IREC Steering Committee Meeting  
July 9, 2021

Present: Doc Bagley, Strafford; Elizabeth Ferry, Barnard; Linda Gray, Norwich; Nancy Jones, Bradford; Erica Ko, Thetford; Geoff Martin, IREC; Neal Leitner, Woodstock; Ryan Haac, Sharon.

1. Additions/changes to agenda: Idea of meeting in person
2. Introductions: We welcome Nancy Jones and Linda Gray, representatives from Bradford and Norwich respectively. Nancy is a member of her town’s energy committee and also chair of the Conservation Commission. Linda has been actively in on the Norwich energy committee since 2008.
3. Steering Committee Updates: HERS; RECs/Legislators; Forest Carbon

(a) Home Energy Rating Score — HERS, reported on by Erica

The goal of bringing HERS to the attention of town governments is to help builders comply with existing energy codes, homeowners get a quality product, and reduce GHG emissions.

HERS is a national program that offers consultation and testing on thermal and mechanical efficiency for new construction homes. This includes heating, weatherization, ventilation, lighting, appliances, and mechanicals. HERS results in an overall building rating that lay people can understand (is not technical). The current standard in VT is 61 or lower (lower is better). Benefits include:

- HERS raters are available for consultation through all stages of construction
- The homeowner has assistance in coordinating all aspects of energy efficiency during the design and building process, and are assured that final product is up to code
- Contractors can call on the rater’s knowledge of materials and codes, thereby saving themselves the effort of staying current and the fees of EVT certification fee of $1,200-2,500 is modest given the value that it ensures.

Note that modular housing is subject to REScheck which has higher standards than HERS. Mobile homes, on the other hand, are not subject to RBES.

Questions:
(i) Are there documents that illustrate the savings? Response: these are basic standards, not elevated ones. For buildings that aim for higher standards, EVT and/or the Public Service Dept. have further information and analysis.
(ii) Do realtors have an appetite for including HERS rating in listings? Response: EVT working on this; not sure of status. Vital Communities had a program in the past, may have a new one.

Action: Erica and Thetford EC will continue to take the lead in developing a document for presentation to towns and to local legislators. We agree that there is strength in numbers and that it would be helpful to have the Steering Committee’s support when taking this to our individual town boards; also that this may be of more interest in larger towns than small ones. Ideally, we hope that this will lead to state-wide progress. Also, Geoff will check with Sarah Brock of Vital Communities for status of current programs.

(b) Renewable Energy Certificates RECS, meeting w/legislators — reported on by Erica
This is a follow-up to our conversation in May with GMP Chief Innovation Officer Josh Castlegay about RECs and GMP policy. Josh encouraged us to voice our concerns about the lack of clarity around RECs to our legislators.

Confusion and lack of clarity remain around GMP’s use of RECs. Specifically, at what point can RECs that are “retired” to GMP be sold when GMP meets its state-mandated requirements for Tier II RECs? We note the that the current structure disincentivizes the idea of exceeding requirements (though we are behind in meeting our overall climate goals). We further note that GMP is the only state in New England that accepts Hydro Quebec RECs as “green”; instead, it uses these cheaper RECs to meet requirements, then sells the more sought-after RECS that are generated in Vermont communities.

Currently two community array projects are being developed in Strafford using the Vermont Law School model. Strafford committees are working to name these as Preferred Sites in order to make it financially viable while retaining the RECs themselves.

**Clarification:** TRORC doesn’t lobby on behalf of policies without approval of the TRORC Board, so as a TRORC employee, Geoff can’t participate in this unless a town select board explicitly gives permission for his involvement.

**Action:** Erica will organize a meeting of Steering Committee members minus Geoff to move this forward. Elizabeth will send out invitation to see who wants to be involved.

c) **Forest Carbon Sequestration Program — reported on by Elizabeth**

*The working landscape is a carbon sink; it operates with no batteries, needs no software updates, and is a widespread resource in Barnard. How can it be taken into account as we chart our way forward?*

Elizabeth reported on a recent Green Drinks hosting of Jim Shallow of The Nature Conservancy, VT Chapter, in which he outlined a pilot initiative, Family Forest Carbon Program, set to launch this fall. The goal is to work with private landowners in selected counties in VT, NY, and MA where there are significant contiguous intact forests. The forest carbon offsets are structured much like renewable energy credits (RECS): landowners are paid a modest fee; a middleman counts the certificates to make sure they aren’t double counted and puts them on the market; large companies (VT companies are too small) buy the offsets and present themselves as being carbon neutral. TNC is asking for a 10-year commitment from landowners, with an eye on a second 10-year renewal. The value would not count towards VT’s climate goals.

Ali Koshiba, VT State Climate Forester, has noted (in a different context) that while carbon offsets may have value as a transition tool, if we’re still using carbon offsets in 10-20 years, we will miss the window of opportunity for the climate change action we need to take.

Jane Lazorchak, reporting recently on the state’s Comprehensive Energy Plan (CEP) and the Climate Action Plan (CAP) has said that if working landscape sequestration was factored in, VT would reach *net zero* by 2030. She advocates for setting a *net negative target* for 2050.

Among Elizabeth’s concerns: This doesn’t accomplish anything new for the climate, as the forests have been sequestering all along; it only inserts human economics into the system. The Gaia Theory talks about the *unity* of Earth and its ecosystems; this cuts up nature into small,
disjointed segments. Why are we helping large companies look good rather than trying to exceed our goals?

Erica asked how Elizabeth envisions incentivizing this work? Elizabeth suggested that one way could be through the Current Use program where the taxes are lessened for landowners who meet certain criteria. To be in current use, it is presumed you will have logging activity. Have to generate some economic activity. Perhaps the state could include an option for managing for carbon in current use program.

Erica asked who manages the current use program and who are the decision makers that need to be swayed. Elizabeth will continue to do research, and could be a topic for meeting with legislators.

For those interested, there may be an opportunity to shape VT policy through the Ag & Forest subcommittee of the Climate Action Plan (CAP).

Action: Doc suggested that we invited Dave Paganelli, Orange County Forester (and trusted resource to the Strafford Energy and Climate Committee) to explore this further with us. Geoff will follow up.

4. Steering Committee Meeting Times
Action: We agreed on a standard monthly meeting time: 11:00, first Thursday of the month.
Allow for 1.5 hours, but we’ll try to keep it to 1.25.
Non-members are welcome to attend as observers.
If we have a speaker and non-members join the session, questions will be fielded via the chat function.