

**Minutes of the  
Somerset County Energy Council Meeting  
Tuesday, August 18, 2020**

Chairman William Amann called the meeting to order at approximately 6:10 PM. The members pledged allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

The roll was taken and the following members were **Present**

William Amann, Chairman  
Jeanne Perantoni, Vice Chair  
Wayne DeFeo, Secretary  
Paul Drake  
William Dondiego  
Jeffrey Grant  
Jeffrey Foose  
William Knox  
Walter Lane  
Monica Lazer

**Absent**

Axel Breidenbruch

**Also Present**

Laurette Kratina, PP, AICP, Somerset County Planning Division, Staff Liaison to the Energy Council  
Roy Horowitz, Somerset County Office of Emergency Management

**April 21, 2020 & June 16, 2020 Meeting Minutes:** A motion to approve the April 21, 2020 meeting minutes without changes was submitted by Ms. Perantoni and seconded by Mr. Foose. A motion to approve the June 16, 2020 meeting minutes was submitted by Mr. DeFeo and seconded by Mr. Foose.

**Chairman's Comments:** Chairman Amann referred to the request from Freeholder Marano for a list of recommended actions, which is the focus of this meeting.

**New Business:** Chairman Amann called attention to the Excel document comprising the draft list of recommendations, which was e-mailed to the members in preparation for the meeting. He noted there are two worksheets; one that is more detailed and will be worked on later-on, and another that summarizes the recommendations entitled "SCEC Priorities" which includes six (6) potential actions for consideration by the Freeholders. The goal of this meeting is to determine if there is a consensus on them.

Chairman Amann noted that the top recommendations pertain to energy benchmarking and auditing of County facilities. Energy audits are among the first steps recommended by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) and are used to identify where energy waste is occurring. The Local Government Energy Audit Program (LGEAP) is a free service offered through the NJ Clean Energy Program that the County could participate in. Chairman Amann noted that the State will provide a certain amount of free audits per year, up to \$200,000. He recommended that the selection of the buildings chosen for the audits should be based on energy benchmarking data (those with the lowest scores should be done first), which is why completing the benchmarking process is also a top recommendation. Chairman Amann described audits performed for the County Complex about 12 years ago. Upgrades to the County Administration Building were made based on that audit. Following this, the Energy Star score was obtained – it was around 30. This shows that although the light bulbs were changed and other minor improvements were made, a building may not become a top performer. The group agreed that these are among the lowest-hanging fruit and are the best first moves the County can take in terms of energy savings and associated cost reductions.

Next, Chairman Amann brought up the recommendation to refresh the County's Electric Vehicle (EV) Readiness plan, noting it was a Freeholder initiative that was completed in 2018. Thus far, the County has installed a few EV Chargers and begun replacing County fleet vehicles with electric as they come due. In view of the State Energy Master Plan and other initiatives going on, the EV Plan should be re-evaluated and refreshed to reflect changes in policies, economics and technology, and to leverage EV planning initiatives underway by the County Planning Division. This recommendation builds upon the previously established County EV Taskforce to and incomplete actions in the plan should be advanced. In response to Mr. DeFeo's question concerning the County's fleet replacement schedule, Mr. Lane indicated the County purchased 4 EVs so far and 3 or 4 may currently be on-order. He noted a reduction in the County budget's capital expenditures was made this year, which may defer some things. He also noted that the Planning Board is in the process of applying for the next round of sub-regional transportation program funding from the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA). This funding source was recently used to prepare the "*Walk-Bike-Hike Study*" and multiple phases of the "*Supporting Priority Investment in Somerset County*" initiatives. The current application is for funding will be used to update the Circulation Element of the County Master Plan. The enhanced EV Readiness Plan will be one of the Circulation Element's new components, which aligns with the State Energy Master Plan's transportation electrification strategy. The updated Circulation Plan will guide County EV policies and investments and those of municipalities and private entities in support of transitioning to a clean energy-based transportation system. In response to a question regarding the number of other NJ counties that have EV Readiness Plans from Mr. Drake, Mr. Lane noted there are none that he is aware of. Mr. Lane commented that Jeff Perlman, Senior Director of Planning at the NJTPA was very excited to see that the EV Readiness Plan refresh is included in this proposal since it builds also builds upon NJTPA's previous EV work. Mr. DeFeo asked whether the County is tracking the cost - benefits of using EVs compared to conventional vehicles. Walter indicated that he talked to the County Public Works Director about this but does not know if this analysis is being done. He indicated that one of the enhancements to the EV Readiness Plan will be to collect this data and put these measures in place. Mr. DeFeo emphasized the importance of being able to show how this saves taxpayers money. Mr. Foose agreed – pointing out the importance of factoring in the steep replacement costs associated with EV batteries and accounting for rising electricity costs

