

**TOWN OF BEDFORD
ENERGY COMMISSION MINUTES
March 23, 2023**

A meeting of the Bedford Energy Commission was held on Thursday, March 23, 2023 in the Town Meeting Room, 10 Meetinghouse Road.

I. Call to Order: Chairman Russell opened the meeting at 7:00 PM.

Present: John Russell (Chair), Chris Bandazian (Vice Chair, Town Council Liaison), Jeanne Walker (Assistant Town Manager), Chuck Nettleship, Bill Foote (SB Liaison), Carolyn Mahoney

Absent: Bing Lu, Andrew Gillis, Tom Elwood, Sue Thomas (Town Council Alternate Liaison), Mindy Bator (SB alternate)

II. Approval of February 23, 2023 Minutes

**MOTION by Mr. Foote to accept the February 23, 2023 minutes as presented.
Seconded by Councilor Bandazian. Vote taken – Motion Passed.**

III. Reports of Members and Committees

a. School projects progress and planning

Mr. Foote stated that nothing changed. The School didn't have an energy warrant this year.

1. Progress with systems upgrades

Mr. Foote stated that they were still working through the HVAC work that was approved last year.

2. Portfolio Manager

Mr. Foote stated that he had put in a request to put them on it, but he hadn't heard back yet.

Chairman Russell wanted Mr. Foote to do a recap of things that happened and were budgeted for over the past year. Mr. Foote stated that they were going to try and improve the HVAC equipment at Peter Woodbury, Memorial, and Riddlebrook. It was going to be a big energy improvement. That would have been part of their energy bond from 3-4 years ago. They were not only going after the air and quality improvement, but the energy use. The schools were going to be much better for it. It's going to be a couple year project.

IV. Old Business

a. Solar Project/Warrant Article for March 28th

1. Warrant Article 5 – strategy discussion by commission

2. Warrant Article 5 – questions from the community (public discussion)

3. Plan attendance at the Transfer Station Saturday March 25th

4. Plan attendance at BHS Voting Tuesday March 28th

Chairman Russell read the warrant article, 'Shall the Town vote to raise and appropriate the sum of four million three hundred ninety one thousand three hundred seventy three dollars (\$4,391,373) for the purpose of constructing a solar array at the capped landfill and electrical trash compactors with associated building and site improvements at the Transfer Station on Chubbuck Road...' He

stated that it further talks about the issuance of bonds. They need 60% or 3 out of every 5 votes in order for it to pass. They humbly request the voters' support and hoping they can earn their support and trust and empower the Town Council to proceed forward.

Chairman Russell stated that some objections had been presented. One objection from the Bedford Taxpayers Association was that this was going to raise taxes and they respectfully disagree.

Councilor Bandazian stated that they've looked at this for a long time; almost two years. There is a misconception that the new incentives were the energy spike in 2022 drive this, but they don't. It was something that economically made sense to proceed with for at least 1½ years by their projections when they first started getting projections from ReVision. That increases the payback both in terms of roughly \$8M of what it would have been versus \$12M in avoided costs and thanks to incentives. Similarly by about 1/3 reduces the return on investment period. It definitely always made sense and it does make sense. On the other side, he didn't know if there were any misconceptions about what goes on after a warrant article grants authorization to the Town Council to proceed. People don't turn their brains off; quite the opposite. There is an RFP that would go out as with every project. The Public Works Director and he had a 2½ hour meeting with their consultant and he could assure everybody that it would be extremely detailed and they would get the most competitive bid including incentives and so forth and marketing renewable energy credits. That's the next process; they get a number and then the Town Council will consider when and how to exercise the authorization. For example, a similar infrastructure investment in the TIF District was approved by the voters in 2011 and they exercised the authority in 2014, because that's when the plans were ready and the interest rate was 1.59%. You look at all of those things, you time bond issuances down to the week of the year based on market conditions, and that's what he expects would happen going forward. It's not some robotic path to spending money, which he thought was the misconception out there.

Chairman Russell wanted to know if it was fair to say that the number they quote was an absolute balloon number; it's got a cost-over run of 12% built in and it's got an extremely high rate charge of 5.5% and Councilor Bandazian responded yes. Chairman Russell stated that they now think will come in below that balloon number and they believe it will come in significantly less than 5.5%.

Chairman Russell wanted to consider the benefits. They were taking blighted land and putting it to productive use. They were talking about significant process optimization at the Transfer Station. If you have significant process optimization and efficiency gains, it means they spend less money. They are generating power, which will theoretically save \$300K+ every year. He wanted to know if they feel good about that number. Councilor Bandazian thought it ultimately depended on what the RFP is and what the lending rate is. Mr. Foote thought the \$300K was only applying to the Town's power cost. Chairman Russell thought they had 54 or 53 unique power bills. Councilor Bandazian agreed that they have that many meters. Chairman Russell thought the more of those they can put behind the meter so to speak, the more they could simply eliminate that charge. Eversource raised their rate 54% last year. Councilor Bandazian stated that it was the first step in leveraging that facility to more savings. Chairman Russell stated that they were also projecting a savings of a minimum of \$12M over 40 years. From an environmental point of view, they offset 1.225M pounds of carbon dioxide equipment. For the trash compactors, he thought it was worth noting that they currently spend \$43,125 every year on a very wasteful backhoe that was not covered under warranty by John Deere. They would be taking that money off the table and also eliminate the \$170K backhoe capitalization in 2024. They were down four people at the Transfer Station, but they free up one highly skilled operator to backfill one of those positions and replace him with someone that pushes a button. That was a significant gain in process optimization. That translates into they spend this money, and therefore theoretically the Town Council could either repurpose that money or offer a tax cut to the taxpayer.

