
Update from the Waitsfield town energy committee

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By Dennis Derryberry

Waitsfield has created an energy committee comprised of three select board members, the town administrator and the town energy coordinator.

Sal Spinosa, who chairs the committee, is joined by Paul Hartshorn and Charlie Hosford from the select board, town administrator Valerie Capels and me. The public is welcome to attend energy committee meetings, which are currently held intermittently and separate from regular select board meetings.

The Waitsfield town energy coordinator is a volunteer position to which the select board appointed me in May. This is the first time Waitsfield has installed a town energy coordinator since the office was created in 1975 by the state legislature during the height of the national energy crisis. The position enables local government to study both public and private energy use in their communities, to develop policies that would encourage the development and utilization of alternative energy resources, and to promote conservation efforts in the town.

In 1979, the criteria of a town plan under Act 200 were expanded to include an energy plan. Accordingly, the town energy coordinator often works closely with the planning commission and other community leaders to develop this section of the town plan. Other duties include overseeing an energy audit of town-owned properties, facilitating the implementation of energy efficiency measures, studying and evaluating economically feasible alternative sources of energy within or available to the town, and public outreach.

This week I'll be visiting road commissioner Charlie Goodman at the town garage to look at the new lighting installed during an efficiency upgrade. The town received a \$1,400 rebate from Efficiency Vermont for installation of the high-efficiency lighting, which cut the overall cost of the project to \$3,290.

Using past billing records, we will develop some energy cost baselines for both the town garage and the Wait House to allow us to measure the energy cost savings over time. In the meantime I will also be making inquiries to develop an energy conservation strategy for the Wait House, targeting the building's poor insulation performance with the goal being to lower heating costs.

The first step at the Wait House will be to arrange an envelope audit. Using a qualified contractor we'll employ either a blower door or infrared camera to determine where the air leaks are most costly so we can begin to consider options for improvement. The audit may cost a few hundred dollars which is significant but still probably nominal compared to any action we might ultimately take and the savings derived from improved heating efficiency.

At the same time, I will advise the Waitsfield Historical Society, the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation and the Preservation Trust of Vermont, all of whom have an interest in the building, that we are looking into this and that we will consult with them before implementing anything.

The energy committee hopes that we might also begin to explore supplemental energy generation options for the town

garage, looking at solar (photovoltaic, or PV) as the most likely choice. I intend to contact supplier/installers of PV equipment and systems for estimates on various grid-connected and off-grid strategies, and how we might target a specific portion of the power usage at the garage.

The committee is also interested in exploring the possible use of B20 fuel in some of the town trucks. Sugarbush has realized solid results using the fuel in their winter mountain operations, and currently Fayston is developing plans to utilize the biodiesel blend in their town trucks. I will remain in touch with that group as they move forward, discussing with them how we might piggyback our knowledge and efforts for greater benefit to both towns.

I recently contacted Jim Sanford in Warren to see where they are on addressing energy issues at the town level. He informed me that while the Warren planning commission is not at this time specifically focusing on energy use, the Mad River Valley Planning District has it very high on its list and is actively pursuing the issue. The next meeting of the planning district is on August 16, where I hope to learn ways they may already be considering the energy issue across town borders.

As you can see, much of this is preliminary but very important work which will sustain progress on various subjects and perform double-duty to avoid surprising anyone with such ventures. The committee believes it is a good plan for incremental but real movement as we continue to discuss other topics, study the successes of other towns and expand the action list.

Minutes of the Waitsfield energy committee and other information are available on the town's web site, www.waitsfieldvt.us/ec/.

It is our hope that providing this information will keep the public informed, offer an opportunity for public comment and perhaps attract more members to the committee. Please visit the website for more information.

Derryberry lives in Waitsfield and is active in energy issues such as conservation/efficiency and local renewables. He is a member of Mad River Sustainability Group and Rootswork.