

Minutes of the Somerset County Energy Council Meeting

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 (Held Via Zoom)

Call to Order

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

Pledge of Allegiance

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
Susan Dorward	No	<i>Paul Drake, Commissioner Liaison</i>	Yes
David Dvorin	Yes	<i>Melonie Marano, Commissioner Alternate</i>	No
William T. Knox, JD, CFA	Yes		

Approval of March 19, 2024 Meeting Minutes

There were no comments on meeting minutes. Mr. Amann made a motion to approve the March 19, 2024, meeting minutes which were seconded by Mr. Lane. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Chairman's Comments

Mr. Amann informed the council that the NJ Department of Education awarded Somerville schools \$26,935 to improve climate change instruction in the classroom. 34 districts received awards as part of the Climate Change Learning Collaborative Grant. Mr. Amann also stated that he is working on a presentation for Sullivan County New York for Electric School Buses.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Drake informed the Council that the Executive Council had met to discuss ongoing work that the County is doing. Mr. Lane provided an update on the matter, stating that one of

the outcomes of that meeting would be that Engineering would update Planning on their projects that are using the County Facilities Sustainability Policy. The first project is the new multiuse facility in Hillsborough that is designed to meet LEED standards. Mr. Drake just wanted to highlight that County staff are working hard across all fields, but especially hard regarding the Climate Change and Sustainability Policies. When Mr. Drake talks to other municipalities and entities, there are very few that have Climate Change or Sustainability policies let alone are they trying to act to implement them. Mr. Drake also mentioned that he spent the weekend with Former Vice President Al Gore at the Climate Change Project event in NYC.

EnRoads Climate Change Simulator Instruction by David Dvorin

Mr. Dvorin gave the Council a tutorial of how to use the program. He explained the various inputs and outputs and how the user could create different scenarios to see the impacts of implementing numerous climate mitigation strategies. The Council found the EnRoads simulator to be a very informative tool.

Old Business

Climate Change Policy Statement and Sustainable Facilities Policy

Mr. Lane stated that the current status of this entity/section was spoken about in Commissioner Drake's comments. Mr. Amann stated that he reached out to Mr. Loper to discuss LEED certification.

Inflation Reduction Act Working Group

Mr. Price stated that he distributed several documents to the Council prior to the meeting. One of these documents was from the IRS with their tax forms on how to process 179d. Mr. Price mentioned he has a meeting with Elizabeth Town Gas and NJ Natural Gas where they will present what they think they're going to do going forward. Additionally, none of this has been approved by the state to determine how the IRA money will be divided up. Mr. Price also participated in a viewing of the BPU where he felt they were missing the mark. The BPU has 91 million dollars allocated for building electrification in NJ, but they are only making houses "electrification ready" but not actually functional. Mr. Price also mentioned that there is Federal money available to electrify the County fleet, specifically electric buses.

Somerset County Circulation Plan Update

Mr. Lane gave an update to the Council that Final tweaks are being made to the plan so the adoption process can start in the summer, most likely August. The document wraps in the Climate Change Policy Statement and other County Sustainable/Climate Resiliency Policies which align with the Energy Council's goals to reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHGs).

Department of Energy's Community Energy Fellow Program

Mr. Lane gave an update to the Council regarding the status of the County's Application to the Department of Energy's Community Energy Fellowship Program. The application was to hire a Sustainability Coordinator position for a few years which would be funded by the grant. Unfortunately, we were not selected for the grant. However, the application is being kept on file, and if there is additional funding that becomes available for the program, they will reconsider our application. The grant has a heavy emphasis on "Justice 40" communities and Somerset County only has a couple of Census Tracts that meet that definition.

New Business

NJ Clean Cities Coalition EV Cohort Group

Mr. Lane informed the Council that the County submitted an application to be a part of the EV Cohort Group. The County should hear back within the next month or two. This Committee would share best practices and would help us with technical assistance. Mr. Lane also noted that Coalition was impressed with the fact that Somerset County has a Climate Change and Facilities Policy Statement, so they were very supportive of our application because of this. Lastly, Mr. Lane added that he went to the Urban Land Institute's Sustainability Forum in Manhattan and most of the presentations were about these types of issues and it was clear to him that the County is ahead of most places in the United States in regards to our policies on climate change.

Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Application

Regarding the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant, Mr. Lane informed the Council that we are still waiting for approval and funding decisions which should happen in July. Our application requested 30 million dollars with some main components including vehicle electrification, heat pumps in buildings, workforce development, and creating a sustainable energy action plan partnering with Duke Farms. We have received many letters of support for the project from entities such as labor unions, various EV Coalitions, and the DEP, which is unique because the state applied for its own funding.

