Town of Swanzey, NH
Swanzey Energy Commission
Meeting Minutes for February 21, 2025

Note: Draft minutes are subject to review, correction and approval by the Committee. Review and approval of minutes generally takes place at the next regularly scheduled committee meeting.

Call to Order—The meeting of the Swanzey Energy Commission was called to order at 10:06 am by Chair Audette. Present: Bob Audette, Barbara Skuly, Cheri Domina (by phone), Steve Russell. Also present: Asst. Planner Stephon Mehu.

Absent: Denis Swain

Minutes

Skuly proposed an amendment to Feb. 10 minutes: "A company that caters to bitcoin producers." Russell made a motion to approve the Feb. 10 minutes as amended. Skuly seconded. All in favor. Approved.

Business

Community Power Fee—Audette said he met with the Keene Energy Commission. They discussed limiting their 50% renewable category. Also recommended to town council that they add a fee of .07-.125. Audette suggested we add a similar fee to create a contingency fund. Skuly asked if Swanzey's welfare fund covers utility bills. Audette said they are already strapped for cash. If we had a fee we could use the funds to help cover emergency utility bills for residents. Domina suggested we might want to wait until next contract to add a fee, and see how Keene's program goes. With people up in arms about taxes, now might not be the time. We need a solid plan and some PR first, she said. Russell added that Keene has a lot more customers. Skuly said she would look at our CP plan and see what the language allows. Audette said he would look for model language for creating a fee and we will proceed slowly.

Energy Audits—Skuly said Whitcomb Hall was done Monday, and Stratton Library will be next Friday. They are discussing mini-split heat pumps for next year (they get funding from town, but also other sources). Carpenter Home will be done Saturday. Reports will come back to us in May.

Russell said that recently-installed heat pumps at Mt. Caesar Library stopped working when bitter cold set in, and their oil furnace had been disconnected. They needed to reconnect oil burners, but have had lots of power problems after reconstruction. New panels were installed this week. Frustrating setbacks.

SolSmart—Audette shared a link to the recent recording. Need to decide by Feb. 28 if we want to participate in SolSmart. If we sign up, they start an audit of our town's solar ordinances. Participants meet monthly as a group. They help educate code enforcement staff and help with solar farm info. This is a CENH-sponsored program. Mehu said Peterborough signed up; Keene too. We would need a liaison. Mehu said he'd sign us up, and Russell agreed to be liaison; Audette will attend as he can. Mehu said our ordinances allow wiggle room around where to site solar; he will find the solar ordinance draft that previous planners including Julius Peel worked on.

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Energy Policy—Audette said he attended a monthly CENH policy call. They are keeping track of NH energy policy issues. Do we want to comment on proposed bills as a commission? How can we contact our legislators about them? Russell said he is on a state EV policy committee. We can give testimony to hearings online. Skuly suggested we have questions for selectboard candidates. Ask for their views on town energy policy. Can we work on a question for March 4 candidates' night?

Budget—we didn't make a request for this year. What is our working budget?

SWRPC—Russell said he would talk to SWRPC about the Natural Resources and Energy Committee.

MSH Update—Rachel Panelli is the new program manager. They are planning an energy day at the Monadnock Co-op in April. Audette will talk to them re: a solar forum.

Community Power Contract—Audette will request somebody from the CP Coalition come talk to us at our March meeting. We should all research CPCNH.org. Could Frank Richter from CENH help us compare?

Reminder: Questions we need to answer!

1. Do we want to continue with Standard Power or move to the Coalition?
2. How much renewable energy to keep in the default program?
3. Do we keep all 4 options?
4. Do we want to charge a fee to create a discretionary reserve fund? We would want to take care of this before we sign the next contract.

Andrew Kellar, Solar Garden—Kellar said they terminated the project on Rte. 10 due to the $2 million Eversource upgrade cost. They tried to work through it, but it made the cost for power too expensive for customers. The landowner got impatient and started exploring other options for development. Prices for everything from Eversource have doubled in recent years, Kellar said. Eversource is way behind in approving solar projects, and Solar Garden is not looking for more land in Swanzey.

Kellar asked what our strategy and goals are for group net metering. Discussed projects they've done for other entities within Eversource territory. We could sign a subscription agreement (contract) to consume up to a MW of power from any large solar farm (up to 5 MW) in NH. They would pay out a penny per KW to group members; no extra cost to us. This is independent of our energy program or power supplier, and would help us pay our electric costs. Stonyfield Farms is a client, he said. Neighboring states have similar programs. Solar Garden would become a generator inside our retail supply, and would work with our supplier to deliver our supply. Can claim RECs. Doesn't matter who we choose for our supplier. We would tell him what the town's energy load is, and he would match us with an upcoming solar project in late stages needing an offtaker. Our subscription agreement could be fixed or variable %. He will send a document for us to review—could he help explain it to Selectmen?

Audette said he will ask CENH what they think about this program.

Next meeting: March 10, 1 pm

Adjournment: Voted to adjourn at 11:30 am

Minutes submitted by Cheri Domina

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