

Minutes of the Somerset County Energy Council Meeting

Tuesday, March 19, 2024 (Held Via Zoom)

Call to Order

Mr. Amann called the meeting to order at 6:05pm.

Pledge of Allegiance

Oath of Office

James Price was sworn in as a member of the Energy Council.

Roll Call

Mr. Lane conducted the roll call, and the following members were present:

Name	Present Yes/No)	Name	Present (Yes/No)
William Amann, PE, LEED Fellow, DCEP Chair	Yes	Walter C. Lane, PP, AICP	Yes
Jeanne Perantoni, AIA, LEED AP	Yes	John McLaughlin	no
Wayne DeFeo, LEED AP-	Yes	Jim Price	Yes, Late
Susan Dorward	Yes	<i>Paul Drake, Commissioner Liaison</i>	No
David Dvorin	Yes	<i>Melonie Marano, Commissioner Alternate</i>	No
William T. Knox, JD, CFA	No		

Approval of January 30, 2024 Meeting Minutes

There were no comments on meeting minutes. Mr. Amann made a motion to approve the January 30, 2024, meeting minutes which was seconded by Mr. DeFeo. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Chairman's Comments

Mr. Amann noted that in the past month he has been very active in the legislation being considered by the New Jersey Legislature on several topics such as: Beneficial Electrification, Grid Modernization and Clean Heat Bills.

He also informed the council about the notice regarding a series of meetings being held as part of the update of the NJ Energy Master Plan. Four hearings public hearings have been scheduled

to gather feedback on the current plan and what should be covered in the new plan. There are 7 different areas of focus, with Meetings 3 and 4 involving buildings.,

Mr. Amann also mentioned the Utility Filings for the second triennium, which are very dense documents. He also mentioned the TRC's Filing for the Incentive Programs. It is a major revamp from previous years.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Drake was not in attendance.

Old Business

Climate Change Policy Statement and Sustainable Facilities Policy

Mr. Lane announced to the Council that the meeting that Mr. Amann requested with Commissioner Drake and County Engineering is in the process of getting scheduled. This meeting was requested after Mr. Amann told us he went to a conference where County Engineers were presenting their projects, and he had a question regarding the Somerset County Multi-Use Facility that was discussed at the meeting.

Inflation Reduction Act Working Group

Mr. Price said there is nothing new on his end to report. His main thought was transitioning oil to heat pumps. Public Works is also working to get audits done as well as building benchmarking. Mr. Dvorin gave a talk at the Warren Library about the benefits of the IRA. Mr. Amann also announced that Advanced Solar has completed their 3 pilot projects for Rutgers University, one tracking site and the others were bilateral designs.

Somerset County Circulation Plan Update

Mr. Lane informed the Council that County Planning and Engineering staffs are reviewing/addressing comments from the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) and that in the next month or two, the County should be starting the adoption process, public hearing, and the 30-day public comment period. Once the plan is released, Mr. Lane will share a link to the plan so the Council can provide comments.

Department of Energy's Community Energy Fellow Program

Mr. Lane reported the County submitted an application to the Department of Energy's Community Energy Fellow Program with the request to have a Sustainability Coordinator position for a year or two paid for by the grant. This person would help advance the County's energy and sustainability work and assist municipalities undertaking similar efforts. The position is targeted more for a recent college graduate or mid-career within the sustainability/energy field. If the

position goes well, Mr. Lane would like to make the position a permanent one. The pay range will depend on the level of educational experience.

New Business

Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Application

Mr. Lane informed the Council that the County has been working with Duke Farms to prepare a grant application to the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Application from the US Environmental Protection Agency. Funding became available in January and the grant is due April 1. In February, we submitted a letter of intent outlining the County's plans for this funding. In order to be eligible for this funding, the County needs to show that our project is consistent with the State's Plans for this funding, which only came out on March 1. Some of the topics involved include the County transitioning our fleet to electric vehicles, installing heat pumps in County buildings to replace fossil fuel heating, and increased investment in the new infrastructure needed to support workforce training/development at Raritan Valley Community College. Ms. Dorward informed the Council that the new building at RVCC for workforce development will be run off of HVAC instead of heat pumps due to the cost. Part of the grant application seeks \$360,000 in funding to develop a Sustainable Energy Action Plan for the County. The total funding request is roughly \$30 million. While this is a very competitive national grant, both the NJ Department of Environmental Protection and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority have stated that the County's application would be well positioned for other grants, if the County is not awarded funding from this grant. .