versus declining gasoline prices. Although increasing the proportion of EVs in the County fleet may reduce the County's carbon footprint, it may not save the County money. Battery costs should be amortized with the life of the vehicle. Mr. DeFeo agreed that a full life cycle cost analysis is needed which includes all maintenance, brakes, battery pack replacement, etc. A 10-year life cycle for amortization was suggested if bonding capital is being used for EV purchase. Mr. Grant raised EV battery disposal issues, noting that right now they are shredded and landfilled, compared to conventional car batteries whose components are salvaged for reuse. Furthermore, sixty (60) percent of all cobalt used to make EV batteries comes from the Congo, which is a conflict country ruled by the Chinese. Its citizens are treated as slave labor – raising human suffrage issues in the production of these vehicles. Mr. DeFeo noted that lithium ion and rare-earth battery recycling programs are currently being developed around the country and may be put in place during the next few years. Ms. Perantoni noted that these comments underscore the importance refreshing the EV Plan in order to take these considerations into account and agreed this is a high priority that should be included in the recommendations to the Freeholders. Walt agreed to use this feedback when writing the grant application. He noted that compiling and tracking EV data will require a partnership with other County divisions. Mr. Amann suggested including these concerns in the detailed worksheet so the Freeholders can get a greater level of understanding if they choose, and agreed that the EV Plan should look at both the opportunities and costs. The group agreed this should be included in the list of recommendations to the Freeholders.

Moving on to a discussion of the green energy sourcing recommendation included as priority 4 on the draft list, Chairman Amann noted that Hunterdon County is sourcing all of its electricity from green energy. Based on the articles he read, Hunterdon County is still able to save in the vicinity of \$100,000 per year. The City of New Brunswick and other counties have also been successful with this. He noted that the State Energy Master Plan talks a lot about supply but very little about demand. Although a lot of people might like to buy green energy, there is not a lot of awareness about how to do this. Although green energy may not be the cheapest, it could still cost less than what customers are buying now. This recommendation involves an analysis of what the costs would be for the County to switch to a green energy source. Mr. DeFeo recommended the wording be changed to “solicit a request for qualifications” (RFQ) and that one of the contingencies included in the RFQ should be cost. This will allow us to determine whether taxpayer savings can be achieved. The RFQ process should occur first, followed by a request for proposals (RFP). Chairman Amann noted there are a lot of vendors that do this. He suggested that if the Freeholders are interested in this, the Council could give them guidance on how to proceed. Mr. Foose described the purchase of green energy as involving an amalgam of energy from a collection of green energy suppliers that come and go, such that the default is always what the utility can provide. Mr. Grant agreed that it is a constantly changing field as business models, partners, etc. change. He questioned the cost of green energy, noting we're paying in the vicinity of \$14. per megawatt to meet the renewable portfolio standards. He would like to know how the aforementioned jurisdictions are reducing costs by switching to green energy. Mr. Grant emphasized the need for a high level of reliability and trust in green energy suppliers and contractors so that the problem Somerset and the two other Counties ran into with the solar initiative a few years ago can be avoided. Mr. Foose suggested the RFQ identify the renewable energy source to improve accountability. He also expressed concern that it may not generate a net savings for the taxpayer. Chairman Amann agreed that although more information is needed, this is a potential opportunity that's worth looking even though it may be

