

Town of Dublin Energy Committee Meeting
Wednesday, August 24, 2022
7 PM, Town Hall, 3rd floor

In attendance:

In person: Allen Hearn, James Finnegan, Blake Minckler, Jack Munn, Susan Peters (Select Board), Andy Hungerford, and Andrea Hodson of Harrisville.

Susan opened the meeting and introduced Andrea Hodson of Harrisville's Select Board and Electric Aggregation Committee (EAC). Andrea generously accepted the committee's invitation to share Harrisville's experience with community power, adopted at Town Meeting in May 2021.

Harrisville's experience with Community Power

Andrea Hodson explained the basic principle that community power offers a means for communities to take greater control (with more transparency) over electricity supply sourcing and costs. For Harrisville, there have been the two principal steps. Phase one was the process leading to a vote at Town Meeting to adopt community power. This phase involved educating the community about community power; working with the Select Board to draft a community power plan (with guidance from the Community Power Coalition of NH); and turning out the vote at Town meeting. Phase two is implementation, a process that is underway now with a goal of going live with community power by spring 2023. Harrisville is currently exploring sources for buying power, and is making revisions to its community power plan to address NH Public Utilities Commission input (PUC) regarding customer data confidentiality and load-serving entity. The city of Lebanon has submitted a revised plan to the PUC and is awaiting their input; other communities plan to model their revised plans on Lebanon's plan, once finalized (viewed as the trial balloon).

Harrisville's EAC started meeting in mid-April 2020, and initially focused on educating themselves about community power (including attending a national conference). They created a timeline - with Town Meeting as the end-point - and stepped it back for all the milestones. On Harrisville's Community Power page, there is a record of the various milestones. Communities are required by NH statute to hold at least two public hearings. In Harrisville, the EAC was able to use the Community Conversations format (with pizza and free child care) already in place for community meetings. The EAC also developed a website; drafted and distributed surveys to Town residents (to raise awareness and solicit feedback); published articles on community power in Common Threads, the town newsletter; looked to Harrisville's vision as reflected in their master plan to find support for community power goals; developed messaging and talking points about community power to share with the community; organized community zoom meetings; and made calls to individual residents (each EAC member would call 10 people). 75-80 people showed up at Community Conversations meetings. The Harrisville EAC met once a week (for an hour) and was systematic about engaging people, with a goal of connecting with at least 100 people; they tracked these contacts and ultimately reached over 150 people.

Harrisville's principal community power goals are: (1) to offer a better and more stable rate that saves people money over default electricity supply rates, (2) to build renewables into the electricity supply, and (3) to grow a reserve fund that could be used to stabilize the rate and create energy-related programs (i.e. training program for skilled workers looking to build technical energy expertise). Harrisville's community power plan will serve residents, businesses, and the municipality, and provides that rate payers not on a third party (non-Eversource) contract can voluntarily opt out of participation. Harrisville is interviewing potential electricity suppliers including Freedom Energy Logistics (teamed with Colonial Power; biggest customer is Boston), the Coalition, and Standard Power. The Coalition has completed an RFP to find a partner to buy the power, and is developing a policy for their reserve fund.

Looking ahead, Harrisville's EAC will make a recommendation to the Select Board regarding implementation. Legal review will be required for any outside contracts. The Select Board will not administer the program; the EAC envisions playing an ongoing role in implementation. It should not be necessary to go back to Town Meeting except in the case that certain material situations should arise.

After Andrea Hodson left the meeting, committee members discussed next steps for Dublin. It was agreed that it will take a significant amount of work for Dublin to develop a community power plan to present at Town Meeting in 2023. It would be helpful to hear from Peterborough resident Dori Drachman, explore how Cheshire County's community power plan will work, and develop a tentative proposed timeline for a Dublin community power proposal. Committee members raised questions about how a reserve fund might work, and how community power would be implemented and administered on an ongoing basis if approved at Town Meeting.

July 27, 2022 minutes

On motion made by Jack and seconded by Allen, the minutes of the July 27, 2022 were approved with one amendment correcting the date of the August meeting.

Action items::

1. Susan will contact Dori Drachman to see if she would be available to attend the committee's meeting on Wednesday, September 28.
2. Jack will research how the Cheshire County community power will work, and how it might benefit Dublin residents.
3. Committee members will explore Harrisville's community power website, especially the timeline leading up to vote at Town Meeting in May 2021.
4. It would very helpful to engage other Town residents in the process of researching community power and other energy solutions to benefit the Town.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:24 pm. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 7 at 7 pm, followed by a meeting on Wednesday, September 28 at 7 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Susan W. Peters