- Name previously suggested by Jason “**Municipal Electricity Aggregation**” was popular since it states up front exactly what it is.
- Bob Cataldo suggested using an acronym **P-MAP** (meaning “Pepperell Municipal Aggregation Program”) so we have an easy handle to use. Ken suggested that this is a useful marketing tool.
- Renee suggested “**Pepperell Power Choice**”
Ken: this is a popular choice. Jason’s argument against is that it isn’t really a choice since everybody gets the *Default* option. Ken’s response is that everyone always has the choice of changing or opting out at any time, so there’s a lot of choice.
- Ken suggesting adding “**Green**” into the name
- Jessica – keep it simple, like Beverly’s – “Beverly Community Electric” – emphasizes “community” vs “green” to making it seem like we’re pushing forward an agenda that many aren’t interested in. Focus should be on “community” and “options”.

- Ken – “electric” vs “electricity” – Jim: “Littleton Electric”. Jessica – definition: “of, worked by, charged with or producing electricity”
- Ken – “Pepperell Community Electric”
- Renee – “Pepperell Community Choice” (but then we lose the “electric”)
- Ken – “Pepperell Community Power”. Jim – prefers “electricity” since we’re not involved with other types of power
- Comments of guests solicited: (Everything we’re doing is meant to benefit the community)

Kevin’s commentary:

- Are we going to be an entity like “Groton Electric”?
- If we’re leveraging our size to pick energy, that’s what we want to get out there
- Hopefully our pick is always cheaper than what we’d get from National Grid
- A big company that he worked with had one person working on power advice for the company. It was a big job, and the company had a lot of leverage because it used a lot of megawatts.

Ken – what name do you prefer?

- Kevin: P-MAP
- Has Solar cells on his house that drives a big credit that he usually gives to his son because he makes too much power

Wayne’s commentary:

- Likes green
- Keep it simple – three words – “Pepperell Community Electric” so if it’s something you receive in the mail you’d immediately know what it refers to, rather than the acronym
- Ken – likes “Pepperell Community Electric” (or “Electricity”), suggests recommending a name, but deferring a decision on name to Aug 11 meeting
- Renee – ok, but likes green
- Jim – likes the name – maybe add “Aggregation”
- Jim – maybe “Electricity Aggregation of Pepperell” – EAP

Program Options

Typical options:

- Budget – matches the state’s current renewable requirement (20%, to increase in 2% increments to 100% eventually) – least renewable may currently be the least expensive option (the rate current ratepayers experience)
- 100% renewable
- Standard (something between “budget” and “100%”)

Requirement at this point is pick the options we’re interested in – don’t have to exactly specify the renewable energy mix.

Jim - would like some percentage above the state renewable rate (say 5%), but have the option of going to a higher rate if we can purchase it competitively.

Jim – we might not need the budget option – prefer the minimum option be +5%.

Renee – agree, since most will stick with the default option.

Jessica and Beth agree – restated mix:

Budget – 5% above state minimum

100% renewable

Middle – somewhere in between

Ken – there's interest in the community to have an offering competitive with National Grid's rate.

Jessica – could 5% above average actually save rate payers money?

Ken – when timing is right, there have been cases where choosing more renewables than the state rate has been able to achieve a lower rate vs National Grid or Unitil rate. However, utilities change rates every 6 months. A question to energy consultants is when we will cross the line where renewable becomes less expensive than fossil fuels.

Renee – already seeing lower costs for renewables.

Ken – yes, but levelized costs depends on where you source from and what the market is doing

Renee – do wait until we procure to decide what energy mix we want, and can we prefer localized renewable energies to benefit New England with jobs, etc.?

Ken – we need an idea where want to source the energy from. Energy consultants analyze the market 6 months in advance. They will need to know in advance if we prefer New England energy to for instance, wind farms in Texas. Don't have to decide now, though.

Renee – should maybe consider whether we're going to source locally, it may be more expensive, and we may need to choose a lower renewable mix. Places like Lowell have gotten their green energy from sources like huge wind farms.

