

Minutes of the Somerset County Energy Council Meeting Tuesday, March 21, 2023

Call to Order

Chair Bill Amann called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call

the following members were present:

Name	Present (Yes/No)
William Amann, PE, LEED Fellow, DCEP - Chair	Yes
Jeanne Perantoni, AIA, LEED AP - Vice Chair	Yes
Wayne DeFeo, LEED AP - Secretary	Yes
David Dvorin	Yes
William T. Knox, JD, CFA	No
Walter Lane, PP, AICP	Yes
John McLaughlin	No
Rakesh Parikh	Yes
Jim Price	No
<i>Paul Drake, Commissioner Liaison</i>	Yes
<i>Melonie Marano, Commissioner Alternate</i>	No
<i>Angela Knowles, AICP, PP - Staff Liaison</i>	Yes

Chairman's Comments

Chairman Amann congratulated everyone on the adoption of the facilities policy. He stated that it is remarkable and that now we have to put it into action. He stated to Commissioner Drake that the Energy Council is here to support in any way we can.

January 17, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the January 17, 2023 meeting minutes with and seconded by Vice Chair Perantoni. All members approved the motion.

Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Drake stated that he appreciates the great work of Energy Council and is looking forward to implementing the policy. He stated that the Commissioners have directed County staff to implement the sustainability policy.

New Business

Presentation

The Council welcomed Dunbar Birnie, III of the Rutgers School of Engineering for a presentation on Agrivoltaics. Chairman Amann made a brief introduction stating that this technology and process is a great opportunity to help farmers and the energy sector.

Mr. Birnie gave a brief introduction on the foundation of this project. He gave a “shout out” to Advanced Solar Products as they have been working together for more than a year. This project is funded by state appropriation to build and research an agrivoltaics project. The challenge is to balance agriculture and the state’s aspirations to promote solar. Mr. Birnie stated that construction has started and will soon have inaugural welcome sessions.

Mr. Birnie gave a PowerPoint Presentation on the topic. He noted that this project is based on work by Ross Rucker with support from the Rutgers Agrivoltaic Program at the Eco-complex (RAP). Mr. Birnie’s presentation focused on the different models of the technology that would produce different outcomes for balancing the solar and agricultural goals. They look at the various angles of the sun, crops that are farmed and which of the geometrics best serves both needs. This is determined by examining the system’s module width, tilt, spacing between posts, height at center, lateral location measure from post and how it varies season to season.

They are emphasizing the vertical bifacial model for good light and vehicle access between rows and are conducting both crop yield and animal behavior studies to field test the model.

Council members asked Mr. Birnie a series of clarifying questions:

Q: Are other states doing this?

A: Massachusetts has a policy for incentives for dual-use solar installations - similar to policies for parking canopy structures. However, they are running into issues with the rules around farming and continuity of use and rotating crops. In NJ, there is a new pilot program from the BPU for dual use projects. They are still writing the rules but generally, allowed 200MW dual use installations. The BPU may run the program for a while. They are finding complications with rural areas where farmland is good for dual use, but access to an acceptable grid is not.

Q: Where are NJ projects located?

A: They have broken ground on three locations - North (Snyder Farm), Central (Piscataway, near Rutgers), and South Jersey (Bridgeton). At each location the trackers and their configurations are different; limit on connecting electrically.

Q: What if State Ag objects to these projects?

A: The conflict of uses was already known to be an issue and was an impetus for the grant, to figure out how to make them work together.

Other comments on the presentation were that electricity could be another product that could come out of farmland and help farmers supplement income. Viewsheds and greenspace need to be in the conversation. Tie back to Farmland Preservation Plan - keeping agriculture a viable industry. The Chairman thanked Mr. Birnie for his presentation.

Old Business

Inflation Reduction Act Working Group

- Aiming to meet in early April

Facilities Policy Statement

- The policy has been adopted. Mr. Dvorin asked if there is a role for the Energy Council when it comes to implementation; will it be shared with the municipalities?
- Mr. Lane stated that, yes, the intent is to roadshow it and promote as a model to towns; Commissioners have directed staff to implement it. He offered that Commissioner Drake will be sure to inquire about the use of the policy at Commissioner meetings when projects come up and will hopefully guide the decisions of our staff.
- Ms. Perantoni stated that there has always been outreach to the Mayors and at times, Energy Council members attended and/or participated in municipal meetings.
- Mr. DeFeo offered that Council members can bring the policy back to their own towns as a model
- Commissioner Drake stated that the County intends to be a model and then hopefully the towns will follow suit.
- Mr. Lane also offered that the County can support the implementation when we update the Housing Plan Element in the coming year. We can add in Green Building policies where appropriate.
- Chairman Amann offered that he has connected with Paul McCall, Director of Public Works (Somerset County) to help implement

Circulation Master Plan Update

- Mr. Lane offered a summary of the priorities garnered from the first public meeting held February 1st. The major themes were warehouse/truck traffic, resiliency, connections/safety, climate change. The next public meeting will be held in late Spring. Once there is a draft plan there will be more opportunity for comment during the master plan public hearing process. The Alternative Fuel Vehicle / Electric Vehicle Readiness Plan will be ready for review later this spring.
- Mr. DeFeo commented that pedestrian safety is key and mid-block crosswalks, pedestrian lights might want to be considered.