a lower priority. Mr. Grant mentioned a company called “SwitchX” that does real-time energy costs and sourcing which provides hour-by-hour information on the energy you are getting from particular companies. Chairman Amann noted that the U.S. Dept. of Energy website has links to “Green E”, which is a third party certifier of renewable energy attributes and a list of companies by state that provide either renewable energy certificates or renewable supply. He noted that he purchases Class 1 renewables on the PJM grid, which costs more. Large customers such as Amazon and Apple are making deals to buy competitively-priced renewable energy and the County might be big enough to get a favorable rate. Mr. Lane noted that Paul McCall, the County Public Works Director has been following up with the State pursuant to a conversation with BPU officials over a year ago concerning participation in the State’s aggregation program. He recently found out that the State is currently involved in the procurement process, and that there may be opportunities for the County to participate in the future. The group agreed that the wording of this recommendation will be revised to indicate the County will pursue a RFQ prior to investigating or soliciting an RFP. The group expressed interest in reviewing the RFQ responses. Mr. DeFeo clarified that the RFQ process represents the investigation of whether pursuing a RFP is appropriate. Depending on the outcome, the County can determine whether it should initiate the RFP process. The RFQ process also provides information that can be used to craft the RFP.

Chairman Amann began a discussion of the fifth recommendation on his draft list – “Establish Sustainability Policies for County Facilities”. This recommendation builds upon his conversations with Freeholder Marano and his knowledge of County building initiatives such as the new warehouse for record storage; and potential partnership between the County Improvement Authority and Montgomery Township for a shared facility. There is only a vague possibility of designing these to LEED Standards. County officials need more information about where the green building industry is headed; and County policies are needed that establish how County facilities should be designed and built. The Freeholders were not aware of how easy it would have been to make the warehouse net-zero or net-zero ready so nothing was done to accomplish this. With regard to managing existing County facilities, there are a lot of best practices the County should also be made aware of. Ms. Perantoni noted that when the new County Social Services Building was planned the County submitted a letter to the Freeholders supporting the integration of Green Building best practices. Ms. Perantoni viewed this recommendation as involving research and the compilation of best practices that includes the economics behind them for use by the County. She noted this can be a useful tool and reminded everyone of the Business Partnership’s “Green Building Toolkit” that was prepared over 12 years ago. Mr. Grant suggested information be provided regarding what went wrong with the Social Services Building that can be avoided in the future. Chairman Amann indicated that he met with the design team for the Social Services Building who agreed to incorporate sustainability practices without pursuing any certifications in order to avoid another layer of project review and approval. There are many more LEED-certified projects now as compared to when that building was designed, and the certification process is easier because most design firms have become very familiar with it. A new aspect to this is that green buildings are healthier, in addition to saving energy. The LEED program establishes clear standards for ventilation systems. He pointed out that some school districts have learned that they have insufficient ventilation systems and are therefore not able to re-open their schools this fall. It is much more likely that facilities built to LEED standards would be able to reopen safely. Mr. DeFeo noted that there are a number of Pilot Credits in the LEED program for earning points for

ventilation upgrades in light of COVID-19. He agreed it is time for the County to move in this direction. Mr. Dondiego indicated that this meshes well with the NJ Clean Energy Program and that the County could benefit financially from the incentives this program provides. Chairman Amann agreed there are a number of Clean Energy Programs that can potentially help pay for energy upgrades, but not necessarily other sustainability improvements. Mr. Dondiego noted the incentive programs are retroactive and can fund improvements made during the last 12 months. Mr. Dondiego offered to put the Council in touch with NJBPU staff that can provide guidance on how the County can access these programs. Chairman Amann agreed this could be part of the education process and brought to the attention of Paul McCall. The group agreed this initiative would be appropriate to include on the list of recommendations.