Ken – absolute price vs derivative benefits such as local jobs. Must discuss this topic with Peregrine (the pros and cons of who we choose).

Ken – recommend deferring a formal vote until Aug 11 meeting, with the recommendation that we offer 3 options, with the +5% being the default. Anecdotally, customers in other communities have commented that the difference in the monthly bill is so small that's it's not worth switching from the default.

Adder fee

Do we want to do an adder fee? State program is set up to an adder of up to 0.1% allow the funding of renewable energy related projects or activities, projects, resourcing that would help with the administration of the project. In practical terms, about \$30,000 / year in aggregate.

From last meeting, there was generally opposition to having an adder fee.

Renee – favors the *adder fee*. Could help fund a sustainability coordinator part time for the town, and allow the committee accomplish more.

Jim – would like to use the adder fee to fund to help for people who can't afford the electricity and help people defray costs in the event prices went up.

Renee – thinks that’s a waste of money because we already have a program called the LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) that already does that, and it would be a nightmare to figure out who would be eligible. A federal program already gives states the given money for the program, people can apply for it – it’s very well known.

Jessica – the amount of work the town would need to do per hear is on the order of 20 hours, and the money from the adder can only be used to fund things related to the program, so she’s opposed to it.

Beth – agrees with Jessica. Don’t need an additional thing to explain. Can it be changed in the future?

Ken – yes – it can be changed in the future. And agrees with points opposing the adder fee. However, Chelmsford has the adder, and it’s used to pay for their sustainability manager.

Jim – this decision only gates whether we have the *option* of having an adder fee, not whether we *will* have an adder fee. We can decide later whether or not to have one, but it will be really hard to change to having one later if we find we need it.

Ken – will discuss with Marlana if there’s language that doesn’t completely preclude it forever.

[Here Ken mentioned “Climate Change Heroes” – see Other Business below.]

Ken – proposes that we defer actual vote to next meeting.

3b. 40R Zoning – discuss proposed zoning bylaw, sited and other 40R related matters

Proposed 40R Zoning in town has been raised by several committee members. Ken and Renee have been closely following. Wants to open up to other committee options.

Jessica – Heard that 3 of the proposed sites were taken off of the 40R proposal, leaving only the Senior Center and the Leighton St site. Wants to understand the rationale, and whether the other 3 sites may be brought back in the future.

Renee – rationale as stated by the Planning Board. Based on feedback from committees, they’re moving toward “let’s go small”, and let’s go with projects where we have developers. Hotel Place owner might be interested in the future, but is not ready to develop it in the near future. Regarding the Peter Fitz, the underlying zoning allows for residential, so it could potentially be revisited in the future with either 40R or any other residential. With the paper mill site – because of the contaminates on the site, the owner might be able to qualify for some MassWorks funding to clean it up, and that could be something in the future. Everybody feels that the Senior Center Site is appropriate. The Leighton St site is being pushed because it give a lot of units (180) and bang for the buck. There is the ability to reduce the number of units under 40R. However, as the proposal is being written, according to the densities, the number of units that can be reduced to is 164 at the least.

Jessica – has looked at as many environmental resources on the site as she can, and rated by most and least impact. In her opinion, Leighton St should have been taken off the list first because of the aquifer and the cold water fishery, and all of the wetlands on site, and all of the proposed impervious areas and the impacts they would have on those resources. From the climate change perspective, one of the reasons for that is the impact to all of the forests surrounding the site. Would like a statement that if it’s not going to be put aside specifically for the water supply issues, that 40R is not the right tool for it.

Jessica – she has comments on the other sites as well. Hotel Place is number one – if we’re going to do a 40R, that’s the place to do it. The mill site has a lot of problems, but it’s right in the down town and close

to services. There might be ways to develop the site to improve the environmental impact and have housing right in the center.

Jessica – regarding the Senior Center – agrees that the impacts are not as strong. Even though it's close to the Senior Center, and intended for senior housing, it's far from downtown, and it doesn't fit with the "trying to contain sprawl" idea of 40R.