Committee Chair Reports

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Amann informed the Council that the NJ Energy Efficiency Alliance has put out a call on behalf of a group called CLEAN to promote case studies for heat pumps. The NJ Energy Master Plan is looking for input on the plan. The CRC filing is going to change the incentive programs for new constructions but won't change the existing buildings. The Council could provide comments to the BPU that the direct install program doesn't work for public agencies because they are not on the state contractor list. In the coming weeks, a list of EV chargers that can be purchased by any state agency under a state contract will come out (We have been waiting for this since 2021).

Renewable Energy

Mr. Amann informed the Council about TRC Revised Compliance filings, and specifically spoke on pages 25-46. He also mentioned that there is the Garden State Challenge which is a pilot program that will offer up to \$1 million per project which support the goals of the new energy master plan. Mr. Dvorin learned that the NJ Economic Development Authority has funding for small businesses seeking to finance clean energy projects. The amounts on the loans range from \$250,000-\$10,000,000.

Energy Education and Awareness

Mr. Dvorin informed the Council that he is in talks with the teacher at the Vo Tech who oversees the environmental club to give presentations to them regarding various aspects of our climate situation. After giving his talk to the Warren Library about the IRA, he has been asked to come back in September or October about the fundamental science around our current climate situation. He is also scheduled to give an online presentation on NROADS (climate change simulator) in mid-April. Last month, he showed how there are grants available to municipalities to create their own energy plans, along with the idea of creating another proposal for a net zero proposal for the County. Ms. Perantoni announced that she has been attending a few forward-looking programs on campus sustainability, with the big message of the meetings being that a campus can't buy itself out of carbon emission by using green power or by offloading, that the campus needs to change, and fairly radically, to comply. EV Chargers were also a big part of the conversation because they anticipate a heavy influx of electric car use on campus. They also talked about how machine learning and AI can affect energy efficiency.

Public Policy

Mr. DeFeo informed the Council that the legislation that would fast track the removal of the zero sales tax on electric vehicles is out of the Legislature and now to the Governor. Additionally, there will be an added fee to EV registrants of up to \$250 a year tacked onto their annual registration to pay for road improvements since they do not pay the gas tax. The Governor supports rescinding the zero sales tax on EVs. There is another bill, Senate 249, the Beneficial Electric Bill, that would deal with the NJ Board of Public Utilities (NJBPU) establishing Carbon Targets. Mr. DeFeo stated that all it does is ask utilities to establish a plan but doesn't require much else. Also mentioned was Senate Concurrent Resolution 11, which would amend the constitution to prohibit the construction of new fossil fuel plants via a constitutional amendment. It is already out of Committee and in the second reading in the Senate. Assembly 3781 was introduced in February 2024 which requires the BPU to implement a program to promote minority/LGBTQ/woman owned energy businesses in the state. Bill A3374 establishes a clean heat standard for natural gas utilities and heating fuel suppliers, which was also introduced in February 2024. It is not currently fast tracked; however, it doesn't mean that it is not going anywhere, but there is no movement currently. The Clean Energy Codification is out of Committee and onto the second reading as of March 14. Bill S2979, introduced very recently, requires clean energy programs to provide incentives to commercial farms. Bill S258 requires the Board of Public Utilities to develop and implement grid modernization plans which appropriates \$300 million to do so. It is out of Committee, it passed unanimously, and has been referred to Senate Appropriations. Mr. DeFeo noted that a lot of bills right now involve cannabis.

Greening Economy

This section is not active.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Upcoming Meetings/Events

No upcoming meetings were discussed.

Adjournment/Next Meeting Date

The next meeting of the Somerset County Energy Council is Tuesday, May 21, 2024