2023 Meeting Dates

- Discussed at last meeting but never approved. Need to approve them now and advertise them.
- A question about going back to in-person meetings was raised. Left to the Chairman's discretion who is in favor of going back to in-person. Plan for the rest of the year to be in person with the option to go back to virtual if needed. Protocol is we only have to advertise 48 hours in advance.
- Mr. Lane will post the meeting dates.
- Walter Lane made a motion to accept the meeting dates and in-person meeting schedule. The motion was seconded by Jeanne Perantoni. A voice vote was taken, and the vote passed unanimously.

Battery Recycling

- There was to be a discussion on the need for a battery recycling facility in Somerset County, but Council will hold off until next meeting. Mr. DeFeo indicated that lead acid batteries are an issue as they are shipped to Mexico for disposal. Mexico's environmental laws are not strict therefore many companies are moving there. Causing health issues from lead poisoning.

Committee Chair Reports

Energy Efficiency - Jim Price - absent

Energy Education & Awareness – Jeanne Perantoni, David Dvorin

- SCBP presentation by David made PowerPoint into a document to be posted elsewhere
- Lesson on Excel and how to use it - Pivot tables to show how to view data
- Hillsborough Rotary Club - presentation on IRA; small engaged audience
- Following up with Bridgewater Rotary Club; giving presentations to RVCC classes; tabling at forum on solar power at RVCC
- Attended seminar on community solar - presentation by Solar Landscape
- Mr. Parikh stated that he is educating himself on community solar. NJ was one of the last states to adopt so it is not a new program. He offered that having a consumer outreach and education session would be helpful for residents and businesses.
- Mr. Dvorin stated that NJ now has a Community Solar Finder website. He will share link to website after this meeting
- Question to Commission Drake: Does community solar pose a problem for PSEG? The Commissioner responded, not really. Your power bill is broken down between distribution and supply so would still apply and wouldn't pose an issue as long as there is capacity on the grid.

Public Policy – Wayne DeFeo

- Group needs to meet
- Going into Budget cycle
- S2978 - Clean Energy for 100% by 2035 (codifies the Executive Orders) - resource recovery plants are at center of discussion and whether they should be deemed Class 2 renewables. The bill calls for them to be phased out and several environmental groups opposed the bill. The goal is to electrify 100,000 residences in NJ and 20,000 commercial buildings by 2035. Mr. DeFeo offered a disclaimer that he is a consultant for Essex County and had written many letters on behalf of the County to make these facilities Class 2.
- Policy issue - offshore wind (OSW); Clean Ocean Action is at center arguing that OSW is causing whale beaching. Whales swim in warmer water, which is now everywhere, and the more likely cause is collisions with boats.
- S3723 - EV Battery Management Act - requires EV battery recycling; proposed by Senator Smith; not likely to move right now
- Bag bill has eliminated 900 million plastic bags from our environment and the reusable bag recycling program has grown. Mr. DeFeo noted that the Food Bank will take extras if they are clean.

Greening Economy – Bill Knox absent

Chair asked for any other New Business

- Citizens Climate Lobby contacted the County for a presentation. Mr. Lane suggested we invite them to the May meeting and have them make recommendations
- Mr. Lane offered that the new VoTech Superintendent is interested in being on the Greening Economy Task Force.
- Mr. DeFeo asked where are we with EV charging in County Parks? Mr. Lane offered that it is a slow process and we are still working through it.
- Mr. Amann offered that Hudson County has a deputy director of sustainability and asked if we can do something like that? Ms. Knowles stated that the Office of Planning, Policy & Economic Development is looking to hire a Supervising Planner for Environmental and Resiliency efforts.

Public Comment

Public comment is limited to 5 minutes per speaker. All comments must be directed to the Chair. No public was present.

Upcoming Meetings/Events

- March 29th - David presenting at RVCC
- April 26th - David presenting at RVCC
- June 25th Burlington County - Earth Fair

Adjournment/Next Meeting Date – The meeting was adjourned at 8:10pm.

The next meeting of the SCEC is Tuesday, May 16, 2023.