Renee – the way the Planning Board answered the Senior Center question is that it is within a ½ mile distance of the center, but would need to construct a sidewalk, which they felt was doable. Anecdotal estimate of cost to construct a sidewalk from there to center is \$1 million. However, under 40R, you can have the developer build in the structural upgrades. Whether that makes the project doable is a question.

Jessica – another question from the affordable housing side of this for Renee. There's a big push for dense housing, which makes sense from a sprawl perspective, but the main argument that Pepperell seems to be having for it is to increase the affordable housing supply, which is a good goal. But even if they did all 5 sites, which seems unlikely, it would still provide only 40% of the housing we need to achieve our goals. So it seems like major threats to our water supplies and environmental resources and still needing a large amount of development outside these zones to meet our affordable housing goals, and allowing other people to develop their land, which they have the right to do. Is the affordable housing trade off worth it?

Beth – still has a way to go to understand this. Are maps available?

Ken – it's all on the website.

Jessica – it's possible to go the MASSJS program called "Mass Mapper" and see all of the environmental information overlaid on aerial photographs or the property tax parcels.

Beth- that would be helpful to helping to know what to comment on. Has a broad-based general fear that we should not be addressing any higher-density housing without addressing the PFAS problem. Not sure where the town is in that process, but thinks we have a well that's shut down. That's here biggest concern. Thinks it's irresponsible to be increasing housing without looking at our utilities and the capacity that our facilities can serve. Not just the water, but the sewage. We're taking sewage from Groton. Don't know the details of our water or sewer capacity, but suspects that they will be stressed by additional development.

Renee – (responding to Jessica's question above) – answering from the Affordable Housing Committee's perspective and from her perspective. The Affordable Housing Committee believes that we need to start now with affordable housing. We've been waiting too long, we're behind. The 2020 Census is going to come out and we're going to be further behind. We need to build something like 335 units to meet our 10%. Getting to Safe Harbor is important – we need 60 units to get to Safe Harbor to potentially ward off the threat of 40B's that aren't friendly, but there aren't many knocking on our door, and the ones we have had have been friendly – the last two Emerson Circle and Birch Drive. The developer on Leighton is willing to work with us on a friendly 40B if the 40R doesn't pass. Renee's view is that we shouldn't be sacrificing our water and aquifer protection zone for the Leighton St site. We didn't have a process where the other committees and boards were involved to identify the appropriate sites. Primarily done by one person and one board.

Jessica – where is the Planning Board going from here? They're still aiming for Fall Town Meeting, but are they planning to move ahead with these two sites?

Renee – yes, they're going to propose the two sites. She didn't know this until the public hearing, but separately the DHCD is reviewing the zoning regulations and Jenny [Town Planner] indicates they expect to have those finalized around September. The 90-day process began when they did the submittal, probably just after the Aug 1 vote.

Jessica – are the 40S payments one-time payments or annual payments?

Renee – conversations with Cheryl indicate that those payments have to do with meeting the difference between the Chapter 70 funding – some years towns got more or less funding, but the 40R is a one-time payment.

Jessica – It wasn't clear from reading the proposed zoning rule how it would interact with other local by-laws – for instance, the wetland protection by-law. Assuming that those are still stand-alone units that would apply. Ken – yes.

Renee – a citizen's group has concerns that 40R won't be restricted to the sites being proposed. The zoning by-laws are separate and don't address specific sites. Thus, 40R can be applied to potentially anywhere in town. Planning to review, but that's a possibility.

Jessica – thought it would be for very specific sites in the overlay district.

Beth – but they can propose different sites

Renee – the Planning Board said that it wasn't worried about going down to two sites because they can propose sites later.

Ken – there are geographical boundaries based on certain demographics that have to be set for 40R zones. Must be within a certain distance (1/2 mile) of certain high population or high density commercial housing districts. Could not apply to a rural district. "Anywhere in town" is an overstatement. Largely consistent with the recommendation of the master plan to concentrate development in the urban district.