The sixth initiative Chairman Amann proposed for inclusion on the list involves developing a County Energy and Resiliency Master Plan. He invited Mr. Lane to speak about this as well as Roy Horowitz from the County OEM's resiliency planning perspective. Chairman Amann noted this would involve establishing energy use benchmarks as well as goals and strategies. He recognized that Sustainable Jersey has been compiling municipal level utility data adjusted by zip code and categorized by facility type. Data for Somerset County municipalities is available from both JCP&L and PSE&G, which can be used to track energy consumption. Mr. Lane noted that as part of the update of the Hazard Mitigation Plan, a draft "*Energy Resiliency Framework*" and draft "*Flood Resiliency Framework*" were developed for the County. Planning staff have talked about expanding the scope of the *Energy Resiliency Framework* to include other energy sustainability aspects and had some initial dialogue with NJBPU officials, but was not successful in scheduling a follow-up meeting. The original goal was to adopt these two framework documents as elements of the County Master Plan, but this has become an opportunity to potentially refine the *Energy Resiliency Framework* to be consistent with the *State Energy Master Plan*. A broader approach would potentially avail the County to a broader range of resources and opportunities, including a NJBPU Community Energy Grant. Ms. Kratina noted that Bergen County is among the first recipients of this grant. The grant application requires the completion of a GHG inventory. BPU staff participate on the Sustainable Jersey Taskforce and may be influencing the utility data collection and compilation work. Complete 2015 data is available from JCP&L and PSE&G for all Somerset County municipalities and 2019 data is available from JCP&L for municipalities in its service area. Sustainable Jersey's work could lower the County's project costs associated with this grant requirement. She suggested inviting the Taskforce Chair, Nancy Quirk to participate in a meeting aimed at finding out how the County can take advantage of these resources. As an aside, Chairman Amann noted that he is acquainted with the person overseeing the replacement of the Roseland to Branchburg transmission lines so the Council will be able to get updates as that project proceeds. Mr. Horowitz questioned whether the potential County Energy Plan could address back-up generators and batteries specifically for County facilities. Chairman Amann indicated that it could, as well as examine opportunities for microgrids and other ways to make the County more resilient in light of increasingly more severe weather events and outages from these and other causes. Mr. Lane noted the *Energy Resiliency Framework* addresses these topics. It included a list of actions that can be done at the local, county, state and regional levels to bring attention to and advocate for resiliency improvements. He noted Mr. Grant's committee also talked about improving the last mile of the distribution system. Ms. Kratina noted that many changes have taken place in the energy arena since the framework document was drafted that need to be added, and that it covers a broad range of issues in a general way that can be expanded upon

in the next iteration. Mr. Grant noted that two of the slides in his Committee's PowerPoint on the *State Energy Master Plan* deal with this, and that some of the actional items identified for the County should be included in the County Energy Plan. Chairman Amann agreed there is a lot of overlap among these initiatives.

In concluding the discussion of the list of recommended Freeholder actions, Chairman Amann asked whether the group wants to add anything to the list. Mr. Foose commented that the recommendations are good but questioned whether they respond to what Freeholder Marano is looking for. He asked how much the County spends on administrating its SRECs and whether this could be provided by the Energy Council at no cost to the County. Mr. Lane agreed to follow-up on his SREC management question. Chairman Amann offered to follow-up on this if need-be as well. Chairman Amann recognized that the Council has made many recommendations in the past that have not been acted upon, many of which have been rehashed today. He also recognized the Council's limited role as an advisory board that has been charged with providing these recommendations. Mr. Foose agreed that benchmarking should be number one. A motion to approve the submission of the list of six recommendations to Freeholder Marano was offered simultaneously by several members including Mr. Dondiego and seconded by several members simultaneously including Mr. Grant. All were in favor and the motion was approved.

## **Old Business**

**Draft State EMP PowerPoint Presentation:** Chairman Amann noted that Mr. Grant and his Committee have been leading this initiative and that he has been involved to some extent. He recognized the significant amount of time and effort the group has put into developing the draft PowerPoint presentation, and that it needs to be reviewed by all of the Council members. The Renewable Energy and Technology (RE&T) Committee chaired by Mr. Grant met just prior to this meeting. Mr. Grant indicated that a lot of the slides address the details behind the State Energy Master Plan (EMP), which led to the identification of a number of recommendations that are also included in the slides. He noted that Chairman Amann advised the Committee that its earlier version was too technical and detailed, so the Committee is currently working on simplifying and condensed it to comprise very clear, concise recommendations with some general background behind them. He noted that this work is about 85% complete, and offered to provide a walk-through of the revised version thus far. Mr. Knox noted that it contains many slides and everyone might benefit from a chance to review them at their own pace. Chairman Amann agreed that a walk-through would require a lot of time and requested that the Committee finish its work and distribute the completed draft to all the members for their feedback and comments. Chairman Amann indicated that he may ask for a special ad-hoc meeting to work on a final consensus document before it is given to the Freeholders. Mr. Grant scheduled a meeting of his committee to be held on 8-20-20 for the purpose of completing the draft presentation, and will forward the current version to the committee members in advance of this meeting. The completed draft version will then be provided to Chairman Amann so that he can decide on the next steps.