Chairman Russell's final notes stated that they've calculated the average cost of solar was about 4/10 of 1 penny extrapolated over 40 years versus the current rate of \$22.26. Right now buying your electricity from the utility is 56 times more expensive than what they've proposed. If they look at an average increase rate of 2.5% year to year; that is 37.4 versus 4/10 of one penny, which is 9,350% increase one over the other.

Chairman Russell stated that regarding strategy, they have flyers that they wish to distribute. They should be distributing these at the Transfer Station this Saturday and hopefully elsewhere. He would like to distribute them at the polling station. They have some Bedford High School students that are very keen on this project that would love to help. Their game plan was to try and distribute flyers to inform people of what's going on and to also engage in the various Facebook groups and he thought they had done it pretty successfully. He thought from a strategy point of view, communication and the distribution of flyers was what they were trying to do. He mentioned Councilor Bandazian's two posters that he did.

Mr. Nettleship wanted to know if it does not go through, if they were going to redo the Transfer Station to electric compactors or keep steady-state. Councilor Bandazian responded steady-state.

Chairman Russell stated that another question that was raised was why they weren't two separate warrant articles and he didn't have an answer. Both feed together; the solar farm powers the compactors and both are at the Transfer Station.

Mr. Foote stated that they could calculate the payback on the solar. There wouldn't be a payback on the equipment other than comparing it to the backhoe. He wanted to know how much of a compaction fraction did they expect. He wanted to know if it was going to be 10 trips was now going to be 1 trip. Councilor Bandazian stated that it really goes by tonnage. A truck is a truck; you can't overload it.

Chairman Russell stated that they would like to be at the Transfer Station this Saturday and pass out flyers. He was looking for people to sign up. People in the community were welcome to join them. They would be there 9 AM – 12 PM. If they get enough people that would free them up to go and hit Flight Coffee. They have over 500 flyers to distribute. They have three wonderful Bedford High School students who will assist them on polling day and he requested that the Commission members maybe be there for the busy hours 7–10 AM or 4–7 PM.

Mr. Foote stated that he couldn't make it Saturday, but he would definitely be at the polls on Tuesday. He'll be handing out flyers and shaking hands.

Chairman Russell stated that they have to hit 60%, so they need every vote. An enormous amount of work has gone into this. This is an authorization to proceed. There shall be a number of conditions they feel they need to hit to make it happen, to make it prudent.

b. Eversource 3 Phase Power update

Chairman Russell stated that it's all been authorized and it's all been done. It's just a matter of Eversource executing it. The actual cost would have been \$985K by the time the Federal grants kicked in; it actually cost \$492,500.

c. Community Power Initiative

Chairman Russell stated that CPCNH was moving forward. They've proposed quite significant cost savings over the Eversource number. Their big picture plan was to get the solar done this year and then come back and look at community power for next year.

d. Solsmart

Ms. Mahoney stated that they looked at and she could use some help pulling some of the information together, especially contacts. If they have websites they would like to see on the solar page, she can add those on there. They were still pulling together the information that folks would need for permits and that type of thing and getting that on there. It's at least in its initial stages for the solar page and then she'll check in this week on what they're doing for the actual application.

Chairman Russell asked Ms. Walker if they had anything from the Planning and Zoning boards that they can share. Councilor Bandazian stated that there was a Zoning ordinance. Ms. Walker stated that at this time they don't, but her understanding was that they've been working with Jillian Harris. She thought they had a better idea of the language that needs to be there.

e. Other

V. New Business:

a. CENH Updates

Councilor Bandazian stated that they were always having events, so people should check their website

b. Website

Chairman Russell stated that they had some updates from Mr. Lu with suggestions on the website, so that would be something they work on. Ms. Mahoney stated that she took a look at it too, but didn't realized it was pretty restrictive in what they can do with it in their template, so they will go back and rework the suggestions that they had made.

Ms. Walker stated that if there was something that they wanted done, they could see if they can do it. Tell her and she will bring it back to the people that were going to be doing it. Dawn (Boufford) was likely to be doing those changes, so they just need to give her what they want there.

c. Other new business

Mr. Nettleship stated that he had a potential speaker. He's in Maine, so he wanted to know if it would be possible to do a Zoom call. Councilor Bandazian thought for some reason, Zoom was technically difficult to do as a combined live and Zoom meeting. Mr. Nettleship stated that he would do some research to see if it was possible.

Chairman Russell stated that they have one open position and hope to have that person seated in April.

VI. Reminders:

a. Next upcoming meeting April 27rd, 2023

b. Election of the 2023-2024 Chairman and Vice-Chairman at the May 2023 meeting.

VII. Adjournment

MOTION by Mr. Foote to adjourn at 7:23 PM. Seconded by Mr. Nettleship. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by,

Dawn Boufford