Jessica – another comment on the code itself that's being proposed and how it addresses environmental resources. A mitigation statement should be prepared, but the planning board can waive mitigation as it sees fit, and only where it sees "extraordinary adverse impact" must it require mitigation – very ambiguous wording. Since our group is an environmental group, this concern should be included in any future comments which we might make. "Any extraordinary adverse impact" sounds like it would have to be really extreme, whereas when we apply other environmental codes, we're not only looking at "extreme" impacts. We would look at daily things that add up to cumulative things that we know already have negative impact.

Ken – doesn't think the state of the 40R by-law hasn't been finalized. We might have the opportunity to add wording to it. Based on comments from early July, they [the planning board] actually added a section to include more environmental impacts than were in the original bylaw, and it also included doing greenhouse gas emissions and doing a vegetation analysis within 200 ft of a water body. Not everything requested was included – e.g., a "no-go" zone. But there are opportunities for the CCC to

suggest changes or clarity around the wording to reduce the wiggle room. It's problematic with the way things are being written. Al [Planning Board member] touched that in the meeting Ken listened in on. The by-law will be the by-law, the guidelines will be the guidelines, but would have preferred regulations. They should seriously evaluate what all of these impacts mean and use that to inform the type of mitigation policies or criteria that they would need to meet to do the policy. Al gave one example: when water usage is a concern, we could say that within this particular project, you can't use potable water for washing your car or watering your lawn or public greenspace. There are conditions that we can impose. And that seems good. But the concern is whether another board would continue to inform their decisions likewise.

Renee – another consideration was in Ken's first letter – the notion of having a *review board* or *review authority* that would have ultimate review and approval of a project for mitigations of any sort. It should be one person of each board, ensuring a good project.

Ken – feedback should in two areas:

1. One is specific to the Leighton St project. Serious concerns over selection of that site for this project. Beth raises the general concern over considering any project that would increase housing density while we have water supply / water quality issues, or continuing the draw on existing supply while we continue to have water quality issues.
2. Are there additional changes or clarifications in the by-law itself, and perhaps the design guidelines? Would like to would narrow the interpretations of "adverse impacts" and to make less a matter of judgement, and clarify how exceptions / waivers are granted to a specific project.

Beth – Sees a big need for public transportation in Pepperell. If you're bringing in more families, how is our current infrastructure going to handle that? How are we preparing to handle the increase in vehicular traffic and public safety, and getting some bus service in here?

Ken – we had submitted some comments concerning the increase in density and increase in vehicular traffic creating a public safety issue and contributing to pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions. Some things are beyond our immediate control. But it has been mentioned before to have public transportation. Tony [Select Board member] was investigating if we could get grant money or connect with other communities to provide those services. Not part of the planning process per se, but an issue others are looking into.

Renee – the assumption with transportation is that we are a bedroom community. Most everyone drives to work and other places. You've got school and kids taking busses. If you have a good complete streets program and a safe to school program, then kids could be riding their bikes or walking to school. Complete streets is planning for all modes of transportation for all abilities. With smart growth, you're building within ½ mile of town center to discourage vehicle use and encourage using other modes. Not sure how effective a bus service would be, or who would take it. But for seniors, we have a service that runs with very short hours, and not on the weekends. Even for medical appointments, there's a window of only a couple of hours during the day, they don't go very far (adjacent towns primarily). Groton does better – they put more money into their transportation. They run longer hours, and for medical trips will go into Boston and Concord / Emerson one day a week. Need to focus on that in conjunction with development and growth.

Beth – more interested in commuters that are driving into and out of town every day. Would love to see some sort of node that could take you to the Ayer train station and into Boston, and then to points wherever. Park and ride, commuter sharing, etc.

Renee – the Master Plan Committee discussed having a park and ride somewhere in the center of town. The commuter lot in Tyngsborough is so overly successful and overly full and they're trying to figure out how much more parking they can take, how many more busses, and how they can get people to get where they need to go.

Beth – it would be great if we could even get some of our citizens to Tyngsborough or Ayer or even ride out out of town.

