

Conservation Advisory Commission
Thursday, May 21 2020
Meeting via Zoom

Minutes

I Climate Smart Task Force

Present: Mary O'Donnell, Steve Wehr, Skip Arthur, Susan Murphy, Elizabeth Shafer, Leslie Surprenant, Mike Harkavy. Joined later: Nicole Roskos, Mary McNamara.

Guests: Good Energy representatives Bob Elliott, Jeff Feith and Edward Carey

The meeting was opened at 6:05 pm by Mary O'Donnell, presiding.

The three guests from Good Energy, a for-profit company that administers Community Choice Aggregate (CCA), introduced themselves.

Bob Elliott has been on the Hudson Valley Greenway board almost from the beginning, also National Heritage Board and the Hudson River Foundation. He was a mayor for many years, worked with Conference of Mayors coordinating two of their aggregating programs, including the NY Energy Program. He was the Exec Director at Westchester CCA for three years. Now working for Good Energy.

Ed Carey: Born into an energy company, as his great-grandfather worked for Shell, his grandfather started an energy company. Educated in economics, with classes in School of Forestry. Worked for the City of NY during the Guiliani and Bloomberg administrations in the Office of Sustainability, purchasing low-carbon fuel for the city. Joined Hess. When he joined Good Energy it had 80% commercial-industrial contracts. With his government background the company got involved with the State of NJ. Now probably 90% government, 10% commercial-industrial. Serve over 200 municipalities in the State of NJ, also boards of education. In the State of Illinois, over 300 municipalities. Ten years ago got involved with CCA; now runs over 400 CCAs in the country.

Much more background info was presented than was recorded here, all of which can be accessed by the committee and task force members on the website; Mary to send the link. They asked that their proprietary information not be shared with competitors.

They described their company as very "brand-conscious," want to keep customers for lifetime, do not put people at risk, like to do things correctly. Going 100% Green can come at a premium. Some municipalities do CCA by themselves, others in combination with other municipalities. Energy in all forms is very low right now, but as the economy comes back it will rise.

Question: How many households do you have to have for an aggregation? They have done as little as 500. Saugerties is fine with the number of households we have; we have a lot of leverage ("more than the Empire State Building"). Could lower cost if we partner with another community but won't make that much of a difference.

NYSERDA offers financing for CCAs.

Jeff Feith spoke about the outreach process. He has over 20 years of experience in marketing and advertising. Won't do a deal if it isn't good for the community; want a win-win. He designs and manages all of the outreach; has a couple of staff members in the office. Will create a custom website, a single place for everyone to get info about the program, including a FAQ. Good Energy pays for the entire outreach campaign. The budget depends on the scope of the deal. Print, radio, social media, ads

in the local papers, whatever we want them to do. Likes to use local photographers. Recently did a Facebook Live public meeting for Piscataway. Has worked with much larger communities than Saugerties; always covered everybody's needs, and exceeded them. Will provide a list of outreach options, including utility bill inserts and a customer-service help line.

Question: What kind of customer service? They have two call centers open 9 to 5, one in NY and one in Texas, trained on 50 questions; one of the executives is always available to answer other questions, and will pick the call up after-hours, 24-7.

Skip asked how long does the buy-in price last? The rate is fixed for the term of the agreement. Most go for 24 months; but for many first time customers go for 12 or 15 months. Will recommend 24 months, but it's always customized. Best not to do the deal in January or August because the demand is high during those months, and the rate reflects it.

Bob will send Mary a link to the website of the Council of Mayors. There is a substantial cost in gathering the necessary data; Good Energy will also pay that cost. At this point the visitors left the meeting.

Mary proposed that the Task Force recommend to the Town Board to take the next step to join or form a CCA, to submit Request for Proposals to administrators. Seconded by Steve. All agreed

Discussion:

Skip: the first step is just clearing it so we can start the process; having the town say "let's do this" does not commit us to a specific program.

Mike: First thing is a resolution; they have already done that. (Not clear what the board passed last October; this needs to be clarified.)

Once the administrator is hired, there is still no commitment to a specific contract with an ESCO. We are not in a position to recommend an administrator at this time.

Difference of opinion about whether Saugerties should go it alone or join with other municipalities. Westchester Power has 27 municipalities. NYSERDA said 40K accounts would be a good benchmark; there are 8K accounts in Saugerties. One reason to go big is to get a lower price.

Mary asked Westchester - how hard was it to get the various communities to agree? It was smooth.

Put into the equation that Good Energy is a for-profit company. Why does this matter? Joule Community Power is also for profit, but has a not-for-profit partner/local organizer.

TO DO: Mary will send around the RFP template that she found online.

All voted in favor of the proposal.

In response to a remark that we should ask Good Energy to show us comparisons in work they have done with different communities, Steve sent a link to Good Energy's webpages showing several communities, including the rates that they are proposing.

Part of the town's decision will be whether to go with a 100% green contract and a standard contract. Once we get to the part where they go out to bid, it will get clearer. The option will be offered for every community member who enrolls to opt-out or opt-up (go from standard to all green).

The question, what will be the relationship between people who are already getting Community Solar and the CCA, was not addressed.

Update:

Let Mary know if you know of anyone who participated in the Get Pumped webinar, because if five people signed up, we may be able to get points. Steve said he knows of people.

Sustainable Hudson Valley is going forward with a group purchasing program.

In anticipation that in-person gatherings will be resuming, Mary has reserved the Senior Center on October 17 for a community presentation on a yet-to-be determined topic.

II Regular CAC Business 7:28 pm

Approval of Minutes from April 16 meeting – approved.

Esopus Creek Updates – The Town of Saugerties and the Village of Saugerties, with the assistance of a private business, has purchased a used aquatic vegetation harvester. The cost is among the village, the town and a private contractor.

The CAC will recommend priority areas for the town to treat using the harvester with a focus on Eurasian watermilfoil. The village has prioritized the beach and across the creek from the beach. It was suggested that a systematic sampling to assess success should be conducted for the town's portion. Priorities will likely be the stream / navigation channel and vegetation patches having significant milfoil.

ACTIONS:

Leslie Surprenant will develop a proposed systematic sampling plan for CAC review and approval.
Mary O'Donnell will contact potential volunteers living on the creek.

Announcement: The week of June 7 to 13 is NYS's Invasive Species Awareness Week.

ACTION: Leslie Surprenant will send information to Mary O'Donnell for posting to the website.

Adjourn: 8:12 p.m.