**2019 Annual Report:** Chairman Amann noted that the draft document was provided to everyone several months ago (prior to the Council's April 2020 meeting). Feedback from the

members has been very limited according to Ms. Kratina. Given the circumstances surrounding COVID-19 and higher priority initiatives underway, she suggested a simplified, streamlined approach be taken instead of involving the County Graphics Department. She asked everyone to look at the aspects of the document that are specific to them and their committees to verify that it is substantively correct. She agreed to re-distribute the report for review with the goal of getting it done as quickly as possible.

### **Committee Chair Reports**

**Education and Awareness:** Ms. Perantoni noted that her committee is going to base its upcoming activities on the set of recommendations provided to the Freeholders, in addition to completing the 2019 annual report.

**Renewable Energy & Technology:** (See **Draft State EMP PowerPoint Presentation** above)

**Resilience and Sustainability:** Mr. Foose mentioned the blackouts occurring every evening in California as due to the intermittent nature of wind and solar sources and lack of enough gas and nuclear to compensate. While this is happening, parts of California are dealing with 130 degree temperatures and the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Facility is scheduled to close in 2024, which will cause a significant deficit. He noted that these are issues that could eventually affect our region since Indian Point and other nuclear facilities in NJ and PA are scheduled to ramp down, and as reliance on renewables increases. Hazards such as hurricanes, severe wind and winter storms further complicate matters in terms of system reliability together with aging infrastructure. Chairman Amann noted that Siemens, GE and Mitsubishi have announced plans to run their turbines on hydrogen. Mr. Foose noted that new technologies are emerging and that he is starting to see the uptake of grid-scale batteries on the west coast. Mr. Foose noted PSE&G is piloting a grid-scale battery system at Newark Airport which is fully operational. The re-use of large vacant retail malls are being considered for grid-scale battery systems, especially on the Del-Mar Peninsula where there are transmission constraints. A grid modulation project involving solar and a Tesla battery system on a landfill in Highland Park is also underway by PSE&G according to Mr. Drake.

**Public Policy:** Mr. DeFeo noted that there is a surprisingly large amount of legislative activity despite everything with COVID-19. He provided a 3-week synopsis of the following energy bills which are moving forward quickly at the committee-level and are passing with large margins: A740, A1653, A2374, A3367, S349 and S2606. Mr. DeFeo offered to share the summary sheets of the bills that are relevant, noting that he has another ten pages of bills. He talked briefly about bill S232 that addresses environmental justice issues which could negatively affect industry and is very likely to be passed. Under this legislation, NJDEP has two years to prepare regulations as to whether or not Title 5 Air Quality Permits will be renewed, which generates uncertainty from an investor standpoint. Portions of 313 communities in NJ are affected by this legislation. The bill essentially gives NJDEP veto power in environmental justice communities. He mentioned that there is a new Deputy Commissioner at NJDEP assigned to addressing environmental justice issues.

Mr. DeFeo also noted that five major automobile manufacturers have agreed to California's emission standards and are legally bound, along with 13 Northeastern states. This supersedes the Federal rollback, but gives them a little more time to meet the higher standards.

### **Public Comment**

Mr. Horowitz expressed gratitude for being able to attend the meeting.

**Upcoming Meetings and Events:** The next meeting is October 20, 2020.

**Adjournment:** A motion to adjourn was submitted by Mr. DeFeo at 7:35 pm and seconded by Mr. Grant.