Ken – work on timeline and process, time and process to submit.

Renee – concerned on traffic impact on air quality. What's the formula for modeling traffic under 40R? Typical is 2 cars per unit with 2 cars twice per day. At 180 units, that's 720 car trips per day going down Leighton St and concentrated small particle pollutants going along with it.

Jessica – good idea to consider.

Beth – is there data out there to consider? Traffic and air quality are big issues to consider.

Jessica – In comments [to the Planning Board], Ken mentioned greenhouse gas emissions, the effect to the climate, and that we're striving for net zero, and what's the impact? There are probably tools out there, but we don't specify how assessing the climate impacts should be approached. It's ambiguous – do we need more detail? Are we providing the tools to make the assessments in a timely manner?

Ken – there are tools that could be used to at least approximate the impacts. We have had the greenhouse gas emissions study done for Pepperell, which gives us a good of the impact on the number of households on greenhouse gas emissions, and what the transportation related emissions are. On the transportation side, it would be simple to determine a per-unit automobile emission and multiple time number of projected cars. From the households standpoint, it's more difficult, because the data reflect the entire Pepperell community – older homes, homes built to different energy standards, newer homes etc. So it's an average over a range of homes, whereas these new buildings would have to be compliant with the current stretch code, so our GHG data won't be as applicable. Maybe be able to use newer data to ballpark the calculations. The hope is that the planning will rally behind the special opt-in stretch code which incentivizes and all-electric home. That would negate any impacts from a greenhouse gas emissions standpoint.

Renee – two additional comments. Traffic just applies to the unit residents. However, there are also visitors, vendors, lawn crews, etc. that might not be a part of the calculation. The second point is the forest calculation for the carbon. It's more than that. What's the calculation for the water that would have been created for the aquifer? Trees through various processes collect, absorb and release water. How would all of the proposed impervious surfaces and no mature vegetation impact the calculation of water lost from the aquifer? Cites a New York study that indicates how much street trees contribute to storm water removal – millions of gallons per year. Points to the importance of a mature forest vs a built-out environment and immature vegetation. Not just carbon.

Ken – made a general comment that the trees provide both a physical and chemical barrier to storm water for the reasons stated. Even if it can be quantified, will it make a difference, since it will be argued that the water can be managed irrespective of the trees. From a filtration perspective, the general principle for aquifer management is that you're supposed to do infiltration on-site. The water filters directly from rain through those resources and into the aquifer. Impervious surfaces don't perform any protective filtration functions. This is the reason we have water protection districts.

Renee – the Planning Board feels that artificial means of dealing with stormwater is equal to the natural filtration and ok. If so, why are discouraged from having impervious surfaces in protected areas by the DEP?

Jessica – a question about the specific aquifer. Is it a system where there is lovely sand and gravel and whatever is on-site is infiltrating right down to the aquifer, or is there some impermeable layer between what's above and the aquifer itself in this particular case?

Renee – in 2002 there was a "SWAP (Source Water Aquifer Program) Report" in which the public aquifers in every Massachusetts municipality were studied. That was the forerunner of the town of Pepperell designating aquifer protection zones in 2004. At the time we had the Jersey Steet and Beamis wells. Nashua Road wasn't on. They said that the wells in Pepperell are gravel-packed wells and there are no impermeable barriers to protect them. They cited two trucks with inappropriate use over the Jersey Street well. They cite roads and development as major risks to our aquifers. Will share the SWAP Report.

4. Any other business not reasonably foreseen by the Chair

4a Climate Change Heroes

Program from Executive Office of Energy Affairs – looking for municipalities to sign on to help achieve net zero emissions. In signing up for this and making the commitment to the associated benchmarks, there are funds that could be made available to the community to help meet the goals. Some of those funds could be used to fund a climate change person to oversee the efforts that the town is doing to get to 2050. Ken promised to take to Select Board to look at. Will provide additional information at next meeting if available.

5. Adjournment

Thanks to guests.

Motion to adjourn: Jessica. Second: Renee. Vote: Approved Unanimously