Update on the 2019 NJ Energy Master Plan

Mr. Amann led the discussion, starting by stating that the State put out a call for input and specific questions regarding the update. We have until June 12 to submit comments. The public hearing on buildings is tomorrow evening, May 22 and Mr. Amann is speaking. He suggests we ask specific questions that pertain to us (The County) such as fixing the direct install public contracting disconnect. Mr. Lane then stated that he participated in the hearing which was on transportation. There were about 80-90 people that spoke for 3 minutes max. Mr. Lane is also on NJ Future's working group for VMT's, and in speaking with the group, they were surprised that Somerset County was as advanced in Climate Policy back in 2019 let alone today. Mr. Lane said he is unsure if NJ Board of Public Utilities is updating the plan or if they're taking comments to do a report on

the progress of the implementation of the plan. Mr. Amann reported he got resources from Richard Lawton from the NJ Sustainable Business Council regarding this topic which he will distribute to the rest of the council.

Committee Chair Reports

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Price stated that he had nothing more to add, that his comments during the IJA portion other meeting overlapped with this section.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Dvorin informed the Council that he met with the Somerville Environmental Commission after being introduced to them by their Earth Day Green Fair that they held on Division street. His goal is to see if there are any overlaps/synergies between this Council and a Municipal Commission. For example, they were unaware of the obstacles that are facing the Somerville Community Solar Project, let alone did some not know that it was a thing. Mr. Dvorin had the opportunity to talk to a consultant on the project Colin Driver, and he was pleased that we had sent out a letter of support. Mr. Lane also stated that Director Robinson sent a letter on behalf of the board of County Commissioners, he sent a letter on behalf of the Planning Board, and the Regional Center Partnership Chair also sent a letter of support. Mr. Amann mentioned that tomorrow he is going to Somerville Borough Hall to talk about putting in heat pumps because their chiller is not functional.

Energy Education and Awareness

Ms. Perantoni started by thanking Mr. Dvorin for his demonstration on the EnRoads Climate Change Simulator, as this was technically part of Energy Education. Ms. Perantoni stated that there will be public outreach once the energy master plan has its revisions. When the Energy Master Plan itself was put into place, the Council divided the work up among the members to review certain sections and then made a presentation to the Commissioners. She stated Council will most likely have a similar approach for reviewing the Energy Master Plan Updates. Ms. Perantoni also mentioned that The American Institute of Architects have fine-tuned a tool for when you're comparing the reuse of buildings compared to new construction. It is meant to be used during the planning stage and then something you can document to a high degree of commitment in terms of carbon offsets. Mr. Dvorin stated that he has a pending presentation to the Warren Library later in the summer. On the other hand, Mr. Dvorin hasn't been able to get into contact with the Environmental Club of the VoTech after initially receiving a warm welcome to come present to them. Mr. Lane responded that he could get Mr. Dvorin in contact with the Superintendent. A member of the public then spoke, stating that her son is a student at Watchung Hills Regional High School and part of their Environmental Club. He then came on to speak and said that it would be great if Mr. Dvorin or another member of the Council could speak to their

environmental club. Mr. Lane responded that he could connect the members of the public attending this meeting with Mr. Dvorin.

Public Policy

Mr. DeFeo started his section by talking about Electrification in Transportation, more specifically that NJ has rescinded the sales tax exemption for EVs, assigned a \$1000 purchase fee, and every year an EV owner will pay an additional \$249 in registration fees to offset what they don't use in gasoline for the transportation trust fund sales tax which repairs roads. This essentially raises the price of an average EV from \$3000-\$5000 in addition to removing the tax credit. The Autodealers Association is opposed to the changes based on the fact that there's little mathematical evidence to support it, however, it seems there is little to be done to stop that legislation as the Governor supports it. On the last hearing for the Environment Committee, Mr. DeFeo stated that the entire meeting was predicated on issues of plastics, advanced chemical recycling, bottle bills, and a series of solid waste measures that are designed with the end goal of removing plastics. A few interesting/relevant bills to note; A4410 that would require Green Building Standards in impact studies for certain affordable housing developments, which is essentially impeding the development of affordable housing. This legislation has a low chance of being pushed forward. S2816 requires electric public utilities to submit to the BPU and implement Electric Infrastructure Improvement Plans, this has moved out of committee, been amended on the senate floor, and is now with the Judiciary Committee. S3263 would authorize the use of competitive contracting and extended terms for lease and purchase contracts for electric school buses. It would also allow for school board as aggregators to obtain electric buses. Ultimately this bill would extend the term with which schools could purchase a bus which would decrease the cost. This has a low chance of being pushed forward. S3308 would require public utilities to authorize interconnection of certain grid supply solar facilities within a four-year window. This has a low chance of being pushed forward.

Greening Economy

This section is not active.

Public Comment

The public in attendance stated they were just happy that we have a Committee looking into and talking about Energy/Climate related issues.

Upcoming Meetings/Events

No upcoming meetings were discussed.

Adjournment/Next Meeting Date

The next meeting of the Somerset County Energy Council is Tuesday, July 